

Grace Bible Church
Women’s Discipleship Training Program
Year One

Unit One: Biblical Womanhood
Session 1 – The Bible on Womanhood

I. The Contemporary Setting

A. When we speak of biblical “womanhood” today we must be conscious of the far reaching effects of modern day feminism—not only in the society and culture but in the church as well.

B. The so-called “equal rights” movement is really an attempt to achieve role interchangeability and a blurring of distinctions between men and women which inadvertently contributes to the confusion of sexual identity that serves the homosexual agenda.

C. Example: Karen J. Torjesen argues that removing hierarchy in sexual relations will probably result in the undoing of heterosexual marriage:

“It would appear that, in Paul issues of sexuality are theologically related to hierarchy, and therefore the issues of Biblical feminism and lesbianism are irrefutably intertwined.” (“Sexuality, Hierarchy and Evangelicalism,” *TSF Bulletin*, vol. 10, no. 4 [March-April 1987], pp. 26-27)

D. The element within Evangelicalism embracing feminism can be roughly divided into two groups:

1. Christian feminists – very broad with no commitment to biblical inerrancy.
2. Biblical feminists – more narrow and committed to the bible as God’s inspired word.

E. The most crucial question raised by biblical feminists is “how to interpret the Bible”—hermeneutics. This is extremely important because some of the biblical passages addressed exclusively to women have exegetical (interpretive) difficulties.

F. The key interpretive issue raised is the question of deculturalization. This essentially means that though Paul meant what he said he was heavily influenced by the patriarchal culture and we have now moved beyond that largely because of the equality the bible itself promotes. According to this view, the bible is fallible and contradicts itself.

G. We will be devoting ourselves to the study of the major passages addressing women and role distinctions rather than attempting to answer each and every feminist argument.

H. Summary of the biblical complementarian view:

1. Men and women are *ontologically* equal. The bible teaches that women, like men, bear the image of God and equally receive the benefits of God's gracious salvation through faith in Christ (Gen. 2; Gal. 3; 1 Pet. 3).

2. Men and women are *functionally* different. The bible teaches that in the context of two spiritually equal human beings, man and woman, women are to submit themselves to their husbands and not hold positions of ruling or teaching (men) in the church (Eph. 5; 2 Tim. 2) while men are to exemplify Christ-like headship of their households and bear the primary responsibility of preaching and teaching in the church (Eph. 5; 1 Tim. 3; Titus 1)

I. Two foundational principles:

1. Equality and subordination are not contradictory. In fact, they are exemplified within the Godhead (1 Cor. 11:3)

2. Role distinctions are NOT a reflection of ability or inability nor giftedness, rather, they are rooted in the created order (Gen. 2-3; 1 Tim. 2:13; 1 Cor. 11:7-9)

II. The Old Testament on Womanhood

A. The Implications of the Creation: (Gen. 1:26-28)

1. Mankind came from God.
2. Mankind bears a resemblance to God.
3. Mankind is male and female.
4. Men and women are "co-regents" and together should rule over the lower creation.

B. The Implications of the Creation Order: (Gen. 2:18-25)

1. God created man *first* and gave him responsibility in the Garden and laid a dual command upon him.
2. God revealed a deficiency in Paradise when He said "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make him a helper suitable to him."

3. God did not immediately create the helper but brought Adam a task that revealed his solitude in Paradise.

4. God then made the woman from the man and brought her to him. This forever explains why men and women pair off and start new families. Marriage is not the result of social evolution or cultural development—it is the original pre-fall creation of God!

a. The mode of woman's creation is illuminating.

1) According to the New Testament the order is very significant (1 Cor. 11:8-9; 1 Tim. 2:13). God, through Paul, has given us the proper interpretation of this significant sequence.

