



## **God's beautiful and balanced design for male and female**

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God designed his creation to reflect perfect beauty and balance. Nowhere is the wonder of this beautiful and balanced design more clearly evident than in God's creation of human beings as male and female (Genesis 1:26-28).

God created male and female to share equal status and equal importance before him by making both male and female in his image (Genesis 1:27). Yet God did not create male and female to be interchangeable duplicates of each other but designed male and female to live in an interdependent and complementary partnership.

This partnership is interdependent because God created male and female to need one another (Genesis 2:18; 1 Corinthians 11:11) as we care for our Creator's world (Genesis 1:26). This partnership is complementary because God created male and female not to duplicate each other but to complete each other. God designed the male to be a reflection of his love as a servant head (1 Corinthians 11:3; Mark 10:45). God designed the female to be a reflection of his love as a servant helper (1 Corinthians 11:8,9). These realities provide the basis for God's design for the partnership of male and female.

The beauty and balance of this interdependent and complementary partnership are most evident in his design for marriage and family. Yet every relationship in which male and female partner in God's world is blessed when we reflect the beauty and balance of our partnership.

Ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin, the beauty and balance of this interdependent and complementary partnership have been distorted by sin (Genesis 3:16-20). Males sin against God's design by distorting servant leadership into self-centered dominance (Mark 10:42-45) or by abdicating responsibility (1 Corinthians 4:2). Females sin against God's design by resenting submission to authority or by claiming authority God has not given. Society's attempt to blur or erase God's design of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female only deepens the confusion (Romans 1:18-32).

Even in a sinful world, fallen human beings still appreciate elements of God's creative design (Romans 1:32) in the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. But only trusting in God's saving grace in the life, death, and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ, do we find both forgiveness for our sinful distortions of God's design and the empowerment to live out the true beauty of God's balanced design. The restoration of harmony between the Creator and his creatures in Jesus enables believers to celebrate and cherish the beautiful balance of our partnership as male and female. No conversation of God's beautiful and balanced design for male and female is complete without a clear understanding of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

With this understanding of God's grace in Christ, we offer this confession of God's design of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female.

### **God's beautiful and balanced design: Created male and female in his image**

1. In boundless wisdom and love, God designed male and female as the two distinct biological sexes in his world (Genesis 1:27).
2. In God's beautiful and balanced design, both male and female were created in his image of perfect righteousness (Genesis 1:27). This gave Adam and Eve equal status in their primary calling as God's dearly loved children (Galatians 3:26-29).
3. The gift of God's image also enabled male and female to share the privileged responsibility of serving their loving Creator by caring for his world (Genesis 1:27,28).
4. God designed male and female to have distinct responsibilities. Male and female were to live out their partnership in specific relationships throughout God's world. God designed

the male to be a servant head (1 Corinthians 11:3) and the female to be a servant helper (Genesis 2:18).

5. God designed the male to exercise authority selflessly as one facet of his servant leadership for the benefit of that partnership (Matthew 20:25-28). God designed the female to submit selflessly to that authority as one facet of her servant support for the benefit of that partnership (1 Corinthians 11:3).
6. Authority is not a higher status but a gift and responsibility from God to give direction unselfishly for the good of those under the care of that head (Matthew 8:8,9). Submission is not a lower status but a gift and responsibility from God to provide selfless support and to respect authority to give direction.
7. As with everything that comes from the loving hand of our heavenly Father (James 1:17), authority and submission are good gifts to be exercised as God intended. In God's beautiful and balanced design, there is no higher or lower status, no room for sinful dominance or oppression (Mark 10:42-45). God's gifts of authority and submission exist in beautiful balance in the loving interrelationship of Christ and his church (Ephesians 5:22-28).
8. In establishing the partnership of head and helper, God intended both male and female to use our God-given gifts as we work together in various relationships in this world. This permits us to be a blessing to God's whole creation (1 Peter 4:10).
9. This partnership is interdependent since God designed male and female to function most completely when serving together (Genesis 2:18; 1 Corinthians 11:11).
10. This partnership is also complementary since God fashioned male and female differently to complete, not duplicate, each other (Genesis 2:4-7,18-22).
11. The beautiful balance in which this partnership functions is seen most intimately in God's design for a male and a female within their marriage. That partnership of marriage, along with the blessing of having and raising children within marriage, are foundational in God's design of male and female to bless and care for his creation (Genesis 1:28).
12. While this interdependent and complementary partnership finds its fullest expression in the institution of marriage (Genesis 2:23-25), male and female find great blessing as we seek to reflect this interdependent and complementary partnership in every relationship in God's world.

