

Clarifying Roles in God's Church – Part 3

1 Timothy 2:8-15

Introduction: Growing up in the 1980's we lived through key distinctives that marked many of us: *Big hair* (with perms for both men & women), mullets, neon everything, fanny packs, koosh balls, walkman's, and cabbage patch kids. But one of the ever present realities of the 80's was the Cold War, a political and military game of chicken between the two strongest nations at the time, the Soviet Union and USA, a battle of wills without direct interaction but with daily implications. All were aware that at any moment the Russians could release their nuclear weapons, resulting in the devastation of earth as we know it. The Soviets were caricatured as cold, calculating, and desiring to take down our way of life. Movies captured this as Soviets were always the 'bad guys', whether they attacked on American soil like *Red Dawn*, or through boxing like *Rocky IV* (Ivan Drago - classic Soviet villain), or stealth military attack through submarine (but thanks to Sean Connery that didn't happen). The Soviets were the enemy, and we were thankful that Ronald Reagan had the courage and endurance to 'win' the war, seeing the collapse of the Soviet Union, ending their powerful influence at the time.

What does this have to do with roles in the church? Growing up I had this view of the Russian people that was shaped by fear and a hope that America would win, discounting the people of Russia as real people and instead seeing just cold enemies. When we visited an old Soviet bloc country in the early 2000's, I began to realize the beauty of the place and its people, the reality of their lives, the love they had for family and country, and the fact that they cared about the same things I did. By having a caricatured view, I missed out on the beauty of people I've been called to love, reach, and worship with forever.

I think this discussion about men's and women's roles in marriage and the church is similar. Through both misunderstanding and mis-application, we have views of what it is that most often are NOT Biblical and keep us away from the **beauty of God's design**. Granted, the reality is that male leadership has often fallen short of the Biblical standard, which means female followership has had to navigate rough waters. I hear questions from well meaning people that go something like this: "does Christianity denigrate women", or "does the church hate women", or "does the Bible promote male chauvinism?" Again, these questions do not come from thin air but often through experience or partial information. So our challenge this morning is to define some terms **Biblically**, in order to see the **beauty** of what God intended with these roles, for the good of our own sanctification, for the building up of the family and the church, and to joyfully revel in the freedom of each role. Before we unpack some new, let's review where we've been.

As we go into the roles of man and woman in the church, its important to keep **three things in mind**:

- **We believe the Bible is our final authority, and submitting ourselves to obedience to it is not simply right, it is for our good -**
- **We believe the Bible teaches men and women "complement" each other -** Men and women are equally created in God's image yet have distinct, God given roles and responsibilities unique to their God ordained gender

"Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood...Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order and should find an echo in every human heart."

Statement on The Danvers Statement¹

¹ <https://cbmw.org/about/danvers-statement/>

- **We believe the gospel radically re-orientates our thinking** - The solution to both of these is the transformation that occurs in the gospel, as men take the mantle of servant leadership and women willingly follow men out of their desire to submit to their Savior.

Considering the Context

1. This is connected directly with gospel driven prayer (2:1-7)
2. This is specifically dealing with corporate worship in the church, as an extension of behavior in God's church (3:14-15), along with proper ordering of elders and deacons (3:1-13)

Calling for Proper Conduct (8-10)

I **desire** then that in every place the men should pray, lifting **holy hands** without **anger** or **quarreling**; ⁹ likewise also that women should **adorn** themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, ¹⁰ but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with **good works**.

Strong call for men to pray

Strong call for women display modesty and godliness

Clarifying the Complementing Functions (11-15)

Let a **woman learn quietly with all submissiveness**. ¹² I do not **permit** a woman **to teach** or **to exercise authority** over a man; rather, she is to remain **quiet**. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control

Posture and Character of women in corporate gatherings

The Way of Learning

The crux of verses 11-12 is that in the church, men will exercise authority in the office of pastor/elder (the different words describe the same office/function, making pastor/elder interchangeable), and an expression of that leadership is the formal teaching in the church, primarily through the preaching of God's Word.

What is meant by "quietly"?

Now, it is significant that it DOES say women in the church are to **learn**. The word is an imperative form of *manthono*, which means "to learn" or "to be informed", and from which we get the word **disciple**. In other words, women and men alike are to be *learners of God and His Word*, and should be active in that pursuit. When we learn as a disciple, it is always to turn that learning into opportunities to teach others. If the functional role of a woman in the public gathering of the church is to be a learner of God's Word through Biblically qualified leaders, where do women exercise this all important step of discipleship?

1. **With Children, especially their own -.**
2. **With other women - (Titus 2:1-4)**
3. **With each other, including men (Col. 3:16)**

The posture of a godly woman is to willingly place herself under the authority of God's Word, to learn quietly and fervently from God's Word, so she can teach God's Word in the areas God ordained. In order to do this, there has to be a posture of the heart, which is where **submission comes in**.

What does submission mean and not mean?

