

# A Biblical Case for Complementarianism

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## Thesis:

Complementarianism is a legitimate way to understand the Scriptures concerning the roles of men and women in the church and family. It is better able than egalitarianism to account for and correlate together all the relevant Scriptural texts.

## Introduction:

Conservative Mennonite Conference (CMC) holds to and practices the complementarian position concerning church leadership. The CMC Statement of Theology, in note 20 under the heading of “Man” states: “This statement is in harmony with the New Testament teaching that male and female as believers have equal access to God through Christ and are of equal standing in God’s creative and redemptive plan, with difference of function between men and women in leadership ministries in the church and in the home.” The CMC Statement of Practice, under the heading of “The Roles of Men and Women in the Church” reads: “A distinction in masculine and feminine roles is indicated by the principle of male headship, established in creation and continued as part of God’s redemptive order in the church. To honor the principle of male headship, CMC reserves ministerial license and ordination for men.”

In our egalitarian culture, this position could seem at best antiquated and at worst discriminatory. The question before us is, “Is the complementarian position viable as a Scriptural rule of life and practice?”

“For the first time in human history women, in Western civilization, have achieved full equality and relative parity with men in virtually every area of society - **except the church!** The church remains - with few exceptions - **the last bastion of institutional discrimination against women.**” C. S. Cowles, “A Woman’s Place? Leadership in the Church,” emphasizes his.

“How does one talk pastorally and compassionately to twenty-first-century people so that the notion of gender roles is presented not as an embarrassing antiquity the church is stuck with but as a gift, meant for our good?” Kathy Keller, “Jesus, Justice, and Gender Roles: A Case for Gender Roles in Ministry.”

## I. Preliminary remarks.

**A.** Working from the idea that all are sincere in their desire to take Scripture seriously as a rule for life. 2 Tim. 3:16

**B.** It’s not only unhelpful but un-Christian to “demonize” those with whom we disagree. Luke 6:31 Titus 3:1,2 James 3:5-12 (esp. 9,10)

**C.** Discussions like this are necessary as attempts to apply the word of God to real life. We cannot dismiss them as insignificant, unhelpfully divisive, or with the simple declaration that we need to focus on Jesus. The church which Jesus formed will always be asking how to be faithful to Him and His word in doing life together. Acts 15

**D.** Throughout this paper I use the term “women.” This is only for clarity and conformity to common terminology. I would prefer to think of the women in the church as sisters, and as all of us working together for the kingdom of God.

## **II. Coming to terms - simply and to our point.**

**A.** Egalitarianism: Women and men are absolutely equal in their image bearing of God and in their avenues of service in the church. Such service is based solely on gifting, with no reference to gender. Any gender role assignation finds its source after the fall of humanity into sin, not before.

**B.** Complementarianism: Women and men are absolutely equal in their image bearing of God, but have differing avenues of service in the church. Such service is based not only on gifting, but also on gender. Any gender role assignation finds its source before the fall of humanity into sin, not after.

## **III. In the beginning - examining Genesis 1-3.**

**A.** Complementarians and egalitarians, while holding to some similarities concerning the original creation of man and woman, hold crucially different understandings of the significance of the original creation of man and woman and the subsequent fall into sin.

### **1. Similarities.**

- a. Both positions affirm the creation of man and woman by God and in God’s image.
- b. Both positions affirm the fall of man had drastic consequences for the relationship not only of humanity to God but also for that of man to woman.

### **2. Differences.**

- a. Egalitarianism affirms that in the creation before the fall woman is created as man’s “helper,” but this word “conveys no implication whatsoever of female subordination or inferiority.” (CBE International, statement on “Men, Women and Biblical Equality.”) It also affirms that “The Bible teaches that the rulership of Adam over Eve resulted from the Fall and was therefore not a part of the original created order. Genesis 3:16 is a prediction of the effects of the Fall rather than a prescription of God’s ideal order.” (CBE International, statement on “Men, Women and Biblical Equality.”)

b. Complementarianism affirms that “Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order . . .”. (CBMW, Danvers Statement) It also affirms that “The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women . . . In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.” (CBMW, Danvers Statement)

## **B. A closer look at complementarianism - foundations in Genesis.**

### 1. Gen. 1:26-28.

a. Male and female are equally created in God’s image and are therefore equally and fully human, with equal and full dignity and value. The command is: “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.” (1:28) At this point, neither the complementarian or egalitarian position is demanded, since no details are given as to how such ruling is to be carried out.

b. They are created “male and female,” denoting some essential differences between the two. Gender, and all that goes along with it, is inseparable from who we are and how we relate to one another.

