

Gender-Specific Ministry

But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled.

~ TITUS 2:1-6

WE BELIEVE that the local church is called to train men to be men and women to be women in ways that are inapplicable to the opposite gender; that each of these ministries are doctrinal in nature and so the theological content of each must be equally rich; that each of these ministries should produce members of households who are able to shepherd the flock at home in gender-appropriate roles; and that when this is a first priority the local church flourishes for both positive and negative reasons.

Complementarianism holds “that God created men and women equal in being but assigned different—but equally valuable—functions in his kingdom and that this gender distinctiveness complements, or harmonizes, to fulfill his purposes.”¹ It is a doctrine that is on the rise. Its practice must follow, but it does not follow that its practice will rise automatically. That will take the conviction and resolve of leadership in local churches. This is important for wounded people coming out of our confused culture. The devil would have new sheep more concerned about the shepherd’s staff for being a little crooked than about the wolf’s fangs that would mangle their whole soul. Wounded men and women are much more apt to single out the failures that *implicitly* contradict the good life than they are to see that the majority of their pain comes from those who have *explicitly* stepped out of God’s design for gender. Thus a return to biblical practices in this area will draw suspicion and resentment. Early, clear statements of vision are imperative.

There are four aspects to biblical gender-specific ministries. The first is that they are *normative*, the second that they are *doctrinal*, the third that they are *home-building*, and the fourth that they are *church-growing*.

¹ J. Ligon Duncan & Susan Hunt, *Women’s Ministry in the Local Church* (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL 2006); p. 32

Note from the structure of all of the New Testament epistles, that the hearing of God's word in the general assembly is for everyone—men and women. Hence the objection that gender-specific ministry amounts to arbitrary segregation falls. The genders are not segregated *until* those elements of gender-specific instruction (or practice)² come into play. Simply think about five basic assumptive facts about Paul's pastoral letters: 1) They are written to young male pastors to enlist the help of other qualified men. 2) They are also written to the whole church—male and female. 3) There is no canonical separation between verses written exclusively to men and some written exclusively to women. Every verse is divinely inspired to the whole people of God. 4) Not every verse on the issue of gender can be applied in the same way for men as for women, and vice-versa. 5) The mandate for both genders to train gender-specifically is also a more general mandate to the male elders—i.e. to make sure that it happens quickly.

The cumulative doctrine that emerges from these five facts is that it is the business of male elders to begin (as early as possible) raising up gender-specific leadership. This means that mature men and women will both have a dual role, but that some men will have a third in addition. Men and women are both to be trained for leadership in the *church* (men leading men in masculinity / women leading women in femininity) and *home* (men as husbands-fathers / women as wives-mothers); yet some men will also be set apart for the task of leading the whole body as *elders*. None of this means that there is no other venue in which the men and women cannot learn together. It just means that gender-specific ministry will be given priority from the beginning.

All three categories of training are commanded to the church. The church that does not do what this position paper will now unpack is in disobedience to God's word and that church will be unhealthy.

1) the local church is called to train men to be men and women to be women in ways that are inapplicable to the opposite gender...

In today's church culture most people may think that men's and women's ministry are optional and recreational. They are viewed in this light because most people have never sat through a verse-by-verse exposition of the Pastoral Letters (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus). If anyone will take the trouble to study those epistles, one of the most remarkable features is just how much Paul is determined to have his two young protégé pastors build up men and women in their unique gender roles and relationships.

² We add "practice" because, of course, if a family is listening to a sermon and a baby must breastfeed, the only thing arbitrary would be the objection that the man should do it! We hope that this is obvious. In our culture today, it is becoming less so.

A good barometer for this unique training is that if there is nothing going on at men's or women's meetings that could not be done unhindered with the other gender there, then it probably needs to take a closer look at Titus 2. By "unhindered" we would include *anything* that crowds out, distracts or discourages the instruction to one or the other gender. If I cannot tear a new one in a young man for improperly touching a girl because there is another lady present, then that lady needs to not be present. That is an obvious example. What might be less obvious is the way that men and women process their worldviews differently. Since God made us to fulfill different roles, we are going to process worldview input in ways that relate to our role. Our God-given roles were not given without a corresponding God-given nature. But since our roles have many tasks, and since those roles and tasks are part of the one worldview, then it follows that much more worldview instruction is going to be siphoned through these gender-specific filters than we may want to realize. Men and women are wired for works; and the moment each hears truth, their gender-specific roles begin to practically apply teaching on the whole spectrum of worldview issues in vastly different ways. It's not an IQ issue (for those who never tire of changing the subject). It's an echo of our original complementary makeup in the Garden of Eden.

