

VIEWPOINT

A BIBLICAL VIEW OF FEMINISM AND WOMEN IN CHURCH LIFE

Highlands holds to a Complementarian view of the role of women in Church life. The two main views found in Christian orthodoxy (a belief in essential doctrines) are Complementarianism and Egalitarianism.

A good starting point to understand these (and other) views is theologian Wayne Grudem's characterization in his book: *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (2004). Grudem developed these categories, which are not universally agreed-upon distinctions.

The Grudem Categories:

Progressive Left: Obliterates all male/female distinctions, approves transgenderism, and society over family.

Egalitarianism: Removing or denying many differences between men and women, no gender-based role differences in marriage and Church functions.

Complementarianism: Equality, differences, and unity; H and W have equal value, and different roles.

Male Dominance: Emphasizing the differences between men and women

Violent Right: Might makes right – polygamy, dehumanization of women

These are some distinctives generally found in the Complementarian view, though all views contain a spectrum of belief. Here are some of those common distinctions.

1. Men and Women are equal in value and dignity.

The Bible opens with God's creation of all that exists, and says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; *male and female He created them.*" (Gen. 1:27). An image bearer means we all represent and are like God in some way. Nothing else in his creation is so described. This privilege is given to men and women alike; in the fulness of both, we see the image of God.

Grudem adds this: "Yet we can say even more. If men and women are equally in the image of God, then we are equally important and equally valuable *to God*. We have equal worth before him *for all eternity*, for this is how we were created.

2. Men and women have different roles in marriage as part of the created order.

The Complementarian view holds that men and women have different but complementary roles. The Egalitarian view agrees that men and women were created with equal value and dignity, but also says that the first man and woman shared all responsibilities and dominion over the created order.

Where do the two views depart? Complementarianism says that the roles were given in the act of creation. This view is accepted by a number of conservative groups, like the Southern Baptist Convention. The Egalitarian view often says the roles of men and women were the *result* of the fall, as described in Genesis 3:16. Others, like the Assemblies of God (in their doctrinal position) say: “we conclude that we cannot find convincing evidence that the ministry of women is restricted according to some sacred or immutable principle.”

It is important that both sides treat each other with respect over different views, and allow for the exercise of conscience.

3. Complementarianism holds that equality and differences between men and women’s roles reflect equality and differences in the Trinity.

First Corinthians 11:3: “But I want you to understand that the *head* of every man is Christ, the *head* of the wife is her husband, and the *head* of Christ is God.” The Greek word for head (*kephale*) refers to one in a position of authority. Paul is demonstrating that within the Trinity, there can be equality and differences between persons at the same time. The Father and Son are equal in deity and equal in all their attributes, but have different roles, and will into eternity. We see this in the Bible in verses like 1 Corinthians 15:27-28:

“For ‘God has put all things in subjection under (Jesus’s) feet.’ But when it says, ‘all things are put in subjection,’ it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. (ESV)

In just the same way, a husband and wife are equal in personhood and value, but have different roles within a marriage. These roles are a picture of the role of Christ to his Church, in which He is the Bridegroom, and we (the Church) are the Bride (Ephesians chapter 5).

When did the ideas of headship and submission within the Trinity begin? The answer is the idea never “began.” It has always existed in the eternal nature of God Himself. There

is no difference in attributes or perfection, but only in how the persons of the Trinity relate to each other, and this existence was imported into creation.

4. Complementarianism holds that the equality and differences between men and women are very good.

In today's hostile culture, this is a difficult subject. It may invite hostilities or ridicule, and Christians may have concerns the view will cause offense. But Christians are called to graciously witness to the truth of God's Word, no matter where the culture goes.

In the creation account of Genesis 1, after each act of creation, the Bible says God saw that it was good. But after the creation of mankind, in his image of God, both male and female, God said it was "very good."

Anticipating another objection, the act of creation with different roles is also "fair." If it is based on God's assignment of roles from the beginning, then it is fair because God says so. We see an analogy to this in different roles in the Church based on gifts. Not all are called to be pastors, teachers, or evangelists, but we would not call this "unfair." These are offices (and gifts) based upon God's creational sovereignty. It was the same in the Old Testament. For example, to be a priest, one had to be a Levite and a descendant of Aaron. Were Israelites from other tribes inferior or treated unfairly in this? We would say "no," because God left this role for certain Levites. Each tribe had its distinctive character, role, and inheritance in the Promised Land.

5. Our view should be directed by obedience to the Bible.

If we abandon biblical positions to defer to changing cultural standards, where does the process end? None of this should minimize the importance and role of women in the Church. In Acts 2:17-18, the Holy Spirit was given in fulness to both men and women, and both received spiritual gifts for use in the church. Women were prominent in Jesus's ministry, and even financed the work (Johanna and Susanna).

Against this, Jesus selected men (and only men) to be his apostles. Following that, the role of elder in 1 Timothy and Titus is limited biblically to qualified men. Women cannot be Elders, but should be very active in life of the church. Women serve in Highlands as directors of ministries, and teach. Unless the Bible denies a certain role to women, Complementarians generally believe it is allowed.

Points to Keep in View:

1. We follow the Bible faithfully. There are principles in the Scriptures, and we don't form a doctrine over one verse. We look at context, language, and construe it (as much as possible) for what it says, and not to align with our preconceived notions.
2. Some principles of the Bible are transcultural, for example, the Ten Commandments. Other verses reflect cultural practices, such as the instruction to "greet with a holy kiss," or women wearing a head cover. Further, we find occasional cultural references that contain a principle applicable beyond the cultural reference. For example, the instruction to "gird up your loins" referred to securing a garment to free up the legs under a robe for work. The principle behind it was still a call to work, just as we might express it today in saying: "roll up your sleeves." So even where the Bible contains what looks like an outdated cultural expression, we must still look to see if there is a transcultural principle or call behind the reference.
3. We are called to love and forbear with others with different views in the Body of Christ. Our view is not meant to be high-handed or disrespectful to others. We all must answer to our conscience and interpret the Word of God as best we can understand it.