### 2. Gen. 2:15-24.

a. Adam is created first, thus giving him (the male) temporal priority (he is the “firstborn”).

b. God gives instructions to Adam before Eve is created. It’s his responsibility to lead his wife in knowing and obeying these instructions. This is an early indicator that Adam, as the head of creation, is responsible for what happens in the future.

c. Eve is created to be a “helper corresponding to [Adam]”, with the word “helper” not being a term for value or worth but a descriptor of a type of relationship. It is used of God helping people (Ps. 33:20, 118:7), God taking on a supportive role in His relationship to mankind. God subordinates Himself by coming down to our level and helping us in need. He does not become less than God in doing so. The ultimate example of this is Jesus subordinating Himself to become flesh and die for us (Phil. 2:5-11). Being a helper means subordination, but subordination in no way implies a denigration of the helper. As Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr. states it, “Therefore, the fact that the Old Testament portrays God as our Helper proves only that the helper role is a glorious one, worthy even of the Almighty. This Biblical fact does not prove that the concept of helper excludes subordination. Subordination is entailed in the very nature of a helping role.” (*Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*)

d. Adam names Eve twice, before and after the Fall (Gen. 2:23 & 3:20), thus exercising one of his prerogatives as the “firstborn.” In the ancient culture the significance of naming someone indicates authority over him or her. The animals are brought to Adam for him to name. While mothers sometimes name their sons, their authority over those sons is only until he leaves home. (2:24 - a man leaves father and mother to establish a new home.)

### 3. Gen. 3:1-7.

- a. Eve is the first to sin, but God holds Adam ultimately responsible for it as the head of the race.
- b. The order of creation should have been man and woman obeying God, man leading the woman and being helped by her, and both man and woman ruling over the animals. Instead the created order at the Fall becomes the woman being ruled by an animal (listening to the serpent), the man following the woman (Eve gave the fruit to Adam, he didn't just take it himself) and being hindered by her, and both of them being disobedient to God.

### 4. Gen. 3:8-24

- a. Complementarians understand the Fall as not creating the male/female relational hierarchy, but rather as a disruption or corruption of that relationship that was already created in Gen. 2.
- b. It's interesting to note that God calls out to Adam in 3:9, indicating his responsibility as the head of the race and leader of the home.
- c. The curse on the woman, "Your desire will be for your husband, yet he will rule over you," indicates the woman will seek to usurp the man's place as head, and he will work to assert his rule over her. This may mean the man either abdicates his role as head of the woman, giving in to her desire to rule him, or he begins to abuse his right to be the head through harsh, cruel, exploitative domination of the woman.
- d. The sentence structure found in 3:16b is also found in 4:7, where Cain is told by God, "[Sin's] desire is for you, but you must rule over it." Sin's desire for Cain cannot be considered as something good - Eve's desire for her husband is also not considered as something good. Adam's rule over Eve is something that should happen, just as Cain's rule over sin is something he's told needs to happen. Of course, "rule" can have negative connotations, but not by necessity. Adam can be the head of Eve without being harsh, cruel, or exploitative.
- e. Adam is judged not only because he "ate from the tree about which [God] commanded [him], 'Do not eat from it,'" but also because "[he] listened to [his] wife," becoming submissive to her leading rather than fulfilling his role as her leader and as protector of the covenant with God.

