



# GOD'S DESIGN FOR WOMEN IN CHRIST

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## The Current Situation

There are few issues facing the church today that are in need of greater clarity than the roles of men and women. Since the 1960's, the American scene has been dominated by an attempt to remove all obstacles to perceived equality among people. Originally cast as a vehicle to rid the country of hatred and prejudice, the Equal Rights movement has now turned its assault on the traditional values of Biblical relationships. Through the pursuit of absolute equality, without regard to the responsibility of roles, the very structure which God established to hold a society together is being destroyed.

Unfortunately, as history has repeatedly demonstrated, the shifting values of society are having a greater impact on the Church than the Church, with the stabilizing influence of God's Word, is having on the world. At the heart of many views is a practice of imposing today's standards of equality onto the pages of Scripture in order to arrive at a pre-determined conclusion.

At Grace Church, we believe that it is every believer's responsibility to be conformed to the standards of Scripture, regardless of society's views. Our objective is to honor God's creative design for women by examining His revealed will in the Scriptures, and put that will to practice in the Church as a light to the world. We believe that God's design has truly liberated women to be all that God intended them to be, in all of their dignity, beauty and usefulness in His kingdom.

## The Confusion over Position and Role; Equality and Submission

The whole debate over women's roles in the church spins from the current hub of confusion over the difference between *equality of position* and *equality of roles*. The major thought today says that if two people are equal in position, it naturally follows that they should be equal in the roles of their relationship. For example, some say that since a man and woman are created as equals in their position before God, then there should be no headship and submission in their roles as husband and wife. Or, if men and women are equal before Christ, they should be able to function in identical roles in the church. Submission, for them, is seen as the act of a person of inferior quality or status.

The problem is that this thought is not Biblical. Being equal in position does not demand equality of roles. And being submissive to another person does not mean that one is inferior. The best illustration of this point is seen in the position and role of Jesus Christ. In fact, He must be the starting point for every believer who desires to understand the difference between their position as a fellow heir with all the saints, and the God ordained role for their relationships in life.

### **Jesus' Position: Equality with the Father**

The Bible makes it clear that Jesus is God. As such, in essence and person, the Father and Son are **equal**. John 10:30 is perhaps the clearest statement of this fact, when Jesus states "I and the Father are one." The Bible also makes it clear that His equality

was not something given to Him, nor could it ever be taken away. He is equal because of who He is (cf. John 1:1 ff.). And because He knew He could never lose His equality with God, He willingly became the greatest of servants, submitting Himself to the humiliation of the cross. That is the point of Philippians 2:6-7, where Paul says He “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.”

### **Jesus' Role: Submission to the Father**

While Jesus is truly God, equal in all aspects, we also find in the pages of Scripture that He is submissive to the Father. He never does anything on His own initiative (John 5:30; 8:28, 42; 10:18; 12:49; 14:10), He is subject at all times to the Father's will (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). He never operates out of this role, otherwise the Trinity would experience anarchy.

This role of submission was not limited to Jesus' earthly ministry. In 1 Corinthians 15, we see that all things are put in subjection to Him, except of course, the Father (v27). Furthermore, Paul adds, “when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all.” In other words, Jesus' role of submission carries on into eternity. And when the fullest expression of the Trinity is seen in eternity, the roles of that relationship are never distorted. The Son, to whom all things are subject, is Himself subject to the Father.

So then, in Jesus Christ we have the perfect example of someone who is equal in position to someone, yet submissive at the same time in the role of His relationship to that same person.

When we come to God's Word, we find the same relationship described between men and women. Before God, they have equality in position or personhood. But, in the roles which God created them to fulfill, there is authority and submission which is carefully designed to preserve the unity of their relationships.

### **Back to the Beginning: God's Creation of Women**

In Genesis 1, it is clear that women are created equal to men. Verse 27 is God's own commentary on this equality, “And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female he created them.” All of mankind is created in the image of God. Neither man nor woman is given more or less of God's image. That is the big picture. As fellow human beings in their standing before God, men and women are equal.

Genesis 2 moves from the big picture of creation, to the details. In this chapter we find Adam alone in the Garden. In this chapter we also find God forming Eve from Adam's side. And, in verses 18-25, the roles of the relationship between Adam and Eve are defined. Eve was created to be his helper (v18, 20). While positionally equal with Adam, Eve is given a role of service as his wife.

The role of service is not second class. It is not a put down. The same word is used to describe how God helps us at times (Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7). And in Genesis 2, it is used to describe the purpose for which Eve was created, to be a helper to Adam. That is her God-given role.

Genesis 3 is the first time Eve stepped out of her role as helper to Adam. When deceived in the Garden about the forbidden fruit, she took the lead and ate it. In addition, she thought that by eating, she could step beyond her role of a created being, and

become like God (v5, 6). When God rebuked Eve (v16), he told her of the consequences of this sin: that her *desire* would be for her husband. In 4:7, this same verb is used to describe the *desire of control*. In other words, the natural consequence of her sin would be a continual desire to control her husband, rather than fulfill her created role of helper. "But," God adds, "He shall rule over you." *By this one sin, the natural harmony which God had created for their relationship was destroyed*. History has attested to the ongoing power struggle between husband and wives. The obvious message to Eve, and to women of all ages, is to never violate the role for which God created them. That will be their desire, but that desire is sin.

So then, from the beginning the Bible shows that women are created as equals to men, while being given a supportive role in their relationships. Because of sin they will continually try to usurp that role, leading to further sin and the destruction of the harmony God intended. A godly woman understands that while she is created equal to her husband, she must still function in the role of submission to him.

