



## **Lesson 7: Anything You Can Do I Can Do Better**

### **Feminism and Egalitarianism**

In 1999, a Gatorade commercial pitted basketball superstar Michael Jordan against the U.S. women's soccer team captain Mia Hamm, who had just led the women's team to a world cup. As the two athletes faced off playing basketball, soccer, tennis, fencing, and more, the song "Anything You Can Do I Can Do Better" played in the background. The message was clear: anything a man can do a woman can do. But is that true? Even apart from sports (where men typically have a strong biological advantage), can a woman do anything a man can do? And beyond that question, should a woman do everything a man does?

In our last lesson, we looked at the role that men and women have in Scripture. In this lesson, we are going to zoom in on two movements that seek to push back against these roles. The first pushback is feminism, particularly second and third wave feminism. Feminism began as a secular movement but has certainly influenced the thinking of the church. Somewhat related is a theological position called egalitarianism, which argues that women and men can serve in the same roles in the church and the home. Egalitarians argue we have misunderstood the Bible and that God's Word does not teach wives should submit to their husbands or that only men should be pastors.

It is important to understand how we got here. Feminism originally referred to a movement pushing for women's right to vote. For most Americans today, it's unthinkable that woman would not be allowed to vote, but for most of our country's history it would be unthinkable that she would. This movement lasted from second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the end of WWI, when the right to vote was enshrined in our country's constitution. But in the 50's, 60's, and 70's, a new breed of feminism was born. One that argued women should be working in secular fields. Other "waves" of feminism have come as well, some arguing there is no distinction between a man and a woman and more recently attempting to bring attention to physical and sexual abuse.

For most of human history men have worked producing what the home needed and women stayed back making sure the home ran smoothly. Through thousands of years and in countless cultures, this arrangement shifted and morphed, but the same basic partnership has existed. Sometimes this relationship was built on mutual trust and affection. Sadly, it has often been tainted by selfish dominance and mistrust. Individuals would often rebel against the system, but

the West is arguing something new: this whole deal is wrong. Men and women are the same, and they should have the interchangeable roles and functions in the home.

***Why do you think this shift has happened so recently?***

***What has been the good in some of these emphases?***

***What has been the damage?***

## Does the Bible Require Women to Submit in the Home?

### The Bible and Submission

We always want to ask what does God's Word say? If God's Word says women are to submit to their husbands, then we must stand by that. If Scripture does not say that, then we must be careful not to bind people's conscience unnecessarily.

- **Does the Bible Teach Submission?**

Feminist and egalitarian scholars argue that Genesis 1-3 teaches that men and women were created equally in God's image, and that nothing in the account suggests any subordination. Two passages that are often used to argue a distinction are Genesis 3:16, where God gives the consequences for Eve's sin, and the creation order where God created man before woman, especially since Paul seems to argue this in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2.

So does Genesis 3:16 teach women are under the authority of their husband? God says to Eve "thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." The word used here for "desire" shows up again in Genesis 4:7, where God warns Cain that sin is crouching like an animal waiting to devour him. That desire to dominate Cain is described with this same rare Hebrew word for "desire." Eve will "desire" her husband in the sense of wanting to master and rule over him, and in turn he will rule over her. Egalitarians will argue that this is not God's intent but is part of the fall. "God doesn't want women to dominate their husbands and," they would argue, "He doesn't want men ruling over their wives." This is a broken part of the world, and we should try to push back against, just as we have epidurals, weed killer, and air conditioning.

So is the phrase about the husband ruling over the wife God's plan, or a distortion of it? Certainly, this verse shows the effect of sin on relationships. Men and women are often at each other's throats. Mistrust, suspicion, and hostility does characterize many relationships. Whether one views the "ruling" of the husband as the legitimate creation order, or a domineering, the truth is men have often been unkind and harsh in their leadership. And women have often tried to manipulate, dominate, and master their husbands. Significantly, no New Testament passage points back to Genesis 3:16 explicitly to argue for a difference in roles between men and women. Instead, they look to Genesis 1 and 2.

