



Male and female he created them

A Bible study on God's loving gift of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female

Lesson #1: Shared gifts belonging to male and female in creation

Introduction

God's one great thought. That's what our spiritual forefather, August Pieper, called our triune God's plan of creating human beings to live in a loved and loving fellowship with him and with one another. In multiple ways the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2 breathes God's eager delight that led up to the pinnacle moment of creation as God uniquely fashioned Adam and Eve. Those events of the sixth day of creation were moments of the greatest fatherly delight for God. That was not true because of what he would gain, but because of what in love he was giving them.

It is this glorious giving of such awesome gifts to human beings in creation—and the gracious re-gifting of those gifts in Christ—that will be the focus of our first two lessons. In this first lesson we will see gifts male and female share (marking them as equal in loved status as his children). Then, in our second lesson we will see gifts that are unique to male and female (marking them as anything but duplicates of each other but glorious and wonderful interdependent complements to each other).

May that which filled God with delight in his creating fill us with wonder and delight as we study it!

Part 1: Creation in God's image

Quickly scan Genesis 1:1-25 as Moses' inspired words record God's creation of the universe as it moves from being "formless and void" to beautiful and well-ordered perfection.

➤ Read Genesis 1:26-28

Here we reach the pinnacle of God's creating activity as he creates the human beings for whose benefit all had been created.

Where in Moses' inspired account do you see testimony to God's delighting in creating human beings as the crown and focus of his entire creating activity?

Notable in that list is the first thing God mentions as Moses pictures God taking counsel with himself as he is about to create human beings. It is the creation of both male and female in his image.

Clearly, since God is spirit (John 4:24) and not flesh and bones as we are (other than the second person of the Trinity who became and remains our true brother as well as our God!), the image of God isn't found in something physical. Since Scripture paints the image as lost in the fall and restored in Christ, some of the most helpful passages for grasping the image of God are those that describe the difference between the sinful nature we were born with and the new self the Spirit planted in us when he brought us to faith. In passages such as Ephesians 4:17-24 and Colossians 3:5-14, the apostle Paul portrays for us how the new self "is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Colossians 3:10).

Here's how a father of our church, Carl Lawrenz, defined that gift of the image:

"True knowledge of God as the source of every blessing was a part of the divine image in which man was created. . . . [A]ll thoughts he entertained and the conclusions he reached agreed with God's thoughts. . . . The divine image consisted also in this: man's feelings and emotions, his organs of evaluation, were in complete harmony with God's evaluation of things. Man found joy and delight in that which pleased God. Man's will—all his impulses, desires, and actions—was likewise in complete harmony with God's holy will. . . . Expressed negatively we can say that they were without sin." (*A Commentary on Genesis 1-11*, pp. 75,76)

➤ **Read Genesis 2:18-25**

In these verses, where can you see the beauty of the gift of God's image in Adam's thoughts and actions? Look for where you see Adam functioning as a beautiful mirror of his Creator in his understanding (thinking God's thoughts after him), emotion (loving the good God loves and hating the evil God hates), and will (acting in conformity with God's will).

Part 2: Perfect peace (fellowship) with God as his perfectly loved and cared for children

This gift of the image carried with it a double glorious purpose and therefore two additional gifts. God's fashioning of male and female in his image enabled them to enjoy perfect peace

(fellowship) with God. God and his perfect creatures existed in perfect harmony. Adam and Eve knew they were God’s wonderfully crafted and perfectly loved, image-bearing children. That enabled them to live in confident trust in their Creator’s ongoing loving provision. They knew perfectly the reality of the often-repeated refrain: “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever” (Psalm 118:1).

➤ ***Read Genesis 3:8***

Here there seems to be a glimpse of a concrete way perfect human beings had enjoyed the gift of peace and harmony with their Creator. The glimpse comes in a strange place. After Adam and Eve have fallen, they hear the sound of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. They hide—giving evidence of having lost the image and its accompanying gift of trusting peace and harmony with their God!

What does this strongly suggest as we note that Adam and Eve knew immediately that the sound they heard was the LORD taking some tangible form to meet with them?

In our fallen state, it is hard for us even to imagine what it was like to possess the image and its accompanying gift of a perfectly trusting and loving relationship with God. Yet, in Christ, this two-fold gift is restored to us. Jesus Christ, as true eternal God, is the essential and eternal “image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). As such he took on flesh to live perfectly in our place (the image of God lived out by our true brother) and die in our place (the judgment taken for humanity’s throwing away the gift of the image). In Christ, God has declared the world righteous in his sight (the image restored). As the Spirit brings us to faith in Christ, we taste again the gift of peace with God that Adam and Eve once knew (the gift of fellowship with God restored as well). “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith in this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1,2). While it will be heaven before we grasp perfectly the restoration of the image of God and the fellowship with God that comes with it, yet it is no less perfectly our possession already now than it was Adam and Eve’s in the garden.

As we ponder the wonder of these first two gifts (the image of God and with it fellowship with him) given to male and female, how do we see the utter foolishness of any thought of earning our way into favor with God?

Part 3: The privilege of being God's visible representatives on earth

The gift of the image not only brought along with it a vertical gift of fellowship with God, but that gift also equipped Adam and Eve for the gift of serving as God's visible representatives on earth. While God could have done everything that was needed to care for his world and his creatures—and indeed God alone enables the entire universe to keep functioning—God was delighted to entrust much of that care to the crown of his creation.

