

Theology Roundtable

Men and Women in the Church

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What is Theology Roundtable?

Apologies to Paul Taylor at PBC Palo Alto for taking the title and some of the material from ten years ago.

- To look at a complicated and important topic that Christians of good faith have different points of view.
- We want to fairly describe multiple views and look at the Biblical case they present.
- We want to have open discussion and dialogue about the theological and practical challenges of differing views.
- We want to be open to exhorting each other to engage scripture more deeply so that we may live more faithfully in service to God and to reaching our community in our day.
- “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.” - Rupert Melindus

What are we talking about?

Three interrelated subjects but only one topic tonight

- **The Primary Topic for this evening is under the category of Church Governance (Ecclesiology)**
 - We are primarily talking about the leadership of women in the church
 - In a limited way, we will talk about relationships between men and women or to what some Christians today call “gender roles.”
 - Essentials matters assumed: the gospel, the authority, and inerrancy of scripture.
- **Secondary topics are interpretation and anthropology**
 - Hermeneutics: How do we best interpret and apply scripture?
 - Anthropology: What does it mean to be human? How should a Christian think about sexuality and gender, marriage and family?
 - We are not addressing all the broader issues related to Christian anthropology.
 - Two assessments of these positions should be rejected: that *all* complementarians are oppressively patriarchal, or that *all* egalitarians have abandoned biblical authority to accommodate to the culture.

First Principles

Dogmatic Rank

- First tier issues: The Trinity, Incarnation, the gospel, supreme authority of scripture for all matters of faith and conduct.
- Second tier issues often fall under Ecclesiology (e.g. sacraments, charismatic gifts, leadership)
 - How should the church be governed? Who is qualified to lead in the church? How does the church discern these qualifications? Are there offices of the church or is it merely about gifting?
 - Matters of church governance may become decisive to serve in leadership or be a member at a particular church.
- Second tier issues can be complex because they involve practical and personal matters, not just theological ones
 - In any church, Pastors and Elders need to agree on more things than the average member of that same church.
 - If a church believed women can serve as elders and you don't, could you be an Elder if your conscience says otherwise? But you may still be willing to worship and serve because you respect and trust the leadership.
 - Vice versa may also but it would be quite difficult if you are are a woman who feels a strong call to ministry to be in a church that does not affirm your calling.

Principles of Interpreting of Scripture

#1 Rule CONTEXT!!!

- **Good interpretation is an act of love, listening to where you do not walk away unaffected.**
 1. Historical/Cultural Background: What is the particular situation being addressed?
 2. Literary Context: How does the particular text fit within the whole?
 3. Meaning of Words: How is this word being used in this given context?
 4. Rules of Grammar: Importance of identifying how various phrases and clauses relate to each other within the language its written
- **We must resist interpreting scripture by ourselves.** Everyone has cultural pre-understandings they bring to the text.
- **We must resist naive dogmaticism,** that is that we know what it says without doing the hard work of exegesis.
 - Paul's letters are written to address particular situations in a particular time and place. But we only have one half of the conversation!
- **We must resist giving up/in to the day's interpretive chaos.** Not all interpretations are valid nor of equal quality.
 - Just because we have pre-understandings does not mean the truth is inaccessible or that we cannot be changed by the text.
 - Perpetual challenge of how to relate the Bible to our culture, do it with public credibility, and without compromise.
 - Seek to love God with our whole selves: heart, soul, body, and mind as we engage scripture.

My Pre-understandings

Learn each other's stories

- Mom and Dad divorced when I was young. Both rather traditional in the roles they modeled. But both always worked. While in a men's only fraternity in college, saved in a Bible study with 5 other women... other men invited but none stayed.
 - Later dumped by one of these girls in part for not being a "spiritual leader" which I had no idea what that meant at the time.
 - Always was in churches that were complementarian but usually at least one woman director/pastor on staff was egalitarian, and often frustrated.
- Exposure to missions and the challenges of contextualizing the gospel in different cultures has always been important.
- Hot topic among students when I was in seminary. Have wrestled with it ever since. Burning question has been just been what does it mean to be a godly man? Also, whom am I to refuse any woman to serve the Lord in any capacity she is gifted and feels called? But what do I do with the text as written? How do we thrive together as brothers and sisters in Christ in this day?
- Full disclosure: one of my good friends from seminary is a contributor to the latest volume of *Discovering Biblical Equality*. Really sharp NT scholar at Wycliff Hall in Oxford, and host for *OnScript* podcast. Craig Blomberg was one of our professors and rejected hard egalitarian and complementarian views. Staunch supporter of women in ministry, many of whom are very accomplished scholars/theologians and yet still thinks senior pastor/elder leadership should be male.
- I also have been a participant in local and regional gatherings for The Gospel Coalition, a reformed and complementarian parachurch ministry. But I've always found Tim Keller's soft complementarian superior to John Piper or Wayne Grudem's harder complementarianism.
- I also have found egalitarian arguments of passages of scripture to be exegetical very sound, and in some cases superior. The criticisms of complementarianism I have found to be persuasive.
- I feel strongly committed to scripture and interpreting it properly but am aware of cultural forces at play in interpretation. It cannot mean for you what it didn't mean for them.

