**Class 9: Biblical Manhood and Womanhood – In the Church (Pt. 1)**

**I. Introduction**

Is it possible for men and women to be equal, yet distinct? The debates about feminism, men’s and women’s roles in the family, and in the church, all boil down to this question. Our culture proclaims equality between the sexes. And yet to speak of the differences between men and women, beyond simple biology, has become almost taboo, politically incorrect. For our generation, equality of essence can only be true if we eliminate any distinctions between men and women in how they live and behave. This is the approach that even some Christians have taken to the way that men and women participate in the life of church. For men and women to be truly equal, they say, well then they must *do* all the same things.

What we’ve been teaching for 8 weeks now in this class, though, is that from Genesis to the New Testament, the Bible holds out a vision of gender that includes both total equality and beautiful, created distinction. Men and women are equal, but not interchangeable.

* We’ve seen that in **Genesis 1:26-27,** where we learned that men and women are both created in God’s Image. They are equal in glory, honor, value, dignity and worth.
* And when it comes to our standing before God, **Gal 3:26-28** is crystal clear: “*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” Galatians highlights the wonderful fact that all those in Christ have equal status before God. **In Christ there is no varsity or JV, racism or sexism, but total equality.**
* But that doesn’t mean that God eradicates our gender or our ethnicity or our personality when we get saved. We are equal in standing before him, but we’re still created distinct. In **Genesis 2** we’ve learned that, generally speaking, God gave men a disposition to exercise responsibility by providing for and protecting others. We saw that woman are created with a disposition to nurture life in others and help others flourish. For the past two weeks we’ve spent time thinking about how these distinct dispositions become formalized into clear roles for men and women in the marriage relationship, according to passages like Eph 5 and 1 Pet 3.

**II. Gender in the Church: General Principles**

Today, we want to consider how our masculinity and femininity should play out in the local church. As we’ll see next week, there a few clearly delineated boundaries in the *roles* of men and women within the congregation, as in marriage. And those are important. But today we want to consider the broad and varied ways that men and women alike are called and equipped by God to participate in the work of the gospel and the ministry of the local church. Because here’s the plain fact that so often gets overlooked in this discussion (Your first bullet point:) Scripture not just *allows*, but ***expects*** *men and women to participate in the vast majority of the church’s ministry and practices.*

Turn with me to **1 Corinthians 12:4:** *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good [wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, tongues] 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”*

What do we learn here? God gives a variety of gifts to his church, and they’re not apportioned here on the basis of gender. Men and women alike are gifted greatly by God for the purpose of **building up the body**, verse 7, “*the common good*” of the whole church. On the whole, men are edified by women and women are edified by men in the church.

This means that no one is unimportant or irrelevant to the life of the church. With respect to men and women and the roles they’re given, we should always remember that God has designed the body just like He wants it. He is infinitely wise. He has given us each our gender, and our spiritual gifts. Recognizing his sovereignty in that should help us guard our hearts against jealousy and discontentment.

So what’s our summary? Look at your 2nd bullet point:

*Men and women are called to serve the church in all capacities, except where such service would violate the biblical principle of male leadership, specifically in teaching or exercising authority over men when the church is gathered.*

Next week we’ll focus on passages that spell out that principle of male leadership in the church.

Today, though, we’re going to explore a variety of practical ways in which both women and men serve the church. And what I want to stress here is that whatever you do to serve the body, even if it’s something that can be done by both genders, *you* do it as either a man or a woman. You don’t operate as a genderless human. If you’re a woman, this means that whatever your gifts, however you serve, you’ve been designed by God to cultivate life and help others flourish. As women serve in the church, generally speaking, they will nurture, enrich, care, beautify, foster relationship, help others listen, fill the church with life. If you’re a man, you’ve been designed by God to provide for others, protect them, and feel a responsibility for their well-being. As men serve in the church, generally speaking, they will strengthen, guard the weak, stand up for what is right, work sacrificially, and take initiative to do others spiritual good. Yes, there is lots of overlap here, and I’m speaking in very broad terms. The point is, be who you are: honor the Lord and build up the body as a man, or as a woman. How? Let’s look at 7 categories (on the next page of your handout):

**III. Various Ways Men and Women Build up the Body of Christ**

**1. Participating in the Public Gatherings**

The most important moments in the life of the church are what we’re about to do in a little while: **gather together publicly around God’s word**. This is part of our most significant ministry to each other: the ministry of presence, as we fellowship under the preaching of scripture. We sing not only to God, but to each other. We pray together. We hear scripture read. We witness baptism and share the Lord’s Supper. The spiritual good we each receive from the public gathering doesn’t come only from the preacher. It comes from one another, as we minister the word to each other and love one another in these various ways.