## **The image lost in the fall**

13. With the fall into sin, both male and female lost the perfect image of God (Romans 3:9-20). Being out of harmony with their Creator, male and female also lost a correct understanding of the beauty and balance of their partnership.
14. This partnership suffers confusion and abuse because of the fallen sinful nature of male and female (Genesis 3:16-19). Those called to serve as head neglect their responsibility to lead or abuse authority for personal advantage. Those called to serve as helper resent submission to authority or seek to assert authority God has not given.

## **The image restored in Christ**

15. God so loved fallen humanity that he sent his Son to reestablish peace between himself and sinners (John 3:16). Jesus, by his perfect life and death as the substitute for all sinners, has earned the declaration that God is reconciled to the human race (Romans 5:18; 2 Corinthians 5:19). As the Holy Spirit empowers people to trust in Christ's life and death in our place, male and female revel in our equal status as dearly loved children of God and co-heirs of his eternal gifts (Galatians 3:26-29, 4:4,5).
16. As male and female grow in our understanding of God's gracious love in Christ, by which he has remade Christians in his image (Ephesians 4:20-24), we also grow in our appreciation for the beauty of God's beautiful and balanced design for us in the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female.

## **God's beautiful and balanced design lived out in our relationships**

17. God has woven his beautiful and balanced design for male and female deeply into every human being (Genesis 1, 2; Psalm 139). Since God's design for us as either male or female is fundamental to our God-given humanity (Genesis 1:27), this interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female is a rich blessing wherever male and female partner in various relationships in his creation.

18. God's Word provides few specific applications for exactly how male and female will live out our interdependent and complementary partnership in our many different relationships in his world. Where the Spirit has worked faith, God treats believers as mature sons and daughters in Christ and not as minor children.
19. By providing an unchanging principle with few specific applications, God leaves room for Spirit-worked faith to bear fruit in ways that make the most of his design of male and female and reflect each relationship in which they interact. While the principle never changes, applications may. Applications of the unchanging principle in each relationship may look different from setting to setting, from culture to culture, and from age to age.
20. God's beautiful and balanced design for male and female finds its fullest and most intimate expression in Christian marriage (Genesis 2:23-25). The unsurpassed beauty of this relationship is honored as a living picture of Christ and the church. The marriage of husband and wife as head and helper reflects the union of Christ, the Bridegroom, and the church as his Bride (Ephesians 5:22-33). As co-heirs of God's gracious gift of life (1 Peter 3:1-7), a Christian husband and wife serve each other and their family. They produce blessings that go far beyond their own home and last for generations.
21. The husband lives out his calling as head in selfless leadership that loves and cares for his wife just as Christ loves and cares for his Bride, the church (Ephesians 5:25-30). As the Christ-like head of the home, the husband uses his gifts to serve his bride and household, and he encourages his wife to use her gifts for their marriage, their home, and all those influenced by their household (Proverbs 31:10-31).
22. The wife lives out her calling as helper as she offers selfless support for her husband. Part of that support is submitting to her husband's God-given leadership as the church submits to Christ and trusts his leadership (Ephesians 5:22-24,33). As the church-like helper in that home, she uses her gifts to serve her husband and household, and she encourages her husband to use his God-given gifts for their marriage, their home, and all those influenced by their household.
23. Neither a wife's calling as helper nor a husband's calling as head ever includes consenting to or demanding what is sinful since our Savior always remains our ultimate Head (Acts 5:29).