### **C. Summation of Genesis 1-3.**

Genesis 1 shows that God creates Adam and Eve both in His image, giving them equal humanity, dignity and value. And yet they are created as male and female, indicating we should not be surprised if we see some differences based on gender. Genesis 2 shows that God creates Adam as the head over Eve in a relational hierarchy which results in Adam and Eve becoming one flesh (2:24) with nothing to be ashamed of even as Adam is the head of Eve. This is demonstrated by Adam being created first, by Adam being given the covenant, by Eve being created to be Adam's helper corresponding to him, and by Adam naming Eve. Genesis 3 shows that the Fall not only brought sin in general into the world but also specifically brought corruption to the proper hierarchical relationship between Adam and Eve. The curses on Adam and Eve are tied together to their now fractured relationship with one another. This fracture occurred in large part because Adam failed to function as the head or leader of Eve.

#### **IV. The primary apostolic texts (and a few others).**

**A.** There are several key texts in the NT which relate to complementarianism.

##### 1. Romans 5:12-21

The emphasis throughout these verses is on Adam and his sin. This relates to Adam, the man, being the head of creation. He is held responsible for the Fall.

V. 12 - "sin entered the world through on man."

V. 14 - "even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam's transgression."

V. 15 - "by one man's trespass."

V. 17 - "since by one man's trespass"

V. 19 - "through one man's disobedience."

Also note 1 Corinthians 15:22 - "For just as in Adam all die . . ."

##### 2. 1 Corinthians 11:1-16

V. 3 - "Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ."

"Head" in this verse means "authority over," not "source." (Cf. Eph. 1:22, 5:23; Col. 1:18, 2:10) If "head" here means "source," then we have man being the source of woman, in the sense of her being taken out of him - but we also have Christ being the source of every man, and God being the source of Christ. Thus, if "head" means "source" concerning man and woman, and how woman was created out of man, then we have every man being created out of Christ and Christ being created out of God. Man then becomes something other than a creation of dust, and Christ becomes a creation of God (Jehovah's Witnesses).

"The strongest lexical evidence suggests that while "kephale" is sometimes used of impersonal objects to mean "source" (e.g., the "head", i.e., "source" of a river) its predominate, if not exclusive, use as it relates to human beings is as "authority over," not "source." (CBMW, "Summaries of the Egalitarian and Complementarian Positions)

Some translations have "the head of a wife is her husband." (ESV) (The ESV switches between "wife" and "woman" in 1 Cor. 11, and never translates "man" as "husband" after v. 3.) This is because the same Greek word is used for "man" as for "husband," and the same Greek word is used for "woman" as for "wife." How these words are translated must be context driven. In context, why would Paul use the word to mean man in the first part of the verse, but then, without explanation, switch to husband in the second part? There is no indication here that marriage is under consideration. Also, in the context of the following verses in this chapter (7-9 & 11-12), Paul is talking about men and women in general, not husbands and wives. Thus the context here determines these words to be translated "man" and "woman," not "husband" and "wife."

This verse is a summary statement of headship, based upon the Trinity. God is head over Christ, Christ is head over man, man is head over woman.

Vv. 4,5 - Men and women may equally “pray” and “prophesy.” So there is no call for absolute silence in these matters. The difference is that when women do so they should have their heads covered. The principle for our purposes here is that there is differentiation in how men and women are to pray and prophesy, and this differentiation, the “covering,” emphasizes the order of creation. What the “covering” is and how it is to be applied is a topic for another time.

Vv. 7-9 - “A man should not cover his head, because he is the image and glory of God. So too, woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman came from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man.”

Note: Woman is not said to be made in the image of man. She is the “glory” of man, but, as we know from Genesis, made in the image of God.

From Genesis we conclude that woman is the glory of man because she was taken out of him and made for him as a corresponding helper. Paul draws on the order of creation before the Fall in this context of man being the head of woman, as well as the order found in the Trinity.

Vv. 11,12 - “In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, and man is not independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman, and all things come from God.”

In this understanding of order and hierarchy, it must be remembered that there is mutual dependence (complementarianism). Man is not better than woman. Woman is not man’s slave. In God’s design there is order and equality with differentiation.

### 3. 1 Timothy 2:11-15

Here “a woman” is to “learn quietly with full submission.” There is no allowance for “a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; instead, she is to remain quiet.”

Since women in the church can pray and prophesy, as Paul teaches in 1 Cor. 11, what is being addressed in this admonition to “learn quietly” and not “teach or have authority over a man”?