Nor does this mean that the moment that a men's ministry or women's ministry engages in subject-matter that either gender could have benefited from, that we have an "aha" moment that disproves the usefulness of the separation. This ignores some very basic elements about truth. Consider that a singular truth will be: 1) equally true for men and women, 2) uniquely applied to a woman, and yet 3) benefit the man—and vice-versa. How so? Let me give one example: At the Well's first women's retreat, the first of four video sessions was delivered by a man (John Piper), our discussion facilitated by a woman (my wife, Emily), to an audience of women. In preparation for that time, Emily and I watched it together the week prior. Among other things Piper said, the central thesis was that, "Wimpy theology makes wimpy women." Amen! Such would also apply to men. But here is the part we need to notice: A man like me can benefit from knowing the same thing that applies to women and that, by God's grace, we will not raise wimpy women at The Well. So in summary, the same truth was equally true for both genders, addressed to women in a way that is inapplicable to men, implying a similar truth to men, yet demanding particular actions in particular contexts for women that they would not have the benefit of exploring with a bunch of men present. Time limitations alone would be a hindrance, not to mention other more intangible limitations. The only thing arbitrary here would be depriving women of that truth-packed, feminine treasure. And the same is true of the uniqueness of men's ministry.

2) that each of these ministries are doctrinal in nature and so the theological content of each must be equally rich...

Foundational to the theology of gender-specific ministry is a theology of gender. That seems simple enough. One will need to justify the existence of such ministry before that ministry can expect men and women to embrace it. In order to do that, the first three chapters of the Bible will be indispensable. In Genesis 1-3, we glean the following overarching principles:

1. Men and women were made equal *and* unique to reflect great things about God, not themselves (1:26-27);
2. Men and women have a higher vocation than themselves or each other: marriage is their coming together for that highest vocation—namely worship (2);
3. The uniqueness of men and women consists in Adam’s logically (not always chronologically) prior tasks of multiplication (1:28), dominion (1:28), cultivation (2:15) and knowing (2:19-20) and Eve’s complementary task of helping him in that higher vocation (2:18, 20);
4. Man (*adam*) was taken from the ground (*adamah*) while Woman (*isha*) was taken from the side of man (*ish*).³ Thus man seeks God’s glory through the ground—which is why he needs **respect** (or, a “ground to stand on”) in order to act; thus woman seeks God’s glory through the man—which is why she needs **love** in order to act. Stated more subjectively, men find happiness through impersonal matter (cultivating things), while women find happiness through interpersonal relationship (cultivating persons);⁴
5. In the Fall, the Lord saw fit to let the punishment fit the crime (3:16-20). Man and woman are not merely two fallen people—they are two fallen genders. This means that their unique design will be corrupt in that same unique way. The very thing the woman needs from the man (love) he will deprive her of, and vice-versa (with respect).⁵ This is so because each is still a glory-seeker, but no longer in the pure worship of God. Thus man goes to the ground to worship himself as woman goes to the man to worship herself. This is not merely the origin for the battle of the sexes: it is the exact way that spiritual aggression and leadership is lost for the man in each generation.

It seems that this “genesis of gender psychology” has to be explained first before people can really buy into biblical gender-specific ministry. People are simply unaware of how messed up we are as sinners. Even when we do begin to grasp the doctrine of the Fall, it seldom occurs to us that we are fallen *as man and woman* as well—not only as persons. Hence the specific curses of man and woman are severe pathologies that need to be exposed and overcome for the health of the individual,

³ The generic, representative man (*adam*) and specific man (*ish*) are linguistically distinct in Hebrew.