Take 5 minutes and reflect on these questions

Recognize and account for your pre-understandings

- Informational
 - What do you already know about the subject?
 - What kind of stories, models, or images do you have about men and women? Who have been important role models for you (good or bad)?
- Attitudinal
 - What disposition do you have towards the topic: prejudice, bias, or predisposition?
 - Skeptical? Open? Fearful? Hopeful? Curious? Indifferent?
- Ideological
 - How do you view the whole topic? What is your point of view? Do you think
 - How important is the topic to you? How does it affect your view of God? Ask yourself, what if you are wrong? What would that mean for how you view God, the Bible, or other people?
- Methodological
 - What is your actual approach, your interpretive practices, in coming to scripture?

Complementarianism at a glance

- Hard to Soft Complementarianism
 - Hard - women cannot teach or preach, possibly even speak in church and may even restrict women from certain jobs in society. Male headship and female submission in marriage and in the church.
 - Soft - women can teach and preach, and even may be pastors in some cases. Do not permit women in top level of leadership (bishop, senior pastor, or Elder). Male headship is less about authority than sacrificial service. (This has been the practice of PBC churches. Ray Stedman held this view in 1976).
- Two important statements relevant to the North American Evangelical context
 - cbmw.org, Danvers Statement, leans towards hard complementarianism.
 - The Gospel Coalition, ranges from hard to soft within the movement
 - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about/foundation-documents/#confessional-statement>
 - What to they mean by “the distinctive leadership role in the church...”?

TGC Confessional Statement

3. Creation of Humanity

...Men and women, equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, church, and civic life. Adam and Eve were made to complement each other in a one-flesh union that establishes the only normative pattern of sexual relations for men and women, such that marriage ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and his church. In God's wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord. In the ministry of the church, both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to be developed to their full potential in the manifold ministries of the people of God. The distinctive leadership role within the church given to qualified men is grounded in creation, fall, and redemption and must not be sidelined by appeals to cultural developments.

Complementarian Exegesis

Genesis 1-3, 1 Cor. 11:2-15; 1 Cor. 14:34-35; Eph. 5:21-33; 1 Tim. 2:8-15

- Genesis 1-3
 - Adam formed first (cf. 1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:13), naming of Eve, and her as Adam's "helper" implies authority. Adam was given charge to "guard and keep" the garden with the command not to eat of the tree in Gen. 2:15-17. Thus believe there is an inference he failed as the head of his wife to protect Eve from the deception of Satan.
 - Inclined to want to be more descriptive of what is a distinctively male activity versus a female activity. Usually this is under the terms of headship and submission.
- In Israel and the Church
 - Only male kings and priests. Jesus' 12 disciples/apostles were male.
- "Gatekeeper texts", texts that *function* more authoritatively than others.
 - 1 Cor. 11:2-6; 14:34-35; Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Tim. 2:8-15
 - The meaning of "head" conveys authority (cf. Col. 2:10) in many languages. Male leadership/headship is viewed as a universal pattern throughout scripture and across cultures. Usually careful to distinguish between domineering and abusive authority versus loving sacrificial use of authority.
 - Understand "to have authority" (*authenticien*, 1 Tim 2:12) to be a positive use of authority combined via a complex grammatical construction with "to teach." Thus, a women is prohibited from the authoritative teaching office of the church. Complementarians differ on what constitutes an authoritative teaching position or context (i.e. the pulpit in local church vs. at a Christian conference or school).

Egalitarianism at a glance

- Men and women are equal and able to serve in any capacity in the church. Husband and wives are called to mutual submission in distinct ways reflecting Christ's sacrificial life.
- Generally reluctant to be too descriptive about what distinguishes men and women. In other words, will push against culturally bound stereotypes.
- Not a lot of range in practical ways but in some cases may restrict leadership for cultural reasons.
- Usually consider it a logical contradiction to say men and women are equal in being but unequal in role (see Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, deceased wife of one of my former professors).
- Christians for Biblical Equality, cbeinternational.org Much more generic statement of faith and dedicated to empowerment of women in ministry. Strong stance against patriarchy.