And meeting together isn’t just part of how we edify each other. It’s a key part of our witness to the world. Together as a corporate body we do something the world cannot explain. People of different ethnicities, cultures, socio-economic backgrounds, interests, hobbies, and genders all unite around and in Jesus Christ. Together we do what no 1-1 discipling meeting, small group Bible study, or men’s rally or women’s retreat alone can do. In the words of Paul in Eph 3, we “*bring to light… for everyone… what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that… through the church… the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.”* Elders and preachers alone can’t do this. Men or womenalonecan’t do this. But redeemed men and women together do this.

Next, let’s think about how men and women contribute in various aspects of our services, such as:

**2. Reading, Praying & Prophesying**

The reading of God’s word is one of the most basic elements in our corporate gathering. It’s a privilege God equips both men and women to partake in, and we have a woman read scripture out loud many Sundays here.

And women *pray* publicly. To see that, look at 1 Cor 11:4-5: “*Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head….*” Don’t worry, we’ll discuss head coverings next week! But for now, simply notice that Paul assumes that women pray and prophesy in the church’s gatherings. As prayer is perhaps the most basic ministry in a church’s life together, it’s no surprise that both men and women contribute to our public prayer life. I have learned so much about prayer from just listening to Maxine lead us in prayer almost every week on Sunday nights.

Though we desire women to pray publicly, you might ask, why don’t they usually pray from the pulpit on Sunday morning? That’s largely because our corporate prayers in the morning service, especially the prayer of praise, prayer of confession, and pastoral prayer, verge right on border of authoritative teaching. These prayers are prepared in advance and serve practically as a form of teaching, the way that we’ve structured them. The one leading, through his prayer, is teaching who God is, and applying that to the corporate gathering. It probably wouldn’t be sin for a woman to lead one of these prayers – remember 1 Cor 11 – but the heavy teaching emphasis in these prayers makes us a bit more cautious. But in general, both men and women pray in the body, as we experience so richly every Sunday night.

1 Cor 11 also speaks of women who *prophesy* in the church. A lot could be said here on what exactly Paul has in mind. To summarize, he’s not speaking of “*fore-telling”* in terms of predicting the future, as is sometimes the case with inspired OT prophecy. He’s referring instead to “*forth-telling,”* which is to say, *non-inspired speech that calls scriptural truths to mind*. There’s some debate on what prophecy involves, but 1 Cor 14:3 is clear: “The one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.” In our context, this would include baptismal testimonies and those “testimonies of grace” we often hear on a Sunday night where men and women share of God’s work in their life in order to edify the body. I would also include many of the edifying things women proclaim when we study Scripture together on Wednesday nights or when we have panel discussions in these core seminar classes. Take out these “prophetic” contributions from the women of CHBC – words spoken about God to build up the body – and how impoverished our time would be![[1]](#footnote-2)

**3. Voting with the Congregation**

As a congregational church, we understand from texts like Matthew 18 and 1 Cor 5 that final earthly authority over our church’s affairs rests in the hands of the assembled congregation. In matters of discipline, doctrine, membership and more, it is the assembled congregation that makes decisions—men and women.

Practically, this means that every member of our church—whether man or woman—is finally responsible for knowing Scripture, applying it to the life of the church, defending the church from error, and exercising discipline in the church.

**4. Serving as Deacons & Deaconesses**

We believe that there are only two Scriptural offices in the church, elder and deacon. As we’ll see next week, we believe that the New Testament reserves the office of elder to men, but we don’t believe it does so for the office of deacon.

How do we defend this position from the text? Let’s look at 1 Timothy 3, beginning in verse 8: “*Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.”* Then v.11, “*their wives likewise must…*”.