⁴ I would have to write an entirely separate position paper to answer potential objections to this fourth point. The objections are a result of the lack of philosophical/logical education in the modern West, combined with peoples’ ever-decreasing attention spans via popular culture. For instance, that man’s basic paradigm for glory-seeking is impersonal does not mean that he does not also have interpersonal needs that are basic. For another instance, that woman’s basic functional need is love does not give a man an excuse to deny to her respect—which need is also, in another sense, basic.

⁵ Emerson Eggerich, in his book, *Love & Respect* (Integrity Press, Nashville 2005), does a good job exposing this from the New Testament command to husband and wife in Ephesians 5. However, there is a deeper theological background for this inter-relational truth that one must go back to Genesis 1-3 in order to discover.

home and church. Fallen men do not want to lead and fallen women resentfully step into that void—the effects of which are a void for the children, a deepening passivity in the man, and a female’s attempt to do masculine things that issue forth in a contentious, forced and often shrill and silly version of the authentically male. What is more, those ladies will be out from under covering and will expose themselves in ways that they will be ashamed of as they grow older. We all make fools and traitors of each other when we are not content with the beauty of our gender design. The whole thing exacerbates itself and will get worse unless exposed and overcome. Gender-specific ministry is designed to that end.

Susan Hunt points out that “Biblical womanhood is a covenantal concept. The helper design would be illogical in an autonomous vacuum. This design is nonsensical in a culture of self but is needful in a culture of covenant.”⁶ Two obvious ways that this is so are in the roles of wife and mother. When Titus instructs women to “love their husbands and children” [2:4], this affection and action is within the covenant of marriage and issues forth in the cultivation of a new generation of Christ-exalting image-bearers. That being the case, a working knowledge of Covenant Theology is invaluable for any wife and mother. How do we shepherd children into the membership of the local church? How do we prepare them to receive the sacraments and apply the preached word to their hearts? How do we integrate the knowledge of God gained in the assembly with the knowledge of all other things in our formative education? These are covenantal concepts, through and through, and therefore a mother must know them well. If she is to nurture spiritual giants then she must be one herself.

What, for example, does the reality of gender say about the Trinity? Quite a bit, actually. Men and women have roles and relationships. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have roles and relationships that have always been from all eternity. In Paul’s instruction to the churches on these matters, he was not merely defending but commending a beautiful picture of God. He wanted the earliest Christians to know that “submission has nothing to do with status. Submission is about function. Equality of being and differentiation of function characterize the Trinity.”⁷

Yet with everything we could say about the doctrinal flavor of gender-specific instruction, the main doctrine that any of us will ever need is the gospel. Hunt continues, “Christ, not womanhood or the women’s ministry, must be the reference point. Unless a women’s ministry is an overflow of the gospel, women will become hinderers and not helpers in God’s church.”⁸ Should anyone revert back again to objections—i.e. If the gospel is a common need, why a gender-specific hearing? Answer: Because it is precisely in the failure to be men and women *specifically* where we will experience our deepest sense of condemnation.

⁶ Duncan & Hunt, *ibid.*, p. 35

⁷ Duncan & Hunt, *ibid.*, p. 73

⁸ Duncan & Hunt, *ibid.*, p. 58

It is precisely in these roles and relationships that we will *feel* the law-grace tension and not simply think it. Whichever doctrine is in view, men, as well as women, “will be energized when they go beyond the functional value of their tasks and see the theological reasons”⁹ for their gender specificities. It is a matter of real heart-persuasion.

3) that each of these ministries should produce members of households who are able to shepherd the flock at home in gender-appropriate roles...

Libertinism has taught men and feminism taught women that the home is not a place for people with a life. Naturally if everyone bought into that, there would not be much new life left after we are all gone. But who’s counting? We will eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. So much for the prevailing mood: Now what is the real nature of God’s design for the home?

It is not enough to insist on monogamy and heterosexuality (non-negotiables to be sure), just as it is not enough to insist that your daughter marries a “Christian,” since *anyone* is a Christian the moment that they want something from Christ’s table! No, we must insist that the relationship between a husband and wife exactly mirrors the relationship between Christ and the church, as that is what Scripture demands [cf. Eph. 5:22-33]. There is no men’s ministry then that does not make war against the extremes of chauvinism and cowardice. Both would fail to serve the wife. Men need to be prepared to “intrude” upon the perpetual, adolescent spell to which twenty and thirty-something men are enslaved, coming alongside of ladies who have to fight the 1 Peter 3 fight alone. Mature men in the church need to prove to hurting ladies that we mean business by reasserting masculinity. Likewise, there is no women’s ministry that does not call materialistic anxiety the sin that Jesus calls it in Matthew 6:25-34. Anxiety is not less anxious when it is in a woman. We cannot domesticate any sin by political correctness.

