

The Biblical Role of Women in Society
Trinity Baptist Church Discipleship Training
(April, 2008)

Introduction:

The proper place of women in society has been an area of much dispute in our generation. Modern feminism has had an enormous impact on the American mind concerning women. They have fought hard for generations to make women equal with men in every way and as a result have destroyed true femininity. They will always be unhappy and unfulfilled because they refuse to recognize God's gift of womanhood.

As Christians, we are never interested in directing our lives according to the wisdom of men or the course of our culture, but according to the wisdom of God as revealed in His Word. The purpose of this study is to examine the Biblical role of women in society – true feminism.

Bibliography:

Piper, John and Grudem, Wayne. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Wheaton, Crossway Books, 1991.

Part I – The Biblical Basis for Masculine Headship

- I. First, we need to be absolutely clear – In Christ both males and females are absolutely equal.
- Galatians 3:28** – “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”
- A. There is no distinction with regard to who God saves
1. The gospel is to be preached to all
Mark 16:15 – “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”
 2. In salvation God does not take a person's race or social status into account
Acts 10:34-35 – “Then Peter opened *his* mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.”
- B. All spiritual blessings, resources, and promises are given equally to all who believe.
- Romans 10:12** – “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.”
1. We are equally justified by faith
 2. We are all the children of God
- C. Believing men and women are full spiritual equals
1. All have the same spiritual possession
 2. All bear God's image equally
 3. All have the same access to God
 4. All have the same eternal hope

- D. There are many well-defined roles among human beings in society – These distinctions are not abolished by salvation
1. Employee/employer relationships – The Christian employee is to submit to his employer
 2. During times in history there were slave/master relationships that were not ended because the slave or master was saved
Ephesians 6:5 – “Servants, be obedient to them that are *your* masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ;”
1 Peter 2:18 – “Servants, *be* subject to *your* masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.”
 3. There are children/parent distinctions
Ephesians 6:1 – “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.”
 4. There are obvious social, racial, and sexual distinctions among human beings that do not change when God saves us
- II. In role and function there are marked Biblical distinctions between men and women
This is clearly seen in creation
- A. Adam was created first – God could have done it differently, but He chose this way according to His purpose for humanity.
1. Eve was created as a companion and helper for Adam
Genesis 2:18 – “And the LORD God said, *It is* not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.”
 2. Eve was created as a weaker vessel – Adam was to be her protector
1 Peter 3:7 – “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with *them* according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.”
- B. The male was created to exercise headship – clearly seen in creation
1. This can be seen in God’s terminology for humanity
Genesis 1:27 – “So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”
Genesis 5:2 – “Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.”
“Adam” - אָדָם - man, mankind
 - a. God called humanity man, not woman or even persons
 - b. God did not use gender neutral language – He used specific language to teach specific things
 2. God made His covenant with Adam as the head of all of humanity. God gave Adam the command not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam’s headship is clear as he represented mankind in the Covenant, not Eve.

3. The headship of Adam is seen in Eve being formed from the body of Adam –
 God had Adam name each of the animals according to their identity so that he could see that none were suitable for him.
 In keeping with his headship Adam named or identified the woman
 Adam interpreted her identity in relation to himself
Genesis 2:23 – “And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”
 4. The headship of Adam is seen in his responsibility for the original sin
 - a. Adam *and* Eve sinned but it was Adam’s sin that was passed down to all mankind
 - b. Adam *and* Eve hid themselves in the garden but God called out to Adam
Genesis 3:9 – “And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where *art* thou?”
 - c. Notice also God addresses Adam with a formal indictment in **Gen. 3:17** – “Because thou hast . . .”
 He did not address Eve’s sin in **Verse 16**
 Adam’s disobedience was the pivotal factor, not Eve’s
- C. With creation God made man and woman different, distinct
 As husband and wife, the man and the woman are to love each other as equals but not in the same way
1. The man is to love his wife by accepting his responsibility for making their partnership a platform for displaying God’s glory
 The woman is to love her husband by supporting him in that undertaking
 2. The man is to love his wife by sacrificially giving himself for her.
 The woman is to love her husband by submitting to his headship.
- D. Men and women are created as equals but different
1. The man’s primary duty is to lead for the glory of God
 2. The woman’s primary duty is to help for the glory of God
- III. This God given relationship was perverted by sin
- A. Eve sinned in her failure to continue in her God-given capacity
1. She took herself out from under Adam’s headship and leadership
 - a. God had given Adam a law to keep – It was his responsibility to teach it to his family
 - b. Eve took it upon herself to change its demands
 Satan’s temptation of Eve was an attack upon Adam’s headship
 “You decide Eve, You lead the way”
 2. Eve ate the fruit without consulting with her husband
Genesis 3:6 – “And when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.”