We might note several ideas in passing: women are to be in the congregation, learning - something not common for that age; women are not told not to teach because they are incompetent - many women in Scripture are very competent in the word; women are not told they may never teach - only in the context of the gathered church when taking authority over the men.

The context of this instruction is signaled by two phrases, one before, one after: “in every place” (2:8), and, “in God’s household” (3:15). This indicates the gathered church, wherever that church may gather to worship.

V. 12 is then teaching that when the church is gathered and there is authoritative teaching being given, the men in the church who have been gifted and chosen to do that authoritative teaching (as taught in other Scriptures, such as 1 Tim. 3) are to be the only ones doing it.

Vv. 13 & 14 - the reason for v. 12 is found in the garden of Eden, in Genesis 2 & 3. We are taken back to the temporal priority of Adam and the nature of what happened at the Fall. Being formed first establishes Adam's headship over the rest of creation, including Eve; and in Eve's sin she takes the initiative from Adam in being first to eat from the tree.

What is the point of this statement? Both the logic of this passage and the parallel in 1 Corinthians 11:3-10 make this clear: for Paul, the man's priority in the order of creation is indicative of the headship that man is to have over woman. The woman's being created after man, as his helper, shows the position of submission that God intended as inherent in the woman's relation to the man, a submission that is violated if a woman teaches doctrine or exercises authority over a man.

. . . verse 14, in conjunction with verse 13, is intended to remind the women at Ephesus that Eve was deceived by the serpent in the Garden (Genesis 3:13) precisely in taking the initiative over the man whom God had given to be with her and to care for her. In the same way, if the women at the church at Ephesus proclaim their independence from the men of the church, refusing to learn "in quietness and full submission" (verse 11), seeking roles that have been given to men in the church (verse 12), they will make the same mistake Eve made and bring similar disaster on themselves and the church. (Douglas Moo, from Chapter 9 of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, "What Does It Mean Not To Teach or Have Authority Over Men - 1 Timothy 2:11-15")

#### 4. 1 Corinthians 14:33b-40

Vv. 33b-35 - "As in all the churches of the saints, the women should be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but are to submit themselves, as the law also says. If they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home, since it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."

"Most of us, particularly women, have been taught to be super sensitive about gender injustice and equal opportunity. This sort of passage [1 Cor. 14:26-40] pushes all our buttons and sounds all our alarms, and our knee-jerk response is, 'You've got to be joking!'" God's Good Design, Claire Smith

Note: It isn't only women who are to be silent in 1 Cor. 14. In v. 28, if there is no interpreter for the tongues, then the one who wishes to speak in tongues is to keep silent. In v. 30, someone who is in the process of prophesying is to be silent if someone else is given another prophesy.

Also note: The same Paul who here admonishes women to silence gives allowance for them praying and prophesying in 1 Cor. 11.

So what are the reasons here in ch. 14 that Paul says women should be silent in the churches? If he teaches that women may pray and prophesy in church, how is it “disgraceful” or “shameful” (35) if they now speak in church? Why are they now “not permitted to speak” (34)?

The context of the prohibition is the judging of prophecies. In v. 29 we have, “Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should evaluate.” This evaluation, or judging process, is what is seen by complementarians as prohibited to women. This evaluation process would be seen as a time of authoritative teaching by the elders of the church concerning what resident or traveling prophets have spoken about. As Claire Smith states it, “The evaluation of prophecies was an authoritative activity that determined what was to be learned by the congregation from the prophecies people shared. While women were able to prophesy, they were not to take part in this authoritative activity but were to be in submission - by not asking questions and by keeping silent as the weighing process occurred.” (Smith, “God’s Good Design”)

The “law,” as Paul references it in v. 34, refers to the entire Old Testament and points back to the understanding of gender roles established there (cf. Rom. 3:19 for the law being a broad term). “The law” in v. 21 demonstrates this term isn’t to be relegated to the Torah, but to the entire Old Testament, since the quote there is taken from Isaiah 28:11. The “disgrace” of v. 35 would then be that of a woman attempting to usurp the place of a man, in the same way it is disgraceful for the roles of men and women to be reversed when a woman wears her hair like a man or a man wears his hair like a woman in 1 Cor. 11:6 & 14.