***What are some of the practical ways in which this hostility between men and women manifests itself after the fall?***

***Why do you think God would curse the relationship between men and women the way He did?***

***How do we as Christians seek to restore what was broken in the fall?***

So what about Genesis 1-2? Some egalitarians will charge complementarians with reading Genesis 1-2 through the lens of Paul. One such writer even charges “The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood may start with Genesis 2 in their overview of complementarianism, but their reading of this creation narrative stems from 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, rather than just read Genesis, we let what Paul thinks influence how we understand these chapters.

***What would you say to such an argument?***

Reading our Old Testament with the eyes of the New Testament is exactly what we should be doing as we study Scripture. Jesus and His apostles, carried along by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, are much better readers of the Bible than we are. Such a statement as the one above argues implicitly that these passages in Paul do teach that there is a difference between men and women, a difference that goes all the way back to creation.

***If 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2 are so clear, why would someone seek to read them a different way?***

- **Do Paul and Peter Teach Submission?**

Two passages of Paul state a woman should submit to her husband: Ephesians 5:22 and Colossians 3:18. Peter states that women are to submit to their husbands in 1 Peter 3:1, and then backs that up the Old Testament example of Sarah in 1 Peter 3:5-6. How can anyone get around such clear statements? Two arguments against this are brought forward:

*“The word we translate as ‘submit’ actually means ‘respect.’”* The problem is that is simply not what the word means. In Scripture, we find that the world will one day be subject to Christ (1 Corinthians 15:27-28; Phil 3:21; Hebrews 2:8); Christians are supposed to be subject to ruling authorities (Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 2:13); Christ is submissive to His parents as a child (Luke 2:51); and the demons are subject to the authority of disciples Christ sends out (Luke 10:17, 20). After looking through this list, it becomes quite clear that this Greek word (*hypotasso*) means “submit” or “be subject to.”

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<sup>1</sup> Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth*, page 40.

***What is the connection between submission and respect? How are the terms similar? What is the difference?***

*“Men and women are supposed to submit to each other. Yes, women should submit to men, but only in the same sense in which men submit to women.”* This argument is made on the basis that the Greek in Ephesians 5:22 doesn't actually use the word submit. The verse, translated literally, says “Wives, to your own husbands as to the Lord.” Why do we throw the word submit in there? Well, because in Ephesians 5:21 we find that all believers are supposed to be submitting to one another. In that context, when Paul says, “wives to your husbands as to the Lord,” it becomes clear that Paul intends the command of the last verse to be assumed here “wives, submit yourself to your husbands, as to the Lord.” While this might sound good initially, there are two problems with it. First, while this logic might work for Ephesians 5, it doesn't work for Colossians 3 and certainly not for 1 Peter 3. Yet in Ephesians 5, there is a difference in roles between men and women that lines up with the church: women are to submit *as the church does to Christ*. This is not a mutual submission, because Christ does not submit to the church. While there is a sense in which men are called to submit to their wives in the overall sense of believers submitting to one another in humility, for the husband this looks like sacrificially loving and leading as Christ does for the church.

***How can a wife submitting be a picture of the church?***

***How can a husband sacrificially leading be a picture of Christ?***

### **The Bible and Homemaking**

In *The Feminine Mystique*, author Betty Friedan wrote words that would come to influence the way an entire generation would think about women “As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night – she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question – ‘Is this all?’” Betty's ideas caught on. Now, the culture in which we live thinks it is demeaning for a woman to stay home and watch over the home and focus on the children. What does the Bible have to say about this issue?

Going all the way back to Genesis 3, we see that the punishment for Adam's was related to his work in the field (Genesis 3:17) whereas the for the woman her relationship to her husband and to childbearing was marred (Genesis 3:16). In Proverbs 31, the virtuous woman is someone who's work is focused on the home, while not being entirely limited to the home. Furthermore, her work enables her husband to take a place of leadership (“when he sitteth among the elders of the land” 31:23), and rightly earns his praise and the praise of her children. In Titus 2:4-5, Paul teaches that the older women should teach the younger women to love their husbands and

children and to be keepers (or workers) at home. In contrast to the world, the Bible finds great meaning and purpose for women in managing the home and raising children.