Christians for Biblical Equality International

From their Statement of Faith and Core Values

- We believe that women and men are equally created in God's image and given equal authority and stewardship of God's creation.
- We believe that men and women are equally responsible for and distorted by sin, resulting in shattered relationships with God, self, and others.
- Scripture is our authoritative guide for faith, life, and practice.
- Patriarchy (male dominance) is not a biblical ideal but a result of sin.
- While the Bible reflects patriarchal culture, the Bible does not teach patriarchy in human relationships.

Egalitarian Exegesis

Genesis 1-3, 1 Cor. 11:2-15; Eph. 5; Gal. 3:28; 1 Tim. 2:8-12

- Genesis 1-3
 - Being formed first is not an indication of authority, God consistently undermines this cultural practice by appointing younger siblings over older (Abel, Jacob, Joseph, David). Naming in OT is a recognition of attributes not an indication of superiority.
 - “Helper” is used of God and clearly he is not subordinate to us. (Ezk. 30:8; 32:21; Is. 30:7; 31:3; Dt. 33:7, 29; Ex. 18:4; Ps. 20:2; 70:5; 121:1,2; 124:8; Hos. 13:9)
 - Adam’s sin is akin to Israel, having been given the commands and knowingly transgressing. Eve’s sin is akin to gentiles, transgressing apart from direct revelation of the command (Westfall). Clearly all are deceived and women are not more susceptible to false teaching.*
- Israel and the Church
 - Stress is placed on women who do show leadership and teaching gifts over men. Deborah, Miriam, Huldah, Priscilla, Phoebe, Junia, etc.
- “Gatekeeper texts”
 - Gal. 3:28, Christ has abolished superiority or hierarchy among us
 - Eph. 5:21 is the main verb and following verses are subordinate clauses.
 - 1 Tim. 2:12 and 1 Cor. 11:2-15 are addressing particular situations and are culturally bound issues that are not universally applicable.
 - Often sees an analogy, or trajectory in scripture, with growing empowerment of women similar to how the Bible undermines the institution of slavery (see William Webb)

Pausing for Questions

- Are these helpful categories?

Closer Look: Genesis 1-3

Genesis 1-3

- God blesses both men and women, to accomplish his purpose for humanity to serve as rulers, creators, and caretakers of his good world.
- “rib” is actually “side”, (2 Sam. 16:13; Ex. 25:12). Adam is halved to create his other half, Eve. The point of the narrative is that she is his only equal, the only one like him and solves the problem of him being alone. She is “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” He is *ish* and she is *ishah* (man, woman).
- Eden is a garden temple and Adam is commissioned as a royal priest “to work and keep it.” The same words used of the priestly role in the Tabernacle. Clearly all believers in Christ by the Spirit are now part of the royal priesthood.
- “desire” (*tesuqah*) in Gen. 3:16 only occurs in two other places. Gen. 4:7 gives the sense its about the desire to rule over her husband... thus war of the sexes.

1 Corinthians 11:2-15

Two very different interpretations

- Things agreed upon - its difficult! Men with long hair and women with shaved heads indicated sexual immorality.
- Key exegetical questions:
 - What is the meaning of *kephale*? Head as in leader/authority (cf. Col. 2:10) or source (cf. Col. 2:19)?
 - What is the analogy of the Son and the Father (v.3)?
 - **As authority:** Unorthodox - Son is subordinate to the Father in authority. Orthodox, the Son *with respect to his human nature*, willingly submits the human will to the divine will of the Father, Son, and Spirit.
 - **As source:** the sense would be just as women came from men, Christ also comes from the Father (which is Trinitarian orthodoxy). Notice also v. 12 says man came from woman. Men and women are not independent of each other just as the Father and the Son are inseparable in their redemptive work. But use of *kephale* as source is very rare.
- What is the cultural background here?
 - Female insubordination and rejection of gender roles? Many Complementarians are admittedly motivated by concerns over sexuality and gender. (Schriener)
 - A matter of honoring God and each other in worship? Paul is correcting those who said women of ill-repute cannot wear a head covering (v.10). They should be permitted to wear the symbol of their devotion to Christ and that they are not sexually available. (Westfall)