### **Signs of the Times: The Rabbis' View of Women**

When we come to the writings of the Rabbis, the Jewish scholars, we can begin to comprehend the effects of sin on the role of women, even among God's people. In their writings we find no comprehension of the equality of women as persons, only the domination of men over them, just as God told Eve (Genesis 3:16). As we read their thoughts, we also begin to appreciate Jesus' approach to the women of His time.

The sources of Jewish thought about women are primarily the legal writings of the Jewish nation, the Talmud and the Mishnan. While the Talmud was not completed until the fifth century AD, and the Mishnan in the second century AD, both reflect the oral traditions of the Jewish nation from as early as the third century BC.

In these writings, the Rabbis described women as lazy, stupid and vain. A woman's words held little weight in court, about as much as a Gentile slave. Men were warned against spending too much time talking to women. One writer thought it better to destroy the words of the Torah by fire than to teach them to a women.

These writings show us the danger of not recognizing woman's created position of equality. Men are allowed to become proud and wrongly exert their authority over women. But surely the correction of that mind-set should not be an obliteration of the roles, as we see today. The Bible never authorizes one to disregard his own responsibility just because someone else has disregarded theirs.

## **True Liberation: Freedom to Fulfill God's Design for Relationships**

### **Jesus' View of Women**

Jesus had a very high view of women, God's view, and demonstrated it openly before the men of His day. For instance, He cut through the cultural climate by talking openly with women, even telling Martha that she should stop her "duties," and like her sister Mary, come listen to Him (Luke 10:38-42). It was to a woman that He openly stated that He was Messiah (John 4), speaking to her first before talking to men of the town. He even had women followers as He traveled from town to town proclaiming the Kingdom of God (Luke 8:1-3). And, although a woman's testimony lacked credibility in the court system of His day, it was to a woman named Mary Magdalene that Jesus first appeared

after His resurrection (John 20:11-18), allowing her to make the announcement to the world that Jesus truly is alive!

Jesus demolished the cultural view of women before the Biblical scholars of His day. In many ways He liberated women from the stronghold of male domination simply by making clear the positional equality of those who were otherwise viewed as possessions. *But, He never encouraged or allowed a woman to step out of her created role (cf. John 2:4).* He had no women leaders or teachers among his group of twelve. He placed none of the women, who faithfully followed Him, into positions over any of the men. While truly liberating women, he retained the bounds of God's designed roles.

### **Paul's View of Women**

Paul also demonstrated the Biblical view of the equality of women in their position or personhood. This is stated best in Galatians 3:28, where Paul says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Some have taken this verse to mean that God has now abolished the roles of men and women in society. But Paul was not abolishing the roles of men and women any more than he was freeing the slave or renouncing nationalities. The context is talking about all those who belong to Christ, or a person's standing before God. All those who belong to Christ are Abraham's children, and receive the benefits of the promise. The Jews historically thought it was for them alone, or at least through them (John 8:31 ff.). Paul is showing that this is faulty thinking. Physical, social or national characteristics did not affect right standing before God, only faith in Christ Jesus (v26). Function and role will continue to be different among God's people, as will physical attributes, desires, etc.

Paul made it clear that he understood the distinct roles of men and women in marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33). He also made it clear that He understood the distinct roles of men and women in the church (1 Timothy 2:8-15). While he elevated women to the place where they could participate in the public teaching ("let a woman quietly receive instruction" - 1 Timothy 2:11), he did not let that participation go beyond the role which God created for them ("But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man" - 2:12). This was not based on personal bias or cultural inconsistency, but on Creation and God's ordained roles (2:13-15).

## **Women at Grace Church**

Grace Church holds to what the Bible teaches about the equality of women: that women stand before God as equal to men, being made in His image. Women are fellow heirs of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7), not second class citizens of God's kingdom. Women are gifted by the Holy Spirit (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12) and empowered by Him to do God's will (Ephesians 5:15-21) in exactly the same way as men are. Women shared in the early church's struggle for the progress of the Gospel (Philippians 4:1-3; cf. Romans 16), and will continue in that same struggle in the church today. As such, we believe that women fulfill a vital part of the ministry in the work of building God's church. Grace Church holds every woman who serves her Lord Jesus Christ and His Church in the highest regard. And many are serving here in strategic ministries.

Grace Church also holds to what the Bible teaches about the responsibility of everyone, whether man or woman, to serve God according to the roles which He has established. As such, we will not elevate women to positions of leadership which are not Biblical. We

will not place women in ministries where they are called upon to teach the Bible to, or exercise authority over, men (1 Timothy 2:12). We will not appoint women as pastors or elders, because that is not God's design (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). We continue to hold that wives are to be in a role of submission to their own husbands, because that is commanded in Scripture, and is the appropriate response for a woman in Christ (Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1).

We believe that it is the mandate of the Church to hold the Biblical standard high. We do so as a matter of obedience to Him, as a matter of blessing to women and as a matter of testimony to the world. Our view of women in Christ is based on God's design, not on cultural demands. It is the design which God created for women to fulfill, and therefore is the one which God blesses. It is the design which promotes unity in every relationship. And, it is the design that Christ Himself demonstrated, being equal with, yet submissive to the Father. Only in following Christ's example will women truly glorify God in all that they do (1 Corinthians 10:31), and know the liberating fulfillment of all God has created them to be.