5. The distinction of roles is found in the phrase: “a helper suitable for him” (2:18, 20). This phrase should alert the reader to several things.

a. The Hebrew word “helper” (*ezer*) often refers to Divine assistance (15 times) but is also used of military aid (Isa. 30:5; Ezek. 12:14; Hos. 13:9). The term does not imply inferiority in the woman.

b. Furthermore, the helper of man is *kenegdo*, that is, “corresponding” to him or “like” him, neither inferior nor superior. She corresponds *to* him, in that, like him, she is made in the image of God.

c. The man was not created to help the woman, but the reverse. Man needs the help. The woman is not a luxury but a necessity for the welfare of the man.

d. Douglas Wilson suggests, “As a result of the creation order, men and women are oriented to one another *differently*. They need one another, but they need one another *differently*. The man needs the help; the woman needs to help... He is called to the work and must receive help from her. She is called to the work through ministering to him. He is oriented to the task, and she is oriented to him.” (*Reforming Marriage*, Canon Press, pg. 19).

e. Ray Ortlund Jr. writes, “The paradox of Genesis 2 is also seen in the fact that the woman was made *from* the man (her equality) and *for* the man (her inequality). God did not make Adam and Eve from the ground at the same time and for one another without distinction.” (“Male-Female Equality and Male Headship,” *Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, pg. 102).

f. The account of the woman's creation has a poetic flavor aptly captured by U. Cassuto, "Just as the rib is found at the side of the man and is attached to him, even so the good wife, the *rib* of her husband, stands at his side to be his helper-counterpart, and her soul is bound up with his." (quoted by Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Gen. 1-15*, pg. 69)

6. Conclusion:

- a. The fact that Paul makes application from the creation order to the Corinthian men and women means that the order in which Adam and Eve were created was intended for use as a pattern for all subsequent generations of husbands and wives.
- b. Biblical womanhood is defined by the orientation of the woman to the man as found in the Genesis creation account.

7. Application:

- a. This creation order implies that all husbands are called to a particular task that involves their dominion over the creation.
- b. Their wives are called to aid them and support them in their calling.
- c. The man is defined by the work God has called him to do, while she is defined by the man whom she has been called to complete.
- d. Husbands and wives are not called to equally pursue separate careers without the priority of biblical roles and the home taking precedence.
- e. The fault lies primarily at the feet of men who have relinquish their headship and do not want to work hard *for* their wives and home and have enlisted women into the workforce and yet expect the home to continue to be maintained (see Wilson, pg. 30-31).

C. The Implications of the Fall: (Gen. 3) How did the fall effect God's perfect ordering of male-female roles?

- 1. The erroneous proposition: "... God imposed male headship/domination (no distinction is allowed) upon the woman after the fall. As the corollary to this interpretation, they go on to argue that redemption in Christ reverses this decree and reinstates the woman to 'full equality' with the man." (Ray Ortlund Jr., "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship," *Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, pg. 106).
- 2. The effects of the fall:

a. The Serpent is condemned to humiliation and to ultimate defeat under the victorious offspring of the woman.

b. God's decree for the woman is twofold:

1) As a mother, the woman will suffer in relation to her children.

2) As a wife, the woman will suffer in relation to her husband.

c. God's decree for the man is the painful and ultimately futile attempt to eke out a living from a cursed creation.

3. A close examination of the effects upon the woman:

a. How one defines the exact content of her marital suffering depends upon the meaning of the word "desire" and its use here. It has been defined in one of 4 ways:

1) It is equated with sexual desire.

2) It is a desire that makes her the willing slave of man.

3) She will desire only what her husband desires and she will have no command over herself.

4) Her desire is to contend with him for leadership in their relationship.

b. There are several reasons for preferring view 4. (see "What is the Woman's Desire?", Susan T. Foh, *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. 37:3, Spring 1975)

1) There is a strong parallel between Gen. 3:16b and 4:7b. Sin's desire for Cain involves mastery or enslavement and Cain must in turn master it.

2) It is consistent with the context of God's judgment for sin. Sin has corrupted both the willing submission of the wife and the loving headship of the husband. The woman's desire is to control her husband and his desire is to master her not leader her. So, God's original intent for marriage is now more difficult for wife to desire her husband.

3) It permits a consistent understanding of the term throughout the Old Testament.

4) It explains the fact that husband's do not rule over their wives as a result of the fall.

c. Conclusion: “Christian redemption does not redefine creation; it restores creation, so that wives learn godly submission and husbands learn godly headship” (Ray Ortlund Jr., “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship,” *Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, pg. 109).