Beyond the fight against the negative, gender-specific ministry must inculcate positive traits. Young women need to know that the Proverbs 31 woman is not a job you can apply for or a pedestal to be exalted on, but a lifelong process. And God has designed all lifelong processes for the main purpose of pointing us back to the cross as we fall on our faces again and again. Young men need to know that those character and doctrinal traits in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are not to be shrugged off by saying, “Oh, I’m not called to be an elder anyway.” These are the traits of any shepherd and a father is a shepherd. Likewise the counsel to younger men in Titus 2:7 is to teach single men self-control so that they can serve Christ and His kingdom. Their singleness does not exist merely to perpetuate a directionless singleness. Young men who do not embrace that need to be told the truth and given better examples.

⁹ Duncan & Hunt, *ibid*, p. 65

This would probably be the right place to show how the Complementarian position is not the same thing as what some have called the **Hierarchical** position. I personally do not like the label “Hierarchical” for this view since all of reality is hierarchical. Nor is that a simple semantics issue. It is precisely in the resentment of divine hierarchies in the created order that breeds false views about this or that institution. However, for the sake of argument, let us accept the following chart:

<u>Egalitarianism</u>	<u>Complementarianism</u>	<u>Hierarchicalism</u>
Gender equality extends to every area except for biological.	Genders equal in personhood but spiritually unique; not merely biological.	Gender equality denied in every area except for eternal state.
Gender differences are irrelevant to roles in the church and home.	Gender differences are a reflection of eternal worship in the church and home.	Gender differences correspond to natural duty without exception.
Men and women can do all of the same things in <u>any sphere</u> .	Men and women have differing roles and relationships <u>within all of the spheres</u> .	Men operate in all of the social spheres; women, <u>only within the family</u> .

As you can see, the principle difference between the Complementarian and Hierarchical views is that within the latter, men and women are seen *to operate in wholly different spheres in the world*. That is totally unbiblical and would actually undermine the entire Christian worldview. It would relegate the female to the home—*apart from the church*—which confuses the boundaries between invisible and visible church; and, depending on how far the man wants to take his chauvinism, compromises the gospel as well, taking upon himself the final moral justification and new birth of his wife and children.

When we say that the glory of a woman’s role in the home is to complement the man’s work by nurturing children, there are two things that we do *not* mean by that: We do *not* mean that what she is doing is not work; and we do *not* mean that she is doing this important work apart from the church.¹⁰ That misunderstands the nature of at least two spheres—work and the church. Therefore a thorough Hierarchicalism (in spite of the fact that the name is unhelpful anyway) would be a significant false view. On the other hand, in seeing how Egalitarianism is also a false view, we can begin to see how the word “hierarchy” is so unhelpful. That word is usually thrown around by Marxist professors in sociology classrooms. Every permanent institution aside from the state itself is eyed with suspicion as an arbitrary power-play of the ruling class. So we need to avoid the other extreme. We

¹⁰ ...nor that a woman may not occasionally be called to work outside of the home, nor that a man—answering his call—is “outside of the home” as in the sphere of family, nor a whole host of other things that, if the reader will simply study the *principle* of the doctrine, instead of assuming the worst, he or she will not have resolved as a simple, logical consequence of the biblical view.

must not, in the name of locating man and woman in all of the spheres of creation, thereby erase the hierarchy of worship implied in Genesis 2 and clearly expounded upon in Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. That is to say, God made man and woman unique to perform *distinct functions within each sphere*. If they do not, it won't get done. The fact that these passages do not address norms in other spheres—i.e. other than the church and home—demonstrates that this is an order of worship issue, not order of being and dignity.

4) that when this is a first priority the local church flourishes for both positive and negative reasons.