Some read that and assume Paul is talking about the wives of the male deacons. But the Greek doesn’t say “their wives,” but merely “*women,*” as the footnote in most your Bibles should read. The same Greek Word can be used for woman and wife. I and many others believe the natural reading of the text is best. Paul is turning to address in v.11 “women” who are deacons, ***not*** “the wives” of male deacons. Why do I say this? Three quick reasons:

* First, when “wives” are in view, there is often a word like “their” wives or “one’s own wife” added, but here we just have the Greek word “women” or “wives” with no modifier in front of it. That means the context has to determine how we translate this word.
* Second, throughout this section Paul uses the word “likewise” to denote a new category. It seems that this is therefore a new section describing not wives of deacons but women who are deacons.
* Third, it would seem odd for Paul to list qualifications for deacons’ wives but not elders’ wives. But if Paul is speaking of women deacons, the following “qualifications” make perfect sense. He’s describing an office.

At any rate, we don’t understand the office of deacon (which literally means “servant”) to carry the kind of authority which Paul prohibits to women in 1 Timothy 2. Biblically, the office of deacon is a practical one – we see that in Acts 6. A deacon makes sure that a particular ministry functions or that a particular need is met, and they operate explicitly under the authority and oversight of the elders. And yet, lest we think this is an insignificant role, we should remember that Christ himself was called a deacon, a servant of the church (Rom 15:8). To deacon is to follow in his steps. Praise God for the competent, qualified, godly deaconesses and deacons at CHBC who serve us so well.

**5. Women Teaching and Leading Other Women**

We want to be clear that men are those called by God to teach the gathered congregation, but that doesn’t mean that women don’t teach! Paul talks about this in **Titus 2:3-5**: “ *[older women] are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.*” Paul doesn’t merely say “model.” He says “teach.” Instruct. Train.

This is true for single women, too. Paul’s talking to women who aren’t just older in age, but those who are mature in the faith. We have single women and married women who lead small groups and speak at the women’s retreat and teach in other contexts. *Exhortation, encouragement, and teaching among Christians isn’t finally based on your life experience,* ***but on Scripture****.* Ladies, consider if the Lord may be calling you to take up the Word and bless other women with it.

**6. Ministering to Children**

This is another area where both men and women can have a powerful ministry in the church. For all kinds of bad reasons our society sees work with children as unglamorous. But that’s not true biblically, or at this church. We need women and men who won’t be satisfied with anything less than a robust, safe, theologically rich, and biblically grounded children’s ministry. Who feel the weight of teaching kids the love of Christ by word and example.

Consider Paul’s exhortation to Timothy in 2 Tim. 3:14-15: *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

Where did Timothy’s theological education come from? Did he attend bible college or seminary? No! He learned it from his mother and grandmother. 2 Tim. 1:5: *I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.*

I thank God for the countless Loises and Eunices who serve in childcare here at CHBC. And I praise him for the men who serve as well. Because providing for and protecting others, physically and spiritually, includes kids. If you’re a single guy who says, “Yeah, I just don’t like working with children. I don’t *get* them.” Let me encourage you: the only way to get more comfortable around kids is to give it a try! They don’t bite – well, usually! Sign up for childcare training – you might just find that you learn as much as the kids do.

**7. Countless Others**

There are so many other ministries we could mention, most of them not unique at all to men or women but rather incumbent on all Christians. Many women have powerful ministries of encouragement or hospitality. I love the examples of single and widowed women who have been used mightily of God on the mission field, like Lottie Moon, Amy Carmichael, and Elizabeth Elliot. Ministering to the sick and elderly. Counseling the hurting or confused. Seeking out and welcoming visitors. Discipling others one on one. Or those who usher, help with music, or serve as church secretary and clerk. All these are ministries in which women play a vital role, and in which they can have a robust and fulfilling ministry in the church, for the good of the body.

Sadly, we tend to only ascribe honor to that which is most visible and public. But God’s not like that. Think back to 1 Cor 12:22-23. T*he parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor…”*

The Corinthian church struggled from the same problem we do. They tended to elevate certain ministries, especially those that were public and visible – in their case, speaking in tongues.