D. Membership in the Covenant: How were role distinctions maintained in the Law?

1. As mother, the wife was on equal footing with her husband in that honor is commanded for both (Ex. 20:12; Lev. 19:3; Prov. 6:20; 10:1).

2. Daughters had the right to inherit if there were no sons (Num. 27:8) and could inherit even if there were sons (Job 42:15).

3. Old Testament legislation regarding marriage appears to favor men. Perhaps because the marriage laws under gird the husband's headship in the context of fallen relationships.

a. The husband's headship is reaffirmed in Numbers 5:19-20.

b. The law allows the husband to request a trial if he suspects infidelity (Num. 5:11ff) but the wife has no such recourse. However, a man committing adultery with another man's wife and being caught is punished (Lev. 20:10-12).

c. Deu. 24:1ff appears to give only the husband the right to divorce.

4. However, women are often depicted as occupying a position of dignity and respect. They are loved by their husbands (Gen. 24:67; 1 Sam. 1:4-8). Some had a great deal of independence. Hannah's husband told her to do what seemed best to her (1 Sam. 1:23). Abigail wisely reversed her husband's decision not to help David (1 Sam. 25:14:ff).

E. Role in Old Testament Worship: How are role distinctions maintained in the worship of the people of God?

1. Women could not receive the sign of the covenant, circumcision.

2. Women who gave birth were considered “unclean” and therefore “unqualified” for the worship of the Lord in the Tabernacle or Temple (Lev. 12).

3. First-born males were dedicated to the Lord and had to be redeemed or bought back (Ex. 13:2, 13) while first-born females were not redeemed.

4. Women could not be priests. However, several women are denoted as being prophetesses.

a. Deborah – Judg. 4:4

b. Huldah – 2 Kings 22:13

c. Miriam – Num. 12

d. Joel confirms the propriety of this – Joel 2:28-29

5. Only men were *required* at the three annual feasts (Ex. 23:17) though women normally attended (1 Sam. 1:1ff).

6. Women brought sacrifices themselves (1 Sam. 2:19; Lev. 12:15).

7. Women participated in the ceremonial feasts (Deu. 12:12-18).

8. There was a group of women who “ministered” at the door of the tent of meeting (Ex. 38:8; 1 Sam. 2:22b).

9. Women could take the vow of a Nazarite (Num. 6).

10. Women were required to be present during the reading of the law (Deu. 31:12; Neh. 8:2).

F. Exemplary Womanhood: Proverbs 31

1. The activities of the woman depicted in this chapter have great variety and they show that the wife is a person in her own right.

a. She is not confined to the house or neighborhood store but has freedom of movement (vs. 14).

b. She engages in business (vs. 15).

c. Her role requires very hard work (vs. 17).

d. She does not leave charitable work to others but engages in it herself (vs. 20).

e. She must plan and look to the future with courage (vs. 21).

2. Her activities are still carried on in the context of her distinct role as a wife and for the benefit of her husband and household (vv. 11, 12, 15, 21).

3. If a woman is proficient her industriousness may take her outside the home but her industry must still function within the context of her priorities.

4. A wife's work is hard work. Doug Wilson comments, "Of course this is hard work, especially when the little ones are young. Many wives, when they go through this experience, are tempted to treat 'being tired' as though it were a symptom of having done something wrong. Rather, it is a symptom of having done many things *right*. (Doug Wilson, *Reforming Marriage*, pg. 49).

G. Conclusions:

1. The OT continues to maintain the dual truths of spiritual equality and functional distinction between men and women.

2. In relation to the law, laws that appear to "discriminate" against women continue to under gird the headship of the man and prefigure the coming Son of God.

3. The ceremonial laws along with the civil law continue to demonstrate that women are not men and God requires different things from them in particular areas. Women are therefore full-fledged members of the covenant but occupy a distinctive role.

4. Properly understood within biblical categories, a limitation in personal role does not threaten or reduce personal worth.

5. Marriage, even at its very best, will never be the fulfillment of what we have lost in the garden. Our pain and frustrations in marriage and male/female relationships in general should point us to our relationship with God who alone will completely fulfill us.