#### 5. Other texts.

There are many other texts brought into this discussion which do not bear as directly as those above. These are considered briefly below.

#### Galatians 3:27,28

These verses, sometimes the centerpiece of egalitarian arguments for church order, roles, and offices, say nothing about such topics. In context these verses are considering the union of all believers with Christ in salvation, which is solely by grace through faith. In that common union there are indeed no boundaries, no distinctions - ethnic (Jew or Greek), social (slave or free), or gender (male and female). We who are born again by the power of God “are all one in Christ Jesus.” Full and equal standing before God in Christ belongs to the entire family of God. This does not preclude differences of gender roles in the church.

#### Acts 2:17,18

These verses are said to demonstrate that women and men equally receive the Holy Spirit and equally prophesy. Complementarians have no argument with these ideas. Again, nothing is said here about the authoritative teaching roles in the gathered church. That women may pray and prophesy is certainly demonstrated from 1 Cor. 11.

## Various texts naming women.

Throughout the New Testament we find many women who are doing various ministry tasks. Some are hosting home church meetings, some are privately teaching new believers (including men), some are helping Paul in his work, some are prophesying. Again, complementarians have no issues with sisters in Christ functioning in these ways. None of these texts unambiguously state that these sisters held authoritative teaching positions in the local congregations or in apostolic leadership.

## **B. Summation of the considered apostolic texts.**

The two unambiguous teachings of the New Testament are that women are not to teach doctrine to men nor exercise authority over them. This is understood to be in the gathered, regular congregational life. This is not due to any kind of inferiority on the part of the women, nor to any kind of need for men to be domineering. Rather, it is based on the order of creation established in Genesis.

“In conclusion, men sometimes have gone farther than Scripture and suppressed the valuable ministry contributions of women. There are innumerable ministries with which a woman can become involved in order to further God’s kingdom on earth. The ministries women do become involved in, however, should be complementary and supportive of the male leadership in the church. Such a supportive ministry does not rule out every public ministry of women when men are present. . . . There are inevitably some gray areas in applying any basic principle of Scripture. Nevertheless, in my opinion, it is clear that Biblical writers consistently ascribe ultimate responsibility to men for the leadership of the church.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ch. 11.

“But the strongest position from which to address these problems [of marginalizing women] is one that takes biblically delineated gender roles seriously. With this starting point — that women cannot be given positions of teaching-with-authority (elders, or bishops, or however the polity arranges things in the particular denomination) — one can build a strong case for the ministry of women in all other capacities. . . . Women are encouraged to be active, verbal participants in the life of the church - teaching, exhorting, encouraging, and contributing in every way except in the office of elder (or wherever juridical authority rests in a particular church), where teaching and doctrine are judged according to the canonical deposit of truth, the Scriptures.” Kathy Keller, *Jesus, Justice, and Gender Roles; A Case for Gender Roles in Ministry*

“The pattern of male leadership and female submission that God first established [in Genesis 2] is to be the pattern for the Ephesian church. And the disruption of that pattern seen in the Fall is not to be repeated. The women are not to usurp the male leadership God has provided. Instead they are to accept willingly the God-given differences in gender responsibilities. They are to accept male leadership and express that in their attitude to learning and by not teaching or having authority over men. And I take it that Christian women today are to do the same. . . . The battle for women in our day is to accept God’s wisdom in this and be content with it, when our entire culture has taught us not to be. The battle for men, as it was in Genesis 3, is to step up to the sort of leadership Paul has in mind, when our entire culture insists that women are the real ‘go-to’ men, and that men and boys have little to contribute beyond being the butt of jokes.” Claire Smith, *God’s Good Design*

## **V. Some Old Testament considerations.**

### **A. Prophetesses.**

There are many prophetesses in the Old Testament. Miriam, Huldah, Deborah, Isaiah's wife, and some false prophetesses were all active. Deborah is often singled out as the prime example, since she functioned as a judge over Israel. But complementarians point out several things about Deborah's ministry as judge. She was not militarily active as other judges were; she gave priority of leadership to Barak; due to Barak's reluctance to go to battle without Deborah, the glory of the victory would not go to Barak but a woman - but Jael, not Deborah; Deborah did not exercise her judging in a public forum like other prophets, but instead gave private instruction under the palm tree of Deborah as people came to her.