***[For women] Why do you think Satan's lie that true happiness and fulfillment must be found outside of the home has caught on?***

***[For men] How can you better honor the work that your wife and/or mother have done?***

***In what ways can single women and women without children fulfill God's purpose for their lives? How might their gifting as a woman be used for kingdom advance?***

Does this mean that a woman can never have a job outside the home, or that men should never do housework? No. But it does mean that the primary responsibility of making sure the home is a place of rest and joy, a place where things are run well and needs are being met typically falls to the wife. This is the way God designed it, and as our culture moves away from God's pattern, the more unhappy and unfulfilled they will be, as a quick Google search of "women leaving the workforce" will demonstrate.

## **Does the Bible Forbid Women Leading in the Church?**

If the Bible does indeed teach women are to submit to their husbands at home, what about the church? Can a woman to preach and teach men? Can a woman have pastoral leadership? Typically, those who argue for equal roles in marriage also argue for women in ministry leadership, and those who argue that there are distinctions in roles between men and women in marriage also see them in the church (both sides realize how awkward it would be for a wife to have pastoral authority over her husband at church, and then be under his authority while at home). But the passages debated are different and worth looking at it.

### **The Case for Women in Leadership**

- **Women are talented and gifted in areas of leadership and teaching**

Most schools have quite a few women teaching, and for good reason. Women can learn theology and know what they believe and why. Women can be effective administrators. After all, the Proverbs 31 woman has quite a lot going on. Many egalitarians argue that if women have these gifts and talents, they should be able to use them freely in the church. To them, it doesn't seem right that simply because they are a woman they can't participate to the same level or in the same ways that a man could.

***What would you say to this argument?***

- **Women serve in leadership roles in Scripture.**

Although some passages are debated,<sup>2</sup> all would agree that in Scripture we see prophetesses in both the Old and New Testament. Although the word “bishop” or “elder” or “pastor” is never used of a woman, the fact that women prophesy in particular seems strong evidence to some that they should be allowed to be pastors.

***Feminists will also point to other roles that, while not technically “clergy,” are nonetheless important. Can you think of roles women have in the New Testament that might have seemed surprising at the time?***

- **The gospel liberates and values women.**

Egalitarian theologians will argue that the general picture we get of women in Scripture is one that elevates their status of women and gives them important ministries. In a culture that was often chauvinistic, women were seen as second-class citizens. In the New Testament, women assist Jesus in His ministry, are the first to proclaim the resurrection, and are vital workers in the young church (Romans 16; Philippians 4:3). In Christ, Galatians tells us, there is neither male nor female (3:28). For egalitarians, this sets up a strong trajectory of valuing women that they believe must be continued by allowing women to have positions of leadership.

***Egalitarians are right to note the prominent role played by women in the New Testament. Can you think of other examples from the Scripture, church history, or personal example of the crucially important work done by women?***

### **The Problem with Women in Leadership**

Egalitarians rightly emphasize the high honor that Scripture gives women. But what about those pesky passages where women are given a different role in the church? In the end, our own feelings, thoughts, and opinions must give way to what God has said. And the New Testament has been clear without being obnoxious about the roles women should not fill in the local church.

