

The Equality of Men and Women in the New Covenant

Galatians 3:28-29

In the New Covenant we are taught real, genuine gender equality. In the nation of Israel only males could work as priests; only males could offer the sacrifices (representing his family), and only males could serve as representatives before God. This functional inequality of males and females changed in the New Covenant. However, most evangelical conservatives believe that the male remains the “head” of the woman, is the “authority” over the woman, and as a result, men should be in authority over women in all matters. The church has propagated and promoted male headship. Authoritative religious figures have been blunt about their views of women.

- *“Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman...Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her obscenity,”* **Rabbi Eliezer.**
- *“Do you not know that you are each an Eve? You are the Devil's gateway: You are the unsealer of the forbidden tree: You are the first deserter of the divine law: You are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert even the Son of God had to die,”* **St. Tertullian.**
- *“What is the difference whether it is in a wife or a mother, it is still Eve the temptress that we must beware of in any woman....I fail to see what use woman can be to man, if one excludes the function of bearing children. Women are vessels of excrement,”* **St. Augustine of Hippo.**
- *“As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active force in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from a defect in the active force or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence,”* **St. Thomas Aquinas.**
- *“If they [women] become tired or even die, that does not matter. Let them die in childbirth, that's why they are there,”* **Martin Luther.**
- *“Most of these feminists are radical, frustrated lesbians, many of them, and man-haters, and failures in their relationships with men, and who have declared war on the male gender. The Biblical condemnation of feminism has to do with its radical philosophy and goals. That's the bottom line,”* **Jerry Falwell.**
- *“...God, by creating Adam first (Gen. 2:18; 1 Cor. 11:8) and also by creating woman for man (Gen. 2:18, 20, 22; 1 Cor. 11:9), has set the gender-based role and responsibility of males in the most basic unit of society (the family) to be that of leader, provider and self-sacrificial protector (also cf. Eph. 5:25; 1 Peter 3:7), and likewise has set the gender-based role and responsibility of females to be that of help and nurture (Gen. 2:18) and life-giving (Gen. 3:20) under male leadership and protection (cf. 1 Pet. 3:7),”* **The Council on Biblical Manhood.**
- *“...make dads the godly leaders [of the family] with the women in submission, raising kids for the glory of God,”* **Randall Terry, Operation Rescue.**

I. Prior to sin in this world, there was full equality between men and women.

Both man and woman were made in God's image (Gen.1:26-27) and both participated in God-assigned ministries without any role distinctions (1:28). The creation order established oneness, not hierarchy (2:24). The first indication of a hierarchical order between man and

woman resulted from the entrance of sin into the world (3:16). The subordination of women to men was not part of God's original design. *A desire to rule is the result of sin.* The use of the word “**helper**” for the woman reinforces the relation of non-hierarchical relationship that existed between the man and the woman prior to the fall (2:18). In the language of the Old Testament, a “helper” is one who rescues others in situations of need. This designation is often attributed to God as our rescuer. The word denotes competency and superior strength (Ex. 18:4; Deut. 33:26, 29; Psalm 33:20, 70:5, etc.). Once the fall shattered the God-given oneness between man and woman, they both faced a dysfunctional relationship. The woman was warned that, because of the disruption of the fall, the husband would rule over her (Gen. 3:16). Oneness would turn into abuse. But no mandate was ever given to the man to claim this rulership over the woman.

II. Jesus Christ creates relationships where the curse for the desire to rule is reversed.

There is no text in Scripture that enjoins wives to obey their husbands. The call is for mutual subjection (Eph. 5:21). Both wives and husbands must relate to each other “*in the same way*” as slaves submit to their masters (1 Peter 2:18; 3:1, 7 NIV) in order to follow in the steps of Christ, their supreme example (2:21). For those who object by citing the case of Sarah who obeyed her husband Abraham (1 Pet. 3:6), it should be pointed out Peter cites Sarah's case in full knowledge of the fact that Abraham pointedly obeyed his wife under God's specific command as well (Gen 16:2-6; 21:11-12). It is mutual submission.

Christians are solemnly forbidden by their Lord to establish among themselves structures of authority similar to the hierarchical systems that prevail in secular society. Those who aspire to attain such positions of leadership must, instead, become servants and slaves of those over whom they wish to wield authority (Matt. 20:25-28). Leadership is always defined in the New Testament as shared leadership, the team concept of submission.

III. There is no NT text that makes man the ruling authority over a woman.

The text usually pointed to in establishing a top-down hierarchy is 1 Corinthians 11:3.

God over Christ--- Christ over man--- man over woman.

However, this biblical text must be radically dismembered and its components reshuffled in order to produce such results. The untouched biblical sequence is totally different.

Christ, head of man--- man, head of woman--- God, head of Christ.

The teaching in this text concerns the concept of “head” as *giver of life*. In creation, Christ (as the Word, John 1:3) gave life to man; man to woman (as she was taken from him, Gen. 2:21-23); and in the incarnation, God gave life to Christ (Luke 1:35). This understanding of “head” as “provider of life” is consistent with the immediate context which deals with the significance of origination (1 Cor. 11:7-12). The meaning of “head” as servant-provider of life in this text is also consistent with the headship passage in Eph. 5:21-33. There, the church is described as being subject to Christ in the reciprocity of servanthood because Christ as head is also servant to the church as its Savior and as the source of its welfare. Saviorhood in the New Covenant is not a lordship role but of sacrifice and servanthood. Likewise, the wife is servant to her husband as she submits to him because the husband is servant to her in radical headship as he gives himself up for her as Christ did the church. So headship in the New Covenant is the giving of life through submission to another (v. 21).