Finally, prophecy and authoritative teaching are still distinguishable in the Old Testament. Old Testament prophets and prophetesses spoke with more authority than those in the New Testament, witnessed by the fact that Old Testament prophets who spoke in error were to be killed, while New Testament prophecies are to be judged and weighed and rejected if in error, but those prophesying are not killed. But the teaching office in the Old Testament was given to the priests, not the prophets or prophetesses. Malachi 2:1-8, Leviticus 10:8-11.

**B.** It should also be noted in connection with this that while there were prophetesses in Old Testament Israel, and even one ruling Queen, there were never any priestesses. In establishing His nation of chosen people, God could have done things any way He wanted. Certainly the pagan nations around Israel had priestesses. But God limited the priesthood to males. In the Old Testament there aren't even words for "priestess," or, "Levitess." There were daughters of priests, but they were simply part of the family. (Leviticus 21:9, 22:12,13)

## **VI. What about Jesus?**

**A.** Jesus mingled with, talked to, touched, taught, and welcomed many that others in His culture ignored, sidelined, or abused. Samaritans, political zealots, tax collectors, Gentiles, lepers, Pharisees, sinners, and women were all equally valuable in His eyes. By His teaching and actions Jesus broke many religious taboos of the day and went contrary to many culturally accepted norms. He was in many ways a revolutionary who cared not for humanity's self-made divisions. There are no truer words recorded in Scripture than those spoken by the disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians in Matthew 22:16 - "Teacher, we know that you are truthful and teach truthfully the way of God. You don't care what anyone thinks nor do you show partiality."

**B.** Just as God could have arranged things for His people in anyway He wished after bringing them out of Egypt, so too Jesus could have done anything He wished in forming His New Covenant church. Yet in His teaching we find nothing that would overthrow the understanding of the order of creation found in Genesis 2. While He welcomed women, used them as examples in His teaching, treated them with full respect as human beings, taught them, and received support from them, He chose (after spending all night in prayer) twelve men to be His apostles. It is difficult to imagine that Jesus, One who was so counter-cultural in so many ways, One who did not care for what anyone thought, would be so constrained by the culture of His day as to not be able to choose women to be His apostles.

## **VII. A comparison - Statements of faith and practice.**

### **A. CMC Statement of Theology: (Under the heading "Man.")**

"Man was created in the image of God, sinless, in perfect holiness and fellowship with God; as male and female, equal before God as persons and distinct in manhood and womanhood, with male responsibility for headship in the home and in the church; as a being of choice who willfully disobeyed God, bringing alienation, depravity, death, and eternal lostness to the human race through Adam's sin." (Note 20: "This statement is in harmony with the New Testament teaching that male and female as believers have equal access to God through Christ and are of equal standing in God's creative and redemptive plan, with difference of function between men and women in leadership ministries in the church and in the home.")

### **B. CMC Statement of Practice: (Under the heading "The Roles of Men and Women.")**

#### "The Roles of Husband and Wife

We believe that man and woman were created with equal dignity and value before God. Adam and Eve equally reflected the image of God. God ordained distinctions in masculine and feminine roles as part of the order established in creation. As the head of the wife, man was created to provide loving and sacrificial leadership. The wife was created to respond with intelligent submission. Before the fall of humanity into sin, as recorded in Genesis 3, these distinctions were beautiful, harmonious and complementary. This fall introduced distortions into the relationship between men and women. Headship gave way to tyranny or passivity. Submission gave way to usurpation or servility. In Christ, men and women are restored to their God-given roles.

Genesis 1:26-27; 2:18; 3:1-7, 12, 16; 1 Corinthians 11:7-9; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Timothy 2:12-14; 1 Peter 3:1-7

#### The Roles of Men and Women in the Church

We believe redemption in Christ gives men and women equal share in the blessings of the Christian life in the church. Both men and women are equipped for ministry by the Spirit of God who imparts to them the gifts of the Spirit. A distinction in masculine and feminine roles is indicated by the principle of male headship, established in creation and continued as part of God's redemptive order in the church. To honor the principle of male headship, CMC reserves ministerial license and ordination for men. Within congregations, other roles of governance and/or teaching may be reserved for men. The spiritual giftedness of men and women should be sought out and cultivated for the common good of the church.