- **Women are not to teach or exercise authority (1 Timothy 2:11-14).**

Paul is very clear in this passage: women are not to teach or exercise authority. Although those can be two separate things, they like are connected. The “teaching” here is not just any

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<sup>2</sup> Due to a lack of space, we will not dive into debates over whether women can be deacons (cf Romans 16:1, 1 Timothy 3:11). Although the evidence for this position is weak, even if women can serve as deacons, the NT sees this role as serving and not authoritative (cf Acts 6). We will also not dive into the debate over whether Junia (Romans 16:7) was (1) a man (not likely), (2) well-known *among* the apostles or well known *to* the apostles (very technical), or (3) an apostle in the official, authoritative sense or an apostle in the sense of a missionary. Given the debate over the verse, arguing that women had authority because Junia had the authoritative role as an apostle is weak.

teaching (women can and should teach in private settings and teach other women and children), rather Paul has in mind authoritative teaching of the gathered church. Those who disagree with this interpretation will attempt to limit this to Ephesus (where Timothy is serving). “Women seemed to be buying into false teaching here in a way that Paul made a pragmatic decision at the moment” they might argue (cf 1 Timothy 4:7<sup>3</sup>). Others will argue certain cultic groups in Ephesus targeted and were promoted by women. The problem with both of these arguments is that Paul is very clear he is giving his instruction, not because of a problem in Ephesus, but because of the way God made things (2:13-14). Creation, not pragmatism, is behind Paul’s instructions.

- **Women are to remain silent in the churches (1 Corinthians 14:33-34).**

Paul’s statements here seem odd, and perhaps even extreme at first. Some have tried to argue that these verses were added later, but the evidence for this is extraordinarily weak.<sup>4</sup> Others have gone the opposite extreme and interpreted these verses to mean that women should never give a testimony or talk during a business meeting. Yet just three chapters earlier (1 Corinthians 11) Paul assumes that women will be praying and prophesying when the church meets. So how can Paul give instructions for women’s public ministry of prayer and prophecy and then say they shouldn’t talk? The context of chapter 14 is tongues and prophecy, and specifically for these verses the interpretation of prophecy, which would have been an authoritative task. Prophecies would be given in the assembly, and then the church would have to interpret them and decide if they were from God or not (cf 1 Thessalonians 5:20-22; 1 John 4:1). Although we no longer test prophecies to see if they are truly from God in our worship services, the general principle that there is an ongoing distinction between men and women is important.

- **Pastors are always men (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1).**

Paul gives several lists of qualifications for bishops (i.e. pastors),<sup>5</sup> and one of them is that they be husbands of one wife and that they manage their homes well. All throughout Scripture, we never read of a woman who fulfills the role of a bishop, elder, or pastor, and so from this consistent example we should conclude that God expects men to fill this role.

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<sup>3</sup> Some modern translations (ESV, CSB) use the word “silly,” but this Greek word does carry the idea of “characteristic of an elderly woman,” BDAG s.v. γράωδης.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon Fee, whose commentary on 1 Corinthians is one of the most highly regarded, attempts to argue this based on the fact that quite a few Greek manuscripts that have the verses in a different location. No known manuscript omits these verses, however, and so the case Fee has made has not been generally accepted.

<sup>5</sup> The terms “bishop,” “pastor,” and “elder” were used interchangeably in the New Testament times, although they have since come to be associated with certain views of church leadership in our time.

### **The Beauty of God's Design**

It is important to realize what the Bible is *not* saying. It is not saying there is no place for women in ministry, or that a woman never has anything to teach a man (any husband with half a brain knows this), or that a woman can never teach or preach publicly (to other women and to children). There is much that women can do, and much that they must do if God's truth is going to go forward. What it is saying is that in ministry and in the home God wants men to lead and women to follow, support, and help.

***What are some ways that women serve here at Colonial?***

***Why do some want there to be more opportunities than these?***

God's plan for men and women is best, even if for some this is a hard pill to swallow. We must begin by accepting God's Word, even if it means by faith we accept truths that initially rub us the wrong way. Then we must come to the point where we embrace God's Word, throwing ourselves wholly into obedience. Finally, if we accept and embrace God's Word, we will find that eventually we will enjoy God's Word. Slowly yet surely we will come to realize that God is right and we were wrong.

***[For women] What would you say to someone who is struggling with the roles that God has given them?***

***[For men] What are ways that you can appreciate and honor the contribution of women in ministry?***