Paul corrects them. We need each member of the body. How richly he has blessed us here! He has given us Betsy Bartron and Jay Ho. He has given us Mark Dever and Victoria Mwongela. Each person’s ministry distinct and wonderful.

**QUESTIONS?**

**IV. The Masculine Nature of Elder Leadership**

I think all that we’ve discussed so far leaves us with one obvious question. If men and women both serve in such vital ways, why does God reserve teaching to the gathered church and the office of elder to men? Next week we’ll study the two main biblical passages that answer that question, 1 Tim 2 and 1 Cor 11. But for now, I want to close by looking at the elder’s job description. And I think we’ll begin to see why, in God’s wisdom, he calls only men to this position.

The key place to begin is **1 Timothy 3:1-2**, where Paul gives the qualifications for being an elder, also called a bishop or pastor in the New Testament: “The saying is trustworthy: if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, **he** desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife” –and so on and so forth. Paul goes on to say they must not be recent converts, and must be able to teach the Word. Beyond that, Paul simply calls them to basic godliness: Holiness. Humility. Honorable living. Hospitality. These, of course, are virtues that Christian women should pursue as well. But let’s consider the things God calls elders to *do*. Here’s the “job description” that emerges in the pages of the New Testament:

**1. Elders *provide* for the church through biblical teaching.** Paul says in Titus 1:9 that an elder “must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine.” Timothy’s calling was this: “Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim 4:13). Eph 4:11-12 says Jesus gives shepherd-teachers to his church “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”

**2. Elders *protect* the church from falsehood.** Paul warns, “the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (2 Tim 4:3). What is an elder to do? 2 Timothy 4:2, “Reprove, rebuke, and exhort.” Titus 1:9, “Rebuke those who contradict [sound doctrine].”

**3. Elders *lead* the church by their example.** 1 Peter 5:3 says pastors should not be “domineering over those in your charge, but...examples to the flock.” Hebrews 13:7 tells us, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”

**4. Elders *bear responsibility* before God for the wellbeing of the church.** We know from James 3:1 that teachers will receive a stricter judgment. As Hebrews 13:17 says, we should submit to the elders of the church because they keep watch over our souls “as those who will have to give an account.”

Now, I want us to pause and notice something. Do you see a pattern here? Look at the things the elders are called by God to do: provide... protect... lead... bear responsibility... **Does that pattern remind you of anything?** That’s our summary of biblical masculinity! Men are designed by God to **provide** for others and **protect** them; that was Adam’s job description in the Garden of Eden according to Gen 2:15. Men are called to **lead** their families spiritually, as we’ve seen in Eph 5 where the husband lays down his life in order for his wife to grow in holiness. Men bear **responsibility** before God for how they lead their households; remember in Genesis 3:9, even though Eve sinned first, God called Adam to account.

So, you see, the biblical picture of elder leadership is masculine at its core.[[2]](#footnote-3) It’s not a worldly machismo, the kind of self-centered strength that uses others for personal pleasure or gain. It’s a compassionate disposition to serve and shelter Christ’s Bride. It’s humble and benevolent toward God’s sheep, yet sturdy and strong against the wolves who would devour them.

Pray that God would give us men who serve as elders in this way. If you’re a man, and you *don’t* aspire to have this elder-like character, even if you don’t aspire to the actual office, you should ask yourself why. Single women, if you desire marriage, you should pray for a husband like this. Others may be richer. Others may be better looking. But no other will cause you to flourish and blossom as a man who loves like this.

At the end of the day, elder leadership by men and robust congregational ministry by women and men alike aren’t in conflict. In fact, they are mutually beneficial. We as the church need the biblically masculine elders that God has given to lead and teach us. And yet the elders aren’t the church. The body of Christ is wonderfully diverse, made up of so many different gifts. Praise God for the faithful men and women who serve this body, for his glory.

1. *Teacher:* Look at Carson’s *Showing the Spirit* if you want to think more about prophecy in local church. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Of course, there are times when women do these things too. They provide instruction for their children and protect younger women they’re discipling from spiritual danger. These functions aren’t *exclusively* masculine, but they do typify masculinity. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)