24. God designed the daily spiritual nurture of the household as a shared task. God calls the husband and father to take the lead in that nurture (Ephesians 6:4). However, this task may of necessity fall entirely to the wife and mother where there is no believing husband or father.
25. God's beautifully balanced design of male and female also guides and informs us as we partner in Christ's church. Scripture provides few applications of the principle within the family of faith (1 Timothy 2; 1 Corinthians 11; 1 Corinthians 14).
26. When authority is exercised over both adult men and women in the church, God entrusts that responsibility to men and instructs them to exercise it in Christ-like sacrificial love (1 Timothy 2:11-13; Mark 10:43-45). Scripture instructs qualified men to serve as authoritative teachers of his Word when that teaching is over both adult males and females in the church (1 Timothy 2:12).
27. Both male and female share the privilege of serving as Christ's royal priests in our daily lives as we encourage and admonish one another with the Word (Colossians 3:15-17) and as we confess our hope to an unbelieving world (Colossians 4:6).
28. The distinct callings of head and helper guide and encourage the use of the gifts of male and female in our relationships in the church. Scripture shows God using the gifts of both male and female in ways that testify to this interdependent and complementary partnership (Romans 16:1-16).

### **God's beautiful and balanced design lived out in faith, not fear**

29. Because Christians are simultaneously saint and sinner until heaven, believers will encounter challenges wherever we seek to live out the beautiful balance of God's design for male and female, even when partnering with fellow Christians in marriage and church.
30. Determining the wisest path forward can be particularly challenging when Christians step beyond the gospel-empowered settings of Christian home and church. In such settings, the Christian is confronted with an unbelieving world that either ignores the partnership of head and helper or so distorts the partnership to make it seem repulsive.

31. In our callings (vocations) in the world, Christians will seek the best way to show love for God and neighbor when multiple good principles of God appear to be in conflict (Esther 4-5). That apparent conflict does not flow from any defect in God's creation. It flows from human sinfulness distorting everything in God's world.
32. When Christians wrestle with situations in which multiple good principles appear to conflict, we know the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership is a good gift of God (James 1:17). However, this principle is not the only biblical principle to consider, and its application in every situation does not supersede all other biblical principles directing love for God and neighbor.
33. God is delighted when faithful Christians seek to be fully engaged in the world, as we remember that Christ has declared us to be salt and light in an unbelieving world (Matthew 5:13,14). As believers seek to be that salt and light, we desire to reflect everything that is a part of God's beautiful and balanced design for his world, including the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female.
34. Living out our vocations in an unbelieving world, we often find ourselves in challenging situations that call for difficult decisions as we seek to honor the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. As salt and light, Christians may arrive at different—but equally faithful—applications of the same principle.
35. Because of responsibilities in many God-given callings in life, Christian females may find themselves carrying out vocations that place them in positions of authority over males, and Christian males may find themselves carrying out vocations that place them under the authority of females.
36. As Christians grapple with such issues in our vocations and communities, we remember that our confidence remains in the abounding grace of our perfect Savior, not in our ability to arrive at the perfect decision in every situation. We thank God for the privilege amid such challenging decisions to seek counsel from other mature Christians to avoid being deceived by our own hearts (Jeremiah 17:9).
37. Christians want to deal with our fellow sinner-saints in love. We want to avoid rushing to judge applications made by other Christians who also strive to love God and neighbor in God-pleasing vocations (Romans 14:1-10, John 8:7). We understand that our applications

are often imperfect, but we learn anew each day to appreciate God's grace in Jesus (Lamentations 3:22,23).

38. Christians delight in the beauty and balance of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female, but we cannot compel outward conformity in an unbelieving world (1 Corinthians 5:9,10). God gave his Word to turn hearts to repentance and faith in Jesus and to empower believers to be salt and light in a dying world. Living as salt and light in our vocations, Christians trust God to provide opportunities to speak to those who ask about the hope in Christ that fills us (1 Peter 3:15).