Note that this is “a” first priority—not the only first priority! The opening chapters of all of the Pastoral Letters make plain that surrounding one's self with other qualified men is the most foundational element of a healthy pastorate. When a new church gets off the ground, this will need to be made clear to people who might otherwise get the impression that something arbitrary and chauvinistic is going on. The priority of gaining a dozen men in the planter-pastor's corner marks the difference between the church surviving or dying an early death.

How we embrace this doctrine as individuals or as households will dramatically affect the church. For instance, woman was created as a helper (*ezer*), which, aside from reflecting something magnificent about the Holy Spirit who is called our Helper (*paraklete*), this also means that if women are not given their spiritual wings, then the whole church will be impoverished. But she is also created as a life-giver (*Eve*), which also reflects something great about God. That is the razor's edge a woman stands on: either she will be a helper or a hinderer, a life-giver or a life-taker. Being on the right side of that razor is worthy of instruction. Hunt draws this lesson from the life of Miriam in Exodus 15:

Miriam was a leader of women. They all followed her. Where did she lead them? What did she sing to them? She sang Moses' song verbatim (cf. vv. 1, 21). She did not add her own nuance. She taught the women to submit to Moses' leadership by connecting them to his teaching...But somewhere along the way Miriam began to grasp equality. She and her brother Aaron “spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married...And they said, ‘Has the Lord indeed only spoken through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?’ And the Lord heard it” (Numbers 12:1-2).¹¹

Notice also the connection between our third and fourth point. When homes are not healthy, the church will not be healthy. Since the visible church is made up of visible homes, it is plain that the more of those individuals that are saved and being sanctified the more the church-members will be saved and sanctified. It is a simple one-to-one correspondence. Moreover, if unhealthy people make up an

¹¹ Duncan & Hunt, *ibid*, pp. 76-77

unhealthy church, then unhealthy gender-identities do the same, since what are individual people but men and women? Until we can find a third gender to baptize, we are stuck with the reality that the unhealthier individual's gender identity are, the unhealthier the whole church will be. To separate gender instruction from overall church health is symptomatic of an age that does not think about these things very deeply.

As men opt out of leading, providing and protecting, and women step into that void to leave behind their qualities of affirming, nurturing and receiving, and every single other element of church life is swallowed up into that same vacuum. Most people cannot see the link between *ethical compromise* (over an action or institution or value) and *doctrinal apostasy* (wholesale commitment to heretical belief). But the link is not simply that one precedes the other: they each strongly *cause* the other. It works both ways. Here we are only focused on the way that the shift in action, institution or value effects how we see the truth. Theologian, Bruce Ware, has said about our day, that, "the primary areas in which Christianity is pressured to conform are on issues of *gender* and *sexuality*."¹² If that is true, then they will be the primary arenas in which all other doctrines will unwind as well. This is exactly what we see.

Men check out as men. Women fill the void. Children go without nurture. They become the next generation of men and women who do the same. When that cycle hits the church, men check out spiritually. Women fill that void. Children go without spiritual nurture. The percentage of church-goers is predominantly female. The pastor tailors his message accordingly. Marginally faithful pastors attempt to scoop the water out of the sinking ship with a spoonful of pragmatism about saving marriages, coping with rebellious kids, etc. Less faithful pastors go all the way in their pragmatism catering to the felt needs of the predominantly female audience. As pragmatism turns to consumerism which turns to narcissism, women are taught the value of "having it all," and the few men who are left are put on the legalistic suburban rat wheel of "giving it all" to her. When he cannot, he retreats to alternative masculinities: fiddling in the garage, sports fanaticism, armchair conspiracy theories, internet pornography, but certainly no longer church! Eggerich's "crazy cycle" is hooked on crack and commended to the whole community. Since most young men are already narcissists, the few that are left are needed to start leading for the preservation of the church. Who will have the courage to stick a lead pipe in the spokes of this cycle? It won't be popular. It won't be understood. But as Duncan commented about women's ministry, the crisis is "too critical for the church to be passive. Scores of evangelical women are functional feminists, because the world's paradigm for womanhood is the only one they have heard."¹³

¹² Bruce Ware, quoted in Duncan & Hunt, *ibid.*, p. 39

¹³ Duncan & Hunt, *ibid.*, p. 42

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