- a. She took the initiative and ate the fruit
She then exercised authority in giving it to Adam – We can see this in the fact that it was Eve who was deceived. She weighed the facts and came to the decision.
1 Timothy 2:13-14 – “For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.”
 - b. Adam on the other hand forsook his responsibility and gave the authority for making the decision to Eve
Genesis 3:12 – “And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest *to be* with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.”
- B. The struggle of the woman against the man’s authority is the result of sin
Genesis 3:16 – “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.”
1. This describes not Eve’s desire for Adam but her desire for his dominion, his authority
 2. We can see the same grammatical construction in God’s dialogue with Cain
Genesis 4:7 – “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.”
NAS **Genesis 4:7** - “. . . sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.”
In other words, sin is seeking to rule you and have dominion over you, but you must master it.
Romans 6:14 – “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”
 3. Eve would have the misery of competition with her rightful head.
This is another reason why Christian redemption restores God’s plan for - creation – Wives learn godly submission, Husbands learn godly headship
- C. Does this male headship diminishes the woman – NO!
1. The woman is just as gifted with all of the attributes and opportunity to serve God in wisdom and righteousness
But the husband is to lead and the wife is to support
 - a. Submission refers to the wife’s divine calling to affirm her husband’s leadership
 - b. This is not an absolute surrender of the will. In fact, in marriage there must be interaction, a sharing of ideas. Headship refers to the husband’s ultimate responsibility for leadership in home and the wife’s recognition of that leadership.
 2. The parallel example can be found with the pastor and church member
The church member has just as much freedom and opportunity to serve and honor God in righteousness as the pastor does.
But the pastor is called to lead and the member is to support

3. Submission does not imply inferiority
In the economic Trinity does not the Father lead the Son? And does not the Son submit to the Father? And does not the Spirit submit to both? Yet, are not the three equal in power and glory?

Part II – The Distinctions Between Men and Women in Practice

I. Role distinctions in the home

The greatest statement on the roles of husbands and wives is in **Eph. 5:22-33**

- A. Paul prefaces his statement with the broad statement of **Verse 21**
Ephesians 5:21 – “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”
 1. The Christian model is one of submission to one another
1 Peter 5:5 – “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”
 2. Jesus Christ forever stands as our Model
Philippians 2:3-5 – “*Let nothing be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:”
 3. Our motive for such submission is our high reverence for God
 4. While we are called to a spirit of humility and submission to all, Paul specifies that there are particular roles that have been established (husbands and wives, children and parents, servants and masters)
 5. The wife’s role: submission & support; the husband’s role: headship & leadership
- B. Paul admonishes wives to submit to their husbands as their heads
 1. This should be done in the same way the church submits to Christ as her Head
 2. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church
 3. Paul is comparing marriage to the relationship of Christ and His church.
- C. Conditions for submission to the husband
 1. The Bible does not set the condition of submission upon the behavior of the husband
 - a. It doesn’t say, “Wives submit yourselves to your husbands if they love you and lead you as godly examples.”
 - b. Rather there is an absolute charge –
Ephesians 5:24 – “Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let the wives be* to their own husbands in every thing.”
 2. There *is* the requirement that God reign supreme – His law must come first
Colossians 3:18 – “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.”

3. There is the requirement that submission be to her own husband
Ephesians 5:24 – “Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let the wives be to their own husbands* in every thing.”
 4. Her submission must be modeled after the Church’s submission to Christ
Ephesians 5:24 – “Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let the wives be to their own husbands* in every thing.”
- D. Where the husband’s primary responsibility is to lead and provide for the home, the woman’s dominion and responsibility is the management of the home – it is her divine calling
Titus 2:3-5 – “The aged women likewise, that *they be* in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, *To be* discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.”
1. Managing a household is her career
 2. It takes a diligent, self-motivating, hard working woman to create a well-managed home
- E. The highest calling for a woman in the Bible is that of keeping the home – of providing for family
1. The greatest concern of godly women was not equality in the work place but of a well ordered home.
“That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, *To be* discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands”
 2. Our generation sees this at the bottom of importance

II. Is it permissible for a woman to ever work outside the home?

- A. This question usually draws our focus away from the Biblical teaching on the role of women.
1. The Biblical responsibility for women is to properly care for the home.
 - a. This is her calling – her domain. She is a homemaker
 - b. Paul writes to Timothy that the house is the woman’s dominion
^{KJV} **1 Timothy 5:14** I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.
οἰκοδεσποτεῖν (oikodespotein) – a compound Greek word:
οἶκος (oikos) – House
δεσπότης (despotes) – master, ruler, despot, sovereign
 - c. The house is the wife’s dominion under the leadership of her husband
 2. So the question should not be what she is doing away from the home but how is she doing at managing the home. Her chief duty is to care for her husband and children.
Titus 2:4 – “That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children,”

