

Did God Intend A Difference?

Opinions abound, but let's see what the Bible has to say about the roles of men and women.

by Doug Horchak



The longest battle on earth? Some say it's the *Battle of the Sexes*—and it isn't over yet!

Whether driven by culture, ethnicity, religion or philosophy, people have all kinds of ideas about how men and women are valued and why. Whether in religious circles or our current pop culture, the various views on gender are clearly all over the map!

A look into the Bible reveals that societal norms for the role of men and women have strayed from what God intended from the beginning. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve decided for themselves what was right and wrong instead of obeying God. As a result, they were cut off from God (Genesis 3:22-24).

From then on, mankind devised its own views on everything, including politics, education, religion and the family. Humanity apart from God has been clueless as to how to properly view the roles and relationships of men and women.

God's view given a bad name

But why is this so? Why has mankind so confused the unique roles for which men and women were created? As in many areas of life, it's often the misuse or abuse of a *good thing* that gives something a "bad name." Even Christianity has gotten a bad rap since the majority who have claimed to represent Christianity throughout history have been guilty of pagan compromise, hypocrisy, false teaching and killing, even genocide—all in the name of God!

In like fashion, history shows that men have often treated women (whether in marriage or not) as subordinates or second-class citizens. And so, the intent of God's Word regarding male and female roles in society, family and the Church has also received a bad reputation due to horrible examples of misuse and abuse.

Errant theology

In addition to man's confusion about the roles and differences of men and women, there are theologians on both sides of the debate who claim the Scriptures support their conclusions. Feminist theologians may think the Bible promotes no distinction of roles in leadership or the family—or that, if it does, this is not relevant today. Conversely, some ultraconservative religious groups believe the Bible says that a woman's role is that of a servant, slave or subordinate.

From God's perspective, men and women were created as a complement to one another (Genesis 2:18). God makes it clear that disrespect, disregard, intimidation and abuse are against His principles governing relationships between men and women—whether in marriage, society or the Church. In creating men and women different, God also made it clear that they had a need for each other. The value and contributions of both are needed for families to be successful and for society to thrive.

Respect and love are key



What is the foundation for the roles and relationships between people? We find that God instructs us to first consider the needs of others before our own. Both men and women are to respect each other and serve each other (Philippians 2:1-4). As Christians, striving to model the actions of Jesus Christ, we have no other option than to hold each other in high esteem. The issue isn't about control and power—but cooperation, humility and service.

In 1 Corinthians 13 the apostle Paul shows what love looks like by describing the giving, sharing and respectful concern people should have for each other. Here, God shows us that true, godly love "bears all things," "does not seek its own" and "thinks no evil." True, godly love never fails. This is the spiritual intent and foundation that relationships (particularly the one between a husband and wife in marriage) should have.

Proverbs 31 reveals a woman and wife of great competence and service to both family and community. This chapter also shows that the husband of such a wife has great confidence, respect and trust in her. He helps provide opportunities for her to use her great talents and become that woman of virtue and great worth.

Roles in marriage and the Church

In the Church, God has reserved the ecclesiastical role of preaching to men (1 Timothy 2:11-14). He also shows that women have a powerful influence in the family and the Church by their example, by teaching younger women and by nurturing and training children (Titus 2:3-4; 2 Timothy 1:5).

God's Word shows us that women do have meaningful (and sometimes the most valuable) input and advice to give and be heeded!

In marriage, God has men and women fulfilling mutually important but unique roles. Ephesians 5:22-25 instructs men and women on the distinctive godly roles they should strive to fulfill. In this chapter, we see that God revealed the broad context within which men and women can fulfill their roles in a marriage and family in light of the entire plan of God. Wives are to voluntarily submit themselves to their husbands as the head in their marriage. This is not a reference to inferiority—but to a unique role. Paul uses the same Greek word in verse 21 to describe how all Christians are to treat one another.

In Ephesians 5:25 Paul shows that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. Husbands are to imitate the same self-sacrificing and loving leadership of the Messiah. Christ gave the ultimate sacrifice—His life—for all humanity. In like fashion, the husband should strive for the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:3-5) with an attitude of humility and service to his wife and family.

A reading of Ephesians 5 gives us insight into God's original intention for men and women. God explained these roles in terms of a family. Marriage was to be for life, with husband and wife growing together as they raise and nurture their family. These roles are patterned after those that Jesus Christ and the Church fulfill now and will fulfill in God's Kingdom.

The high regard God has for His servants (both male and female) is also evident in the language used throughout Hebrews 11, the "faith chapter." Hebrews 11:35 refers to multiple women of faith, without specifically naming them. There is also a tribute to both unnamed men and women: "of whom the world was not worthy" (verse 38).

Biblical summary

To summarize, the Bible shows us that:

- God designed men and women with gender-specific differences to equip them for specialized roles as husbands and wives and members of society and the Church.

- God intended for husbands and wives to work together as a team in their respective domains, reflecting the roles He introduced to Adam and Eve.
- God gave authority to the man to be the leader in his marriage and family, which also outlines the norm for the male leadership roles in the Church.
- A husband is to put the needs and care of his wife and family ahead of his own, and to love and cherish his wife as Christ does the Church.
- A wife is to bring honor to her husband by supporting his leadership and using her talents to complement her husband's abilities, as they work together to serve God and care for their family.
- Spiritually mature women are to teach and encourage younger women in their feminine role. A wife's role includes keeping the home and loving her-husband.
- The foundation of godly leadership established by Jesus Christ emphasizes mutual love and respect between husbands and wives/men and women, as each fulfills the role God designed.
- God regards men and women as equal in spiritual potential, and He treats them accordingly. One is not superior to the other. Both have equal access to God and His promises.

Equality of "worth"

Men and women were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). This shows us that God has the same goal and future in store for all men and women who answer the invitation to become part of the family of God (Galatians 3:28; 1 Peter 3:7).

True equality—*equality of worth*—is not measured by equivalent religious or leadership roles. It is measured by each person being all that God intended him or her to be through a proper relationship with Him. After all, He loves us all, showing no partiality (Galatians 3:28; Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9).

Now, if Christian men and women are really sincere about being the best they can be, if they both seek dignity, significance and true, lasting happiness, they will need courage.

Courage is needed to recognize that man's definition of *equality* cannot be used to change the teaching and intent of the law and plan of God. Courage is required to learn, with pure and honest objectivity, about the wonderful uniqueness of being male or female. Courage is necessary to accept the-obligations and role that our gender bequeaths to us. And courage is needed to know that our greatest potential imaginable lies in being who we are—as God intended. Because, in the end, it all leads to the same destiny—living forever in the family of God! VT

About the Author

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Comments or Questions

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