

What is Complementarianism?

Summary: *While being absolutely equal in personhood and dignity, man and woman are distinct in their roles in the home and church. This position is to be distinguished from both ancient patriarchy that often neglects the equality of the sexes and egalitarianism which neglects the clear Scriptural role distinctions.*

God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:27

The Village Church is complementarian in our understanding of manhood and womanhood.¹ To put it most succinctly, we believe that while being absolutely equal in personhood and dignity, man and woman are distinct in regards to roles in the home and church. This position is to be distinguished from both ancient patriarchy which often neglects the equality of the sexes and egalitarianism which neglects the clear Scriptural role distinctions.

Scripture dedicates much space to the affirmation of the equality of men and women in regards to worth, nature and substance. This means that man and woman are essentially, naturally and substantially equal before God and each other. Any interpretation of the biblical text must be free from misogyny or unwarranted and naïve assumptions of male dominance or superiority. This is made clear in such passages as:

- *God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*
Genesis 1:27
- *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*
Galatians 3:28
- *... as a fellow heir of the grace of life...*
1 Peter 3:7
- *It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.*
Joel 2:28

Although man and woman are equal, it is not true that there are no commanded role distinctions. Rather, the Scriptures teach that we each have proper roles in the home and church. It is our belief that confusion of these roles will result not only in a sinful application of the biblical text, but, consequently, the loss of joy in our pursuit of Christ.

Distinction within the home revolves around the idea of the headship of a man over his wife. This headship is not to be exercised as dominating and oppressive authority, but rather servant leadership. Such a pattern is seen in the following passages:

- *Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her...*
Ephesians 5:22-25
- *Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ...For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.*
1 Corinthians 11:2-3, 8-9
- *Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.*
Colossians 3:18-19
- *Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.*
Titus 2:3-5

The husband is called to serve and sacrifice for his wife as an expression of his love for her. At the same time, the wife is called to submit to and respect her husband as an expression of her love for him. In this way they complement each other. Though equal, they have distinct roles in their homes.

¹ See also the teachings and "The Role of Women" by Matt Chandler and "A Theology of Manhood and Womanhood" by Geoff Ashley.

Likewise, man and woman have some level of distinction within the context of the church. The texts upon which these distinctions are based include:

- *The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.*

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

- *Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness. A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.*

1 Timothy 2:9-14

As we understand the issue, there are certain contexts in which women are not allowed to teach (1 Timothy 2:12). This prohibition cannot be universal however as Paul specifically calls for older women to teach younger (Titus 2:3-4). Indeed, we even have an example of a woman teaching a man in the story of Priscilla and Apollos (Acts 18:26).

In addition to the above, we also recognize that women are not to be put into the positions of ultimate authority within the context of the local church. As we are elder-led, we therefore restrict eldership to males who meet all of the pertinent qualifications (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1).

Though space will not allow for us to address all of the concerns related to this issue, we would like to comment briefly on the position which claims that all of the Scriptural role distinctions are cultural in nature. According to this interpretation, any alleged distinctions in the text are merely a result of or concession to the surrounding patriarchal culture. Therefore, as times and cultural mores change, so should our application of the relevant Scriptures.

In response, it is interesting to note that the divinely inspired authors of Scripture do not argue from the perspective of culture. Rather, they argue for role distinctions on the basis of Christ's relationship to the Father (1 Corinthians 11:3), His relationship to the church (Ephesians 5:22-25), creation (1 Timothy 2:12-13; 1 Corinthians 11:8-9), the fall (1 Timothy 2:14) and law (1 Corinthians 14:34). Suffice to say that such grounds

for Paul's argument go well beyond the cultural bias position. The distinctions in role are grounded in who we were created to be and who we are and are a reflection of our relationship to our Creator.

Given this very brief overview of complementarian theology, it behooves the reader to familiarize him or her self with the material presented in the various supplemental materials mentioned above if they have any questions.

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