3. Obviously, when the children are young the mother must at all cost be at home. This is her domain. She has a high duty to nurture and care for her children.
 4. In addition, a woman working outside the home for the purpose of the promoting materialistic lusts should be discouraged.
- B. The Bible, however, does not give a strict prohibition against a woman working outside the home
1. The duty of the husband is to provide for the wellbeing of the home. He does this through his labors in providing for it and his leadership in guiding it.
 2. The duty of the wife is to provide for the wellbeing of the home. She does it through the wise oversight and care of the home and in following the leadership of her husband.
 3. There are times when the wellbeing of the home is enhanced by the woman's involvement outside the home.
 4. We are sometimes guilty of setting stringent rules and losing the overarching teaching of Scripture. The woman must oversee the home but may be involved in many different activities as she does it.
 4. We can see this in the example of the excellent woman of Prov. 31.
 - a. She cared well for her home – this was her chief duty
Proverbs 31:13 – “She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.”
Proverbs 31:15 – “She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.”
 - b. She was also involved in the investigation and purchase of land
Proverbs 31:16 – “She considereth a field, and buyeth it”
 - c. She planted a vineyard
Proverbs 31:16 – “with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.”
 - d. She cared for the poor
Proverbs 31:20 – “She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.”
 - e. She manufactured goods and sold them in the marketplace
Proverbs 31:24 – “She maketh fine linen, and selleth *it*; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.”
 - f. All of this was done in the context of caring for her home
Proverbs 31:27 – “She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.”
- C. What are some conditions where a woman might work outside the home?
1. Conditions where the husband has become disabled – the woman is her husband's helper
 2. Conditions where the husband has lost his job or conditions where the income is insufficient for the wellbeing of the family
 3. Conditions where the children are grown and the house is empty – the woman then has much time.

- a. There must always be great caution against idleness.
1 Timothy 5:13 – “And withal they learn *to be* idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.”
Proverbs 31:27 – “She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.”
 - b. During these years a part-time job or volunteer work keeps her productive and enables her to enhance the well-being of the home.
 - c. She has time to mentor and teach the younger women.
4. Cautions:
- a. If she volunteers or works outside the home her supervisor must understand that she is under submission to her husband and her family will always have a place of priority.
 - b. Any activity outside the home must have the purpose of enhancing the wellbeing of the home.

III. What about a woman’s submission to masculine authority outside the home?

- A. The Bible teaches true femininity - that women are under masculine leadership
This is true both inside and outside the home
 - 1. Women should receive the strength and leadership of men – this is true femininity
 - 2. John Piper – “At the heart of mature femininity is a free disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman’s differing relationships” (*Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, page 46).
- B. The Bible clearly teaches that a woman is under the headship of her husband
Ephesians 5:24 – “Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let the wives be to their own husbands* in every thing.”
 - 1. This does not diminish the headship of masculinity in general
The word for “husband” is ἀνὴρ which can be translated husband or it can be simply translated man.
 - 2. A young lady is under the headship of her father until he gives her away in marriage.
 - 3. Women are to recognize the leadership of all men yet particularly and primarily of their own husbands
- C. The Bible also clearly teaches that women should not assume the role of leadership within the church but should submit to male leadership
Timothy 2:11-12 – “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.”
1 Corinthians 14:34 – “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law.”

- D. What about outside the church?
 Can a woman teach men in a college setting? Can a woman have men subordinate to her in the work place? Once we move outside the home and the church Scripture seems to be more ambiguous.
1. The Bible clearly teaches the pattern of male leadership.
 2. The Bible clearly teaches this pattern of leadership in the home and in the church.
 3. It would seem consistent with the nature and expression of manhood and womanhood to carry these principles into society. But with all of the possible occupations and situations of which men and women can be engaged in society God has chosen not to be specific.
- E. Some principles to follow:
1. A godly woman will always express herself in appropriate ways
 - a. She will respond to a man in such a way as to signal endorsement of his masculinity – not sexual suggestiveness but respect.
 - b. This means a glad acceptance of His gentlemanly courtesies and a recognition of his leadership.
 - c. It should be natural for a man to open the door for a woman or to speak to her with courtesy and respect.
 - d. It should be natural for a man to come in defense of a woman
 It was good and proper for the women to occupy the lifeboats on the Titanic
 2. There are times in our society that this will be difficult
 - a. Few take the position that it is never permissible for a woman to work outside the home. For example, few would say that a single woman is never allowed to hold a job.
 - b. Christianity does not view women as Islam does where the women are never allowed to work, drive a car, go to school, etc.
 - c. As soon as women enter the world there will be times when the issue of feminine submission will be difficult
 - A college teacher and her students
 - A bus driver and her passengers
 - A retail manager and her clerks
 - A doctor and her interns
 - A principle and her teachers
 3. In society there are times when a woman will be asked to teach men
 Giving directions to a man looking for a particular street
 She has superior knowledge to a man seeking her guidance
 4. When put in circumstances of interaction the man should speak to a woman with gentleness, courtesy.
 The woman should speak to the man with respect, honor – this is true even if they are in a situation where she is in a position of authority
 5. Some roles strain the personhood of men and women to the point of being inappropriate
 - a. The best guideline is whether her leadership is personal or non-personal. Or direct, or indirect.
 - b. It would be difficult for a woman to be a drill sergeant over men

