



Lesson 6: Ladies and Gentlemen!

God's Plan for Men and Women

Whatever God creates is beautiful. God didn't have to create two different genders; He could have made everyone male, or everyone female, or everyone some middle thing that splits the difference. But because He delights in creating beauty and diversity, God made men and women. He made them different, and that difference is a part of His good creation. We should celebrate and worship Him for His good, beautiful design of men and women.

But anything that God creates as beautiful Satan desires to twist and pervert so that it either becomes ugly or at least appears ugly.

What are some of the ways that Satan tries to pervert and distort the good role that God has given to men?

What are some of the ways that Satan tries to pervert and distort the good role that God has given to women?

If God creates men to lead, Satan will try to make that look ugly by having men domineer and be cruel and selfish in their leadership. If God creates women to help, Satan will tell them God must think of them as second-class citizens and try to get them to seize the leadership roles. The world we see today is a confusing mixture of the good that created along with the perversion and rebellion of that good by Satan.

In this lesson, we are going to focus on the roles that God has given to men and women. As we do so, we will be careful to note how Satan tries to pervert these roles, including misunderstandings and wrong thinking designed to make us distrust God. The ultimate goal of this lesson, though, is to motivate and inspire everyone to joyfully embrace the role that God has given them and to thankfully worship Him for His good plan.

Biblical Manhood

What comes to your mind when you hear the word "masculine"? Do you think of flannel sweaters, thick beards, and deep voices? Do you think of bulging muscles, watching football, or

hunting? While there's nothing necessarily wrong with any of these things, and while they are typically considered "masculine," you can be a man without any of them. So, what is a man? And perhaps more specifically, what does the Bible say a man is and ought to be? In this lesson, we will sum up the role of men with three words: leading, loving, and laboring.

God Calls Men to Lead by Serving

Paul observes in 1 Timothy 2:12-14 that men have a primacy of leadership in the church because men were created first and because Eve was deceived by Satan, while Adam was not. This means that Adam should have been leading because that was the role he was given, and he should have been leading because he didn't believe the lies of Satan (at least in this instance). Instead, Adam let Eve call the shots and followed her decision to keep her happy.¹ Sadly, there are many men today who follow what their wife wants rather than doing what they believe in their heart to be right before God.

A few important qualifications about this leadership are in order. First, leadership doesn't mean that the thoughts and opinions of women don't matter. Wise husbands and church leaders will listen and listen carefully to the perspective of the godly women in their lives. There's a reason lady wisdom is, well, a lady. Second, leadership doesn't mean you getting whatever you want. Leadership means you have the responsibility to give of yourself, to set an example, and to make righteous choices that will influence others to love and obey God.

Jesus teaches that leadership means taking the lowest position, the position of a servant (Matthew 20:25-28). The worldly perspective is one that says whoever is on top gets to call all the shots and everyone under him serves him. The biblical perspective is that whoever has the responsibility of leadership is to be a servant, as was exemplified by Christ.

What happens when men lead but don't do it with a heart to serve?

Finally, this is not a universal rule that every woman on the planet must submit to every man she comes across. These are instructions for the local church, and there are similar instructions for the family (Ephesians 5:22ff). Beyond that, there does seem to be a general creational pattern God intends for men to take leadership, but that is not a hard and fast rule. There are examples of strong and successful women in Scripture, such as Lydia or Deborah.² Too often Satan has used this beautiful pattern to illegitimately encourage arrogant and chauvinist attitudes.

¹ Many believers are under the impression that Eve was alone while she was being tempted, but Genesis 3:6 makes it clear that Adam was with her. The fact that Adam says nothing in this passage says much about his lack of character. God had put Adam in the garden to defend it, and yet he sits idly by while the devil deceives his wife and then follows her example even though he knows better.

² Even in these examples, however, there seems to be an indictment on the lack of male leadership. In the case of Deborah and Barak, Barak's lack of leadership is implicitly critiqued by the giving of "glory" to a woman since he

So what does it look like for men to lead? Men lead by protecting. They should guard those weaker, including their families, other women, and the weak in society such as the widow, orphan, and foreigner. Men lead by running to problems and solving them, rather than sitting around and hoping problems go away. Men lead by seeking to influence those around them to follow Christ through their words and example.

What does it look like for a man to lead his family well? To lead in the church well? To lead in society well?

[For men] What ways could you as a man seek to better lead those around you?