## **What we affirm and reject on the basis of our confession**

1. We affirm the blessing of scriptural narratives that show males and females using their gifts at various times and in various ways. We reject the attempt to set such narrative passages in opposition to passages that establish God's unchanging will for male and female.
2. We affirm that male and female enjoy equal status before God as his children in Jesus (Galatians 3:26-28). We reject the attempt to use our equal status to cancel God's interdependent and complementary design for male and female. The New Testament directs applications of this principle to believers (1 Corinthians 11, Ephesians 5) who are urged to express our freedom in Christ by delighting in God's created design, not by disregarding it.
3. We affirm that God announced after the fall that the interdependent and complementary partnership of head and helper would groan under sin's weight (Genesis 3). We reject the teaching that the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female was established only after the fall. Scripture returns to Eden's perfection (Genesis 1, 2) when applying the principle (1 Corinthians 11; Ephesians 5; 1 Timothy 2).
4. We affirm that marriage is the most complete and intimate expression of the partnership of male and female. We reject the attempt to limit application of the principle only to relationships in the home, or only to relationships in the home and the church, since male and female remain his uniquely designed creatures wherever we live and serve him.



5. We affirm the importance of knowing not only what Scripture says but also to whom it speaks. We reject the teaching that the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female is intended only for some people, only for some periods of history, or only for limited areas of a believer's life. Scripture grounds every application of the principle in God's beautiful and balanced design for male and female (Genesis 1, 2; 1 Corinthians 11; Ephesians 5; 1 Timothy 2).
6. We affirm that applications of biblical principles may be culturally conditioned and may change. We reject any abuse of Scripture that fails to distinguish between unchanging principles and potentially changing applications that Scripture may describe (1 Corinthians 11).
7. We affirm that within his church God assigns responsibility for the authoritative teaching of his Word as a key application of this principle. We reject the teaching that the exercise of authority in selfless leading is limited only to instruction in the Word; no such limitation is expressed or implied in Scripture.
8. We affirm headship as a good gift of God and make applications in situations where authority, as Scripture defines it, is clearly at work. We reject as an over-application of headship the teaching that authority is always present even when there is no clear evidence of it being exercised.
9. We affirm that God has called all believers, both male and female, to a mutual service to one another. We reject as a misreading of Ephesians 5:21 the teaching of a mutual submission between male and female.
10. We affirm the reality in a sinful world that authority can often be abused. We reject overreacting to such abuses by removing authority from the biblical concept of leadership or by rejecting the authority of those who lead imperfectly.
11. We affirm that God wove the beautiful and balanced design of head and helper into his creation of male and female. His design incorporates both authority and submission. We reject the teaching that every male must always be recognized as an authoritative head over every female in every setting (e.g. Ephesians 6:1; Titus 2:5). Authority is entrusted by God within specific relationships. We reject as an exaggeration any understanding of this principle in terms of authority alone. Authority does not operate autonomously.

12. We affirm that the principle of head and helper is God's beautiful and balanced gift, and it is meant to be applied in all relationships where male and female partner in God's world. We reject broad, rigid, and arbitrary applications that do not consider that customs and practices reflecting this principle may change across settings, cultures, and centuries.
13. We affirm Paul's encouragement in 1 Corinthians 14 that "women should remain silent in the churches" as a specific application to authoritative teaching in an assembly of adult males and females. We reject the prohibition of all speaking by women in every gathering of Christ's church. Such a prohibition treats an application as if it were the principle itself and overrides other clear Scripture (1 Corinthians 11:5; Colossians 3:16).
14. We affirm that applications of the principle may differ from setting to setting, culture to culture, and from age to age. We reject any application which by its very nature undermines or nullifies the principle.

### **God's beautiful and balanced design: Closing encouragement**

In his beautiful and balanced design for male and female, God blesses his entire creation. Males and females are equally valued creatures of a loving Creator, masterfully created to partner with each other. As believing men and women live out this interdependent and complementary partnership, we find countless ways to be the blessing to others that God designed us to be.

In this statement we seek to honor our heavenly Father. We are believers in Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit has taught us to trust God as giving only good and perfect gifts (James 1:17). Even where we struggle to apply the principle, we do so with confidence that the One "who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood" (Revelation 1:5b) is always at work with his forgiving grace to bless us and make us a blessing to many. Therefore, we regard the interdependent and complementary partnership of head and helper not as a burden to avoid but as a gracious gift to cherish.