1 Corinthians 11:3-16; Galatians 3:28; 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 3:2; Titus 1:5; 2:3-5; 1 Peter 3:7

## Submission to God's Order

Both men and women are called to respectful submission to God's established order of governance in the home and church. As Christ humbly submitted to His role, so must man and woman. Christ submits to God the Father. Man submits to Christ. Woman submits to man. In the eternal and perfect relationship between the Father and the Son, love and submission are inseparable. So in all Christian relationships, submission and love were never meant to be separated. While Paul exhorts wives to submit to their husbands, he also exhorts husbands to love their wives as Christ sacrificially loved the church. This attitude of sacrificial love should be in the heart of church leaders and laity, husband and wives, parents and children. Denying the will of self and submitting to the will of God, brings all believers, men and women, leaders and laity, into times of mutual submission.

Submission is primarily an attitude of the heart and spirit. This attitude may be symbolized externally by the practice of men baring their heads and women covering their heads for prayer and worship. We accept the integrity of brothers and sisters who have differing views of these practices and affirm their sincere desire to be faithful to the Lord and His Word.

John 6:38; Philippians 2:6-8; 1 Corinthians 11:3-12"

### C. Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective

#### 1. (Under the heading "Article 6: Creation and Calling of Human Beings")

Commentary #2: "According to Genesis 1:26-27, God created both man and woman in the divine image. Both are equal in relation to God and are created for relationship with each other. Woman's relation to God is not derived from man, and man's relation to God is not derived from woman. Genesis 2:18 describes woman as man's "helper," but this does not imply one-sided subordination. The same Hebrew word is most often used for God as "help" or "helper" (for example, in Deut. 33:7, 26; Ps. 33:20; 54:4; 70:5; 115:9-11). *The rule of man over woman is a result of sin (Gen. 3:16) and is therefore not an acceptable order among the redeemed (Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 7:4; 11:11-12).* The renewal of humanity in Jesus Christ restores both woman and man to the divine image. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon both men and women directly in accord with the prophecy of Joel (Acts 2:1-18; see also Acts 1:12-14). In the community of faith, Gentiles have the same status as Jews, slaves as free, and women as men (2 Cor. 6:18). They are called to live in unity with each other (Gal. 3:25-28) and in mutual subjection to each other (Eph. 5:21-6:9)." (Emphasis mine)

#### 2. (Under the heading "Article 15: Ministry and Leadership")

". . . The church calls, trains, and appoints gifted men and women to a variety of leadership ministries on its behalf. These may include such offices as pastor, deacon, and elder as well as evangelists, missionaries, teachers, conference ministers, and overseers. . . ."

**D. Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) International - Statement on Men, Women and Biblical Equality**

(Under the heading "Creation.")

2. The Bible teaches that woman and man were created for full and equal partnership. The word 'helper' (ezer) used to designate woman in Genesis 2:18 refers to God in most instances of Old Testament usage (e.g. 1 Sam 7:12; Ps 121:1-2). Consequently the word conveys no implication whatsoever of female subordination or inferiority.

5. The Bible teaches that the rulership of Adam over Eve resulted from the Fall and was therefore not a part of the original created order. Genesis 3:16 is a prediction of the effects of the Fall rather than a prescription of God's ideal order.

(Under the heading "Community.")

10. The Bible teaches that, in the New Testament economy, women as well as men exercise the prophetic, priestly and royal functions (Acts 2:17-18, 21:9; 1 Cor 11:5; 1 Peter 2:2-10; Rev 1:6, 5:10). Therefore, the few isolated texts that appear to restrict the full redemptive freedom of women must not be interpreted simplistically and in contradiction to the rest of Scripture, but their interpretation must take into account their relation to the broader teaching of Scripture and their total context (1 Cor 11:2-16, 14:33-36; 1 Tim 2:9-15). (Emphasis mine)