God Calls Men to Love by Sacrificing

Too often the picture of a manly man is someone who is emotionless. They never cry, they never get upset. If anything, the only emotion they feel is anger whenever life doesn't go their way. Cold, distant, unmovable, this is the picture of manhood given to us by the world, but this isn't the picture we get of Christ, the God man. Jesus wept. Jesus cried out in agony over Jerusalem's calloused refusal to accept God's offer of salvation (Matthew 23:37-39). Jesus came to the climactic point in His ministry, and we are told that He loved His own and He loved them until the end (John 13:1). Jesus is the best example we'll ever get of what true biblical manhood is, and Jesus loved.

Why do you think the world views men as emotionless?

Can you think of other examples of the emotion of Christ?

It might sound odd, but the biblical picture of a man is someone who *loves*. He loves God first, his family second, and the rest of his fellow man third. In particular, as a husband he is called to love his wife, and he does this by sacrificing himself for her spiritual well-being (Ephesians 5:25-33). God's plan for marriage is for a wife submit, but that only works well if a husband does his part to sacrificially love his family. A husband who demands that his wife submit to him while at the same time selfishly refusing to sacrifice for her needs will likely end up in a miserable marriage. The call to sacrificially love as Christ loved the church is a high calling and a humbling calling. Men are to be leaders and they are to be strong leaders, but that strength must always exist within a context of love.

What does strength with love look like?

refused to fight without Deborah. As for Lydia, the fact that she and other women are meeting for prayer on Sabbath rather than in a synagogue means that there were not enough Jewish men to start a synagogue. This does not mean that these women were in the wrong; they are indeed held up as models of the faith. Rather, it means that they stepped up because they had to due to the lack of men willing to lead.

What does strength without love look like?

God Calls Men to Labor by Sweating

Both Adam and Eve were called to work in the garden, yet when God addressed their sin after the fall, the result for Adam's role in the fall was the curse on work (Genesis 2:17). Both men and women work today, but their work tends to be different. Women tend to (although there can be exceptions) work in the home, managing the house, raising children, and supporting their husband's career. Men tend (although there can be exceptions) to be the primary ones working a job and providing the income for the family.

Recent technological advances (e.g. washing machines, dishwashers, affordable clothing, birth control) and shifts in culture (e.g. daycare, mandatory and free schooling through 12th grade) have led to greater presence of women in the workforce. What are the potential benefits of this shift? What are some potential pitfalls?

Although it is not wrong for a woman to work, or for a wife to make more than her husband, men should feel a burden of responsibility to make sure that their family is being provided for (1 Timothy 5:8).³ This will often take sweat – it will be hard, at times exhausting work. But this is the duty to which God has called men, and it is a duty to which they must respond.

What would you tell a father who is struggling to make ends meet?

How can we push back against a culture in which absentee dads are becoming an increasingly large problem?

Biblical Womanhood

What comes to your mind when you heard the word “feminine”? Do you think of tea parties, enjoying shopping, or home and garden magazines? Does the word make you think of baking, soap operas, and frilly dresses. While again, none of those things is inherently wrong (except maybe soap operas), and while they are often associated with being a woman, you can be a woman without any of them. The question we want to ask is “What does the Bible say about being a woman? What role is given to women, and how can God's children joyfully accept and fulfill their God-given role?”

There are many character qualities that should characterize both men and women. Both should be courageous, humble, kind, diligent, and the list could go on. However, when we look at how men and women relate, there are certain virtues that should characterize women in a way

³ In context Paul is talking about providing for a widowed parent or relative. If this is true for taking care of a widowed relative, how much more the immediate members of one's own family!

different from men. We will primarily look at two: women are called on by God to support and to submit.

God Calls Women to Support

We saw last week that women were created to be helpers. In Genesis 2:18 God sees Adam is alone and decides that is not good, so He makes a “help meet” for him. God creates a helper who complements him. Eve was made as a helper, and not just that, as a fitting helper.

If we’re not careful, though, this term can sound somewhat demeaning. Parents will often praise their children as being “good little helpers,” which normally means the child is doing a job the parent could do quicker and better. But we realize that the child is learning and growing and so their effort is worth a pat on the back. We often think of helpers as people who do menial, unimportant tasks. To say that women are supposed to be “helpers,” then, might sound like the help they give is somehow less impressive or important. Understanding what the Hebrew word for helper means will help us think rightly on this issue.