1 Corinthians 11:2-15

Two more comments

- From Bernerd Bell, Biblical Studies Pastor at PBC Cupertino
- *“The three-fold use of kephale in 11:3 has nothing to do with authority, and to translate it as “origin” or “source” robs the passage of the detailed wordplay: Paul uses the word nine times in vv. 3-10. How the man treats his head confers honor or shame on his head: on his own head, and on his figurative head Christ. Likewise, how the woman treats her head confers honor or shame on her head: on her own head, on her figurative head, the husband, and on her head’s head Christ. The passage is a call to behave in a proper manner so as to confer honor not shame when the church gathers in assembly. It’s not about yourself; it’s about how your behavior enhances the community.”*
- I find Westfall’s interpretation illuminating and very persuasive. I agree that the passage is not about authority, but our interdependence on Christ and each other to honor all in the worship setting.

1 Timothy 2:8-15

- What is the situation of false teaching in Ephesus?
 - Artemis Cult? New Roman Woman? Simply lack of sound biblical and theological training for women?
 - Its clear the false teachers preyed upon women and probably taught that marriage and children were no longer necessary because of the resurrection (1 Tim. 1:3-7; 4:3; 2 Tim. 3:6-7).
 - Clearly Paul has sent Timothy to refute false doctrine and unethical practices in the church.
- Are we talking about a universal prohibition or a limited contextual one? It is a situational letter but it clearly was intended for broader use.
- Very difficult grammatical construction in verse 12, combining two infinitives and the meaning of “have authority,” *authentien* is heavily disputed because its incredibly rare. Why didn't Paul use more common words to convey authority?
- What to make of Paul's use of the Genesis narrative in vv. 13-15?
 - It is a *retelling* of the Genesis narrative, in light of the gospel, to counter the false teaching prevalent among the women (male false teachers are the only ones mentioned by name in 1-2 Timothy).
 - The greatest source of pain for women, and most likely cause of death until the modern era, childbirth, has become the means through which God brought the savior of the world. Therefore, be like Mary not Eve (and that can apply to men as well).
 - Adam's sin is akin to Israel and Eve to gentiles without the law. It would be a contradiction of Paul (cf. Rom. 5:12) to assert women more responsible for the fall, or more prone to deception than men.

Assessing the Sides

- Are these categories really helpful? Many scholars and theologians do not like them as presently defined.
- I believe there is far more agreement than is often perceived. For example, Graham Cole argues for “Christo-complementarianism”.
- Deep theology happening in some of the most difficult texts with appeals made to creation, the Trinity, and the Incarnation. Paul is making use of the gospel to address particular challenges to counter false narratives with redemptive narratives.
- Both sides have made poor use of the Trinity to aid their cause with complementarians in particular having to abandon appeals to the Son’s subordination because of its similarities to the heresy of Arianism.*
- Is equality so radically defined in our culture that it blurs important distinctions? Are we guilty of reading that into the text? Are all power imbalances evil?
- Why the emphasis and concern with authority and submission? Does not Jesus utterly flip the concept of authority on its head, thus undermining our cultural notions of power (cf. Mark 10:45)?
- Do we really believe its okay for women to teach all other things in society but not okay to teach scripture and theology? What is the significance of the pulpit versus other contexts of teaching?

Assessing the Sides

- Complementarians have struggled to maintain the equal dignity and worth of women in appealing to difference in “roles.” Roles vary significantly across cultures. Tendency for abusive men to find “safety” in conservative circles.
- Egalitarians have struggled to maintain differences between men and women, particularly the male strength and female beauty. Paul consistently calls men to sacrificial service and women to adorn themselves with the beauty of character and good works, redeeming sinful ways we leverage the power of male strength and female beauty (1 Pet. 3:1-7).
- Gerald Heistand asks the question, “How do we to make sense of God’s justice that he would make men physically stronger than women, knowing they would use it to oppress women?”
 - The Greek myth of Caenis, raped by the god Neptune... “Put pain like that beyond my power.” Requests to be turned into a man so she may no longer be vulnerable to abuse.
 - Camille Paglia (atheist and lesbian) a 3rd wave feminist who argues we must recognize the innate physical differences between men and women.
 - Pope John Paul II, *A Theology of the Body*, our bodies signify *something* about who we are as human beings, as men and women in distinctive ways. Our purpose is to give of ourselves for each other (1 Cor. 7:3-4; 11:11-12).
 - Reflecting on Eph. 5:21ff, husband and wife are a type pointing to Christ and his bride the church. Jesus does not merely use his power on behalf of his bride, but shares his power and makes her co-ruler with him. The church’s dependence on Christ, as a recipient of his gracious power is then lifted up. Challenges both sides.*