- c. J. I. Packer – “A situation in which a female boss has a male secretary” puts a strain on the humanity of both (*Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, page 52).
- F. Some positions of leadership in society should be restricted to men
 - 1. The military should be restricted to men. The presence of women (and the male duty to protect) places the armed forces in jeopardy. Calling a mother away from her home and children for year long periods is contrary to her Divinely appointed role.
 - 2. Police and firefighters should be restricted to men – there are physical limitations
 - 3. Holding political office – This seems most consistent with the Biblical pattern of male leadership.

Conclusion:

- 1. Every woman should strive to attain her full measure of femininity.
 - A. Satan is destroying womanhood.
 - With great blinding deception he is convincing women that men are doing all of the important work.
 - He is convincing women that work at home is unimportant and unfulfilling
 - He is convincing women that self worth is measured in individual dominion.
 - He is convincing women that following the leadership of men is demeaning and a sign of weakness. That to be truly fulfilled she must take on all the qualities of manhood.
 - B. As womanhood and manhood is being destroyed the results are devastating
 - Homes are being destroyed as mom and dad give themselves to their careers while children are left in daycare.
 - Churches are being destroyed – there is a battle over leadership in the church
The foundation of our society is unraveling
 - Women are left confused and stressed because society is teaching them that they can be excellent wives and mothers and professional women at the same time.
- 2. The Godly woman must recognize the proper seasons of life. There is the season of motherhood. You can't be a good mother and homemaker while trying to advance a career. There is too much to balance. There will come a season when you will have more time for volunteer work etc. But the primary place of dominion is in the home.
- 3. The Godly women must strive towards God's standard of true femininity.
 - A. In her book, *Feminine, Free, and Faithful*, Ronda Chervin gives a list of some positive feminine traits. These are the traits of a truly virtuous woman. Responsive, compassionate, empathetic, enduring, gentle, warm, tender, hospitable, receptive, diplomatic, considerate, polite, supportive, intuitive, wise, perceptive, sensitive, spiritual, sincere, vulnerable (in the sense of emotionally open), obedient, trusting, graceful, sweet, expressive, charming, delicate, quiet, sensually receptive (vs. prudish), faithful, pure (*Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, page 46).
These are the traits that adorn true femininity.

- B. On the other hand some negative traits:
Weak, passive, slavish, weepy, wishy-washy, seductive, flirtatious, vain, chatterbox, silly, sentimental, naïve, moody, petty, catty, prudish, manipulative, complaining, nagging, pouty, smothering, spiteful (*Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, page 46).
It is interesting how the Bible describes such women:
1 Timothy 5:13 – “And withal they learn *to be* idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.”
Proverbs 27:15 – “A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.”
^{NAS} **Proverbs 21:9** – “It is better to live in a corner of a roof, Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.”
Proverbs 21:19 – “*It is* better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.”
- C. Compare this with the virtuous woman
Proverbs 31:10 – “Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price *is* far above rubies.”
Proverbs 31:28 – “Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband *also*, and he praiseth her.”
4. We must never diminish the great value of womanhood
- A. Women are life-bearers. It was a woman that gave birth to our Savior
- B. Women are caring nurturers. It was the women who came to anoint the body of Jesus. It was the women who were first at the tomb.
- C. Women are the primary instruments for passing on our culture and values. They have a huge influence upon our youth. If the plague of feminism is to ever be reversed it will be by the teaching of Christian women.
Titus 2:3-5 – “The aged women likewise, that *they be* in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, *To be* discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.”
- D. Women have enormous gifts and abilities that must never be diminished. They are an invaluable asset to the Church of Christ.
5. May God grant our women the grace to be adorned with the true femininity with which they were created. This is true Woman’s Liberation.
Freedom to be all that God created you to be.
Freedom to be the kind of wives and mothers that will adorn godly homes.
Freedom to live your life to His honor and glory.