

A Biblical Understanding of Complementarianism
Toward a Biblical Theology of Equality and Authority

I. The Central Question

This week’s message addressed a central question: *Does the Bible, in its clear and normative teaching establish unique aspects of primary leadership in marriage and in the church that are restricted to biblically qualified men?*

This question is not asking whether the Bible teaches that men are superior and women inferior to one another—the Bible clearly states men and women were created with equal value, standing, blessing, and participation in the promises of God to Abraham (Gen. 1:27-28; Gal. 3:28) and are co-heirs of the grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7).

Nor is this question implying that somehow women are less qualified or equipped than men to participate in **vocational or spiritual ministry**.

This question is asking whether the Bible establishes and restricts certain aspects of primary leadership and spiritual authority to qualified men in marriage and in the church.

Q: How likely is it that our initial reaction to this question might be shaped more by our current culture or surroundings than it is shaped by Scripture?

Q: What are some of the cultural pressures that make it important to go to Scripture for clarity on questions about the biblical roles of men and women?

II. The Contrasting Views

Complementarians believe that **primary responsibility** and **spiritual authority** to lead in marriage/home, and to teach authoritatively/ spiritually govern the Church has been assigned and restricted to biblically qualified men.



The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood is a flagship complementarian organization and here is how they define their mission:

“The mission of The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood is to set forth the teachings of the Bible about the complementary differences between men and women, created equally in the image of God, because these teachings are essential for obedience to Scripture and for the health of the family and the church.”

*Egalitarians believe that biblically qualified women can lead equally with biblically qualified men in the **home** and in the **church**.*

The Center for Biblical Equality is a flagship egalitarian organization and here is how they define their mission:

“CBE exists to promote biblical justice and community by educating Christians that the Bible calls women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership in the home, church, and world.”

So when we look at Scripture, who has it right?

There are four primary terms in Scripture that help shed light on the Biblical answer to this debate.

III. Four Key Terms

“Helper”--Genesis 2:18

Help: To come alongside and supply what is lacking or what is missing that is necessary for the success of the mission.

“Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.’” (NASB)

Q: In Genesis 2:18, what is the Scriptural evidence that Eve’s role was a complementary role to help him fulfill the role and responsibility God had assigned to him?

“Submission”—1 Peter 3:1; Ephesians 5:21–24; Colossians 3:18–19

Submit: To arrange oneself properly toward others God has placed over me.

1 Peter 3:1 *“Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives;”*

Ephesians 5:21–24 *“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.”*

Colossians 3:18–19 *“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.”*

Q: In the verses above, how does our relationship to the Lord inform our response to the Biblical teachings regarding the different but complementary roles of men and women in marriage and the home?

“Head”—Ephesians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 11:2–4

Head: Does not mean “source” or origin” as in the “head” of the Jordan River; in these contexts it clearly means “leader,” as for instance Jesus is the “leader” of the Church.

Ephesians 5:23 *“For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.” (ESV)*

1 Corinthians 11:2–4 *“Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head.” (ESV)*

Q: Practically speaking, what kinds of obligations does the Bible’s teaching on these issues place upon Christian men?

Q: How can a godly man learn to provide the kind of loving, sacrificial leadership God requires of him?

Authority—1 Timothy 2:11–15

Authority to teach or preach God’s Word from on “office” or “position” that is binding on believers.

In a church/religious instruction context:

“...I do not permit a woman to teach [men] or to exercise authority over a man...” (ESV)

Q: In context, does this text ground the issue of authority in shifting cultural values or in creational norms?

Q: In light of other passages of Scripture, what are some appropriate ways women can be involved in aspects of local church ministry under the appropriate spiritual leadership of godly men?

Q: How does your personal understanding of these four words in Scripture line up with the presentation in chapel?

Summary:

Throughout the Scriptures, God has always honored, valued, and blessed the role of godly women. **However, the clear and plain teaching of Scripture establishes and restricts certain aspects of leadership and responsibility in marriage and in God’s church to biblically qualified men.** Nor is this restriction merely cultural accommodation necessary for a particular time and in particular culture for the Gospel’s sake.

This restriction did not come about as a consequence to the Fall—it was designed into the very creation of Adam and Eve. It was corrupted after the Fall—men would be tempted and oriented to leading women in harsh and tyrannical ways—women would be tempted to usurp and resist the leadership and authority of their husband.

Jesus—the author, creator, and sustainer of both old and new creations—affirmed, confirmed, and restored the original created order so that, ***as His new creation, men are to lead by loving service and women are to joyfully support that leadership in their home and in the church!***

Q: How can this teaching change your life or disposition right now?

Q: What does “complementarianism” mean to you or how would you put it in your own words?

Q: In a serious dating relationship, how important is it to you to understand what the other person thinks about some of these teachings of Scripture?