Perhaps one of the most misunderstood and abused words that the Bible commands today, the word **submit** needs to be clarified often for us. In fact, if we really wanted to stir up controversy, we would simply give the command without explanation and see what the reaction would be (a guess: not very positive). Paul says women should learn quietly and with **all submission**. *What does that mean:*

1. The **word "submit" or "submission"** means to "line up under". Specifically here and in other Biblical passages it means a voluntary placing oneself under the authority of another. The key to this definition is the idea of "voluntary". **Without willingness, submission is not submission**. Submission is a free choice that one redeemed by Christ can make. This also means that if anyone forces another to do something, it is no longer out of submission but rather domineering.
2. **Our greatest source or object of submission is to Christ** - Every believer submits to God (James 4:7), the church submits to Christ (Eph. 5:24), every believer submits to each other (Eph. 5:21) and wives to their husbands *as unto the Lord* (Eph. 5:22). In other words, the call to follow Christ and His Lordship is to give up our own authority and autonomy and yield to Him. *"The head of every man in Christ, the head of the wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God."* (1 Cor. 11:3). Submission comes out of the recognition of headship, which means we willingly place ourselves under the authority of another in the ways God has ordained.
3. **Men and women are both under submission** - This means that men as well as women place themselves under submission. Men and women submit to the governing authorities set over us (Rom. 13:1) and the employer relationships we have (1 Pet. 2:18-19). All of our submission to any and all human institution (1 Pet. 2:13) comes out of our submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. When we are truly submissive to Him, we can submit to human authority, and rebellion against human authority is truly rebellion against Christ.
4. **Submission does NOT infer weakness or lack of ability** - Submitting requires strength and resolve. In human relationships, we submit to those that are not necessarily superior to us in intellect, ability, or gifting, but rather for the sake of good order and obedience. In the workplace, we submit to the authority of a boss that may actually be inferior in certain areas, yet there is positional authority over us. The same goes in government positions. The submission of a wife is NOT to a superior being. In fact, **1 Pet. 3 lays out a fascinating case of submission**. *"For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening."* (3:5-6). Sarah submitted to Abraham even when he told her to say she was his sister (Gen 12:13; 20:2) because he was afraid of his own safety. Abraham did NOT live with her in an understanding way nor treat her as a weaker vessel (one he should protect) (1 Pet. 3:7), but wimped out. Yet Sarah submitted to this imperfect man. It takes resolve to do this. It takes inner strength. It takes confidence in the Lord to share your opinion, be deemed right, and still follow. Submission does not mean "doormat", but instead a willingness to help the one we are submitted to succeed, since the source of pleasure is in the Lord. Sarah was not weak in character, but rather showed her strength by her fearless willingness to follow her husband.

Rebecca McLaughlin wrote a fantastic chapter on this topic in her book "Confronting Christianity". She has a PHD, is a published author, gifted thinker, and mother of three. She recounts how she did not like the concept of submission in marriage, until she began to understand it Biblically, clarifying some former misconceptions. Submission in the home and the church have much overlap, so we learn by studying expressions in both contexts.

"Desiring to justify God's commands, Christians sometimes try to ground this picture of marriage in gendered psychology. Some suggest that women are natural followers, while men are natural leaders. But the primary command to me is to love (see Eph. 5:25) not to lead, and I have never heard anyone argue that men are naturally better at loving. Some claim that men need respect while women need love, or that we are given commands corresponding to natural deficiencies: women are better at love, men are better at respect. But to look at human history and say that men naturally respect women is to stick your head in the ground with a blindfold on!

At best, these claims about male and female psychology are generalizations. At worst, they cause needless offense and give way to exceptions: if these commands are given because wives are naturally more submissive, and I find that I am a more natural leaders than my husband, does that mean we can switch role? Ephesians 5 grounds our roles in marriage not on **gendered psychology but on Christ centered theology.**

*I have been married for a decade, and I am not naturally submissive. I am naturally leadership-orientated. I hold a PhD and a seminary degree, and I am the trained debater of the family. Thank God I married a man who is man enough to celebrate this! And yet it is a daily challenge for me to remember my role in this drama, and to notice the opportunities **to submit to my husband as unto the Lord**, not because I am naturally more or less submissive or because he is more or less naturally loving, but because Jesus went to the cross for me."²*

5. **Submission is a gift** - In a couple of weeks, we will look at how men in the church should lead, which is counter to our culture and unfortunately counter to what so many have experienced. But submission to godly leadership in the church and home should be **freedom!** One of my good friends reminded me of this in our shepherding group the other night, when she said she used to not like the idea of submission but now sees it as freedom. That delights my pastoral heart. Submission puts the onus of trust in the Lord and the responsibility of leadership of elders and husbands. it *should* mean that women are valued, treasured, protected, heard, sought after, lifted up, deemed as precious, and uplifted. It should take the weight of responsibility off their shoulders, entrusting themselves to the leading of Christ and godly men. The problem, of course, is that men do not always lead in godly ways, but that does not change the call. It simply reinforces that it takes **faith in Christ alone to play this out in the church and in the home.**

² Rebecca McLaughlin, "Confronting Christianity", p. 141-42.