The Hebrew word here translated helper is *‘ezer*, and if we look around at other passages that use the term we won’t get the picture of “a good little helper.” You might recognize the term *‘ezer* from the name Eliezer, which means God is my Helper. Indeed, the Psalms often depict God as a Helper, as the Helper who saves us when no one else can (Psalm 70:5; 121:1-2; 146:5). The word is also used in military contexts where the help given is military help which leads to victory (Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7; Ezekiel 12:14).

When the Bible sets out to paint us a picture of what a woman who is a helper looks like, we get passages like Proverbs 31. This passage shows us a hard-working, competent, industrious, smart woman.

Read through Proverbs 31:10-31. How does this passage describe the virtuous (or “capable”) woman?

What does the Proverbs 31 woman of the 21st century look like? How would you modernize the ideals put forward in this passage?

Notice that after the high and lofty descriptions of this woman’s diligence, perseverance, work, wisdom, care, and preparation, the statement that her children and husband bless her and that she is to be praised only seems fitting. God’s Word does not treat the contribution of women as some token accomplishment, the work of a “good little helper.” Rather, it views women and the work they do as absolutely necessary, the necessary assistance of a powerful helper.

Can you think of women in your life who have exemplified this ideal in Scripture? Women who have been fitting helpers, or Proverbs 31 women?

God Calls Women to Submit

As with the call of women to help men, we need to begin by stating clearly what this is not. This is not a broad statement that every woman must submit to every man. This submission is required specifically regarding husbands (Ephesians 5:22-24) and more broadly the leadership of the church (1 Timothy 2:11-15). Since women were designed to support and help, God desires that particularly in church and home men take the primacy of leadership and women support, encourage, and benefit from that leadership as they joyfully submit to it. But does submission mean that women are less valuable than men? If women are told they must submit to their husbands, does that make them inferior? If women are not allowed to have roles of pastoral leadership, does God think less of them?

Why do you think it is considered demeaning to women that the Bible requires them to submit to their husbands?

The problem with this logic is that there are many relationships in God's economy that require submission. If submission = inferior, then there are lots of people who are inferior to others.

Why do you think we tend to believe that "submission = inferior"?

What other relationships does God require submission?

Children are to submit to their parents, but that does not make them inferior. Citizens are told to submit to their rulers, but this does not make them inferior. Most importantly, Jesus submits to the Father, yet He is equal with Him. This is Paul's argument 1 Corinthians 11, a passage that is challenging but very important. Although the specific application of women wearing head coverings no longer seems to apply,⁴ the principles behind it are sound. Within the church, Paul wants women to continue wearing head coverings, an act which signified their submission to their husbands (1 Corinthians 11:10). This principle is found in creation itself, and Paul begins by showing that this is reflected even in the relations inside the trinity! The head (or authority) of man is Christ, the head (or authority) of a woman is her husband, and the head (or authority) of Christ is God the Father (1 Corinthians 11:2-3). Peter builds on this idea and instructs women that their dress should display outwardly their inward submission to their husbands, as the heroines of the faith did (1 Peter 3:1-6).

Such ideas are quite unpopular today, and perhaps even hard for many questions to accept, let alone joyfully embrace. Yet this is what God's Word says, and we must follow God's Word even

⁴ This was culturally understood at the time to be a sign of a woman's submission to her husband and was the universal custom in the churches, as Paul himself observes 11:16.

and especially when we don't like it. Obedience is always motivated by faith, believing what God says even if I don't understand or would do it differently.

Why do you think there is such resistance to this teaching of God's Word in our culture?

How would you counsel another lady who is struggling with this teaching?

Men need women and women need men. God designed humanity to be two halves, and we will only accomplish the work He has given us well if we both work together. Thriving churches need godly, strong, humble men to lead; and they need godly, strong, humble women to help. Thriving families need husbands who love their wives as Christ loves the church and they need wives who submit to their husbands as the church ought to submit to Christ. When this happens, it is a beautiful picture of God's love for His people and the wisdom and greatness of His design. When it gets distorted, by cruel men, by passive men, by domineering women, or by bitter women, it brings great shame to Christ's name. The differences between men and women weren't an accident, and they weren't a result of the fall. They are the very good idea of a wise and good Creator, and we reject them to our own peril.

[For men] What is one area where you could improve to be a godlier man?

[For women] What is one area where you could improve to be a godlier woman?