The Order of Leading

Now, in order to truly understand submission, we must also understand Biblical authority. One of the key words we must keep in mind is that with authority comes **responsibility**, meaning the onus of loving leadership was given to Adam, to husbands, and to elders in God's church.

What is the Biblical teaching on authority?

1. In God's church, men are to lead as those responsible to give an account -

*"Remember your leaders, those who **spoke** to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and **imitate their faith.**"*

*"Obey your leaders and **submit to them**, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."*

Hebrews 13:7, 17

Leaders in God's church are to lead by the spoken word and living out the word. The role of those in the church, men & women both, is to remember them (1 Thess. 5:12-13), to obey and submit to them. The role of shepherd was one who watched over the sheep, guarded, protected, fed, and nourished. Notice that the **responsibility is great, since they are ultimately accountable to God for the work.**

2. Biblical Authority is marked by humility and mentality of a slave and servant -

Christ defined greatness by humility (Matt. 18:4) and when the disciples began to see themselves through the lens of greatness, Jesus taught them again about Christ-like leadership.

*But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. **It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.**'"*

Matthew 20:25-28

- The way of leadership in the world is heavy handed, fear based, intimidating, selfishly driven, agenda driven, and though it can be effective getting the job done, does not emulate that of our Savior.
- Notice that a TRUE LEADER is a servant, slave, and giver. He seeks after the good of those he leads. There is a clear, Biblical distinction between worldly leadership and Biblical leadership.
- Servant leadership embraces **responsibility**, willing to make hard decisions, to give up rights, and to give up personal agendas. The role of a servant/slave was to please their master first and foremost, and their own personal needs were secondary. **If submission is only true submission if it is voluntary, true Biblical leadership is only leadership if it is primarily the embodiment of a servant!** The role of a husband or elder is that of **Chief Servant, the one who is willing to give the most, and serve the true needs of others.**

3. Leadership is exercised by model and example, not domination -

In 1 Pet. 3:7, Peter makes the point that husbands need to live with their wives in an understanding way, honoring them as fellow heirs of the grace of life, and as **weaker vessels**. His point to husbands was that men should treat their wives as precious, not weak, but as those who are *physically* weaker. Men are

physically (on the whole) stronger than women. This is to be used as a protector and provider as one who gives loving servant leadership. But men can also try to **dominate physically** as so many have and continue to do. This is a direct result of the Fall of man and sin nature we are born with (Gen. 3:16), but is exactly the opposite of what Biblical leadership looks like.

*"Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; **not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.***

1 Peter. 5:2-3

The power of servant leadership is example, a life that is worth emulating and following. Any type of overpowering, manipulation, or fear based pressure is true leadership.

What teaching is this talking about?

The other important expression of leadership is that of teaching. Remember, Adam was given the primary task of passing along God's command in the Garden to Eve (Gen. 2:17), since she was not created yet. Adam was to protect through information, and then protect when that information was confused through the serpent, a task which he failed. Teaching God's Word requires one to **know God's Word**, and living out God's Word by example requires one to **know God's word through wisdom**, living out the realities that are known. What does this mean?

1. The primary role of pastor/elder is to be a teacher - Shepherding requires teaching. Part of elder qualification is the ability to teach (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:2; 2:24; 4:2). Timothy was to keep a close eye on his life and his teaching (1 Tim. 4:16), and to devote himself to the task of teaching (4:13). This DOES not invalidate the opportunity for women to teach in God's church (as we saw a couple of weeks ago), but does mean that an elder cannot lead without teaching.

2. Men and women teach in the home and church, but a man cannot lovingly lead as a servant without teaching - A loving leader sets the tone in the church and home, a culture of service, priority of worship, or time spent, and decision making. This means that men must have a growing and robust knowledge of God and His Word to be able to Biblically lead! We want all women in the church to be theologically trained, but not to the exclusion of the men. Men have often been intimidated, overwhelmed, too proud, or too lazy to engage themselves in knowing and living out God's Word. It is no wonder men have a hard time knowing what to do in the home and church, how to lead their kids, and leave the role to their wives to play.

What does all this help clarify? There is beauty in the roles God has created, as men and women strive to honor Christ, submitting to Him, and seeking to help the other grow into Christlikeness in all areas of life. Men seek to lead by example and word, out of an active knowledge of Scripture, by being the greatest servant and giver in the home and church, and women who seek to follow that leadership, exercising their gifts and talents to the building up, rather than tearing down of leadership. All this done out of a desire to please God, make Him known, and show the world the freedom and order of life in Christ.

Next week we will look at the basis for this in creation (vv. 13-15) as well as some practical implications for our church in all of this.

Biblical Consistency for the command