While the vertical gift (fellowship with God) that comes along with the image of God is more implied than stated in the creation account, it is this horizontal gift (serving as God's visible representatives in their love and care for his world and each other) that is most fully expressed. We saw it already in what God said as he took counsel with himself about the creation of human beings (Genesis 1:26) and in the blessing God then spoke over Adam and Eve when he had created them (Genesis 1:28,29).

Why was the gift of the image to human beings so important for the living out of this gift of being God's visible representatives on earth?

How does Adam and Eve's perfect trust in their Creator's love and care for them (that gift of a perfect relationship with God that came with the image) powerfully impact their living out being God's representatives as they cared for his world and one another?

When male and female lost the image in the fall, and with the loss of that image also lost trust in God's goodness to them, how did that also utterly distort any proper understanding of this gift as well?

➤ *Read 2 Corinthians 5:14,15*

How does the restoration of fellowship with God in Christ as the perfectly loved and cared for children of our heavenly Father also strengthen us once again to live out the gift of being God's representatives on earth?

There is one key difference, however, between the restored gift of fellowship with God and the restored gift of serving as God's loved representatives on earth. The gift of fellowship with God

comes to us full and complete as a declaration of God in Christ that the Spirit teaches us to believe. That is the truth of our justification. It is ours as a complete and perfect gift (though it will be heaven before we fully grasp its wonder)!

But Scripture speaks about the restoration of the gift of being glimpses of God's love and compassion and protection in this life as something that is an ongoing part of our growth in sanctification.

➤ *Read Colossians 3:10*

How does Paul signal in this verse that our lives of living as glimpses of God's love and compassion in this life is a "work in progress" in us?

This gift of being God's visible representatives on earth—given first in creation and so gloriously restored day by day in us in Christ by the Spirit's power—is called the doctrine of vocation. God calls human beings to be glimpses of his love and kindness in all the various callings that he gives them in life. While even unbelievers without realizing it are channels of God's love and kindness when they live in their vocations, only those who have been called to faith find the joy of grasping this reality that Adam and Eve once knew perfectly and, until the fall, lived perfectly!

So, we have seen that God gave three astounding gifts to both male and female in creation. They were both created in his image. That gift of the image also brought with it two closely related gifts. Male and female lived in perfect fellowship and peace with their Creator, and they also both served as his visible representatives who would care for the world with God's own love and compassion. Though lost in the fall, those same three gifts are given back to us in Christ! Therefore, both in our creation and in our re-creation in Christ, male and female share these three gifts in equal measure.

Why is it so critical to how we interact with one another to ponder our sharing of these three gifts as male and female?



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Lesson #2: Unique gifts belonging to male and female in creation

Introduction

“You can be anything you set your mind to being!” That is an encouragement that some parents might give to their children. It sounds so affirming and empowering. And there is a grain of truth there when it comes to being careful not to discourage children from developing as fully as possible their God-given gifts.

But might there also be more than a bit of the hiss of the ancient serpent at work to deceive in those words? The goal of this life is not to make ourselves into whatever our hearts want to be. The goal of life is to discover how God has uniquely shaped and fashioned and gifted each one of us and to discover how we can best live that out to the glory of his loving name and for the benefit of those he puts around us.

We spent lesson #1 noting what male and female have in common (created in his image, gifted with fellowship with God, privileged to be his representatives in the world—all gifts given back to us also in Jesus). But now we turn our attention to what is unique about us as male and female. We will seek to explore the gift God had in mind when from eternity he determined to shape and fashion those he created in his image into two unique genders, male and female.

So, having reveled in the glory of the gifts shared by male and female in lesson one, we now turn back to Genesis 1 and 2 to delight also in our unique gifts. Here too we will find gifts no less wise and loving!

Part 1: The gift of complementarity not duplication

It is fascinating to note that the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 makes no mention of any of God's other living creatures being created male and female. While that is certainly true, the inspired text does not call attention to that created reality until the account of the flood when having both male and female along on the ark was necessary for the preserving of each kind of animal (Genesis 7:2,3,9). Contrast that with this reality in that same creation account: no sooner has God announced his intention of creating human beings (1:26) than he immediately makes it

clear that part of his eternal delight was to craft us this way: “male and female he created them” (1:27).

What conclusions might we draw as we notice this immediate and prominent mention of human beings being created “male and female”?

Remember, as we read Genesis 1 and 2, that these are the foundational narratives in which God is revealing patterns woven into his creation that will impact this world and his human beings for as long as this world exists.

➤ ***Read Genesis 2:7-9,15-25***

In Genesis 2, God gives us the equivalent of a slow-motion replay of his creation of human beings that was handled more quickly in chapter 1.

What inspired-for-our-pondering-and-learning details in these verses from Genesis 2 are begging us to notice and learn about the uniqueness of male and female in God’s created design?

We have the strongest and most authoritative confirmation possible that God intended us to notice and learn from the unique facets of his creation of male and female. Two of those unique features in particular are highlighted for us by New Testament inspired Scripture.

➤ ***Read 1 Corinthians 11:8,9***

What two features of the creation of male and female does the Apostle Paul tell us were intended to help us begin to understand our uniqueness as male and female?

It is important to note that it misses the point to underline the word “helper” in Genesis 2:18 as if that word alone tells us of the unique calling God had in mind for the female. The uniqueness of her calling is marked instead by the whole concept that Moses lays out for us and that the apostle Paul underlines for us to notice in the New Testament (1 Timothy 2, 1 Corinthians 11 and 14). From the very moment of her design, the Creator uniquely shaped and crafted the female “*from*” and “*for*” the male to be a perfect partner and complement to his creation. God wasn’t just arbitrarily doubling the population of his newly-minted world when he created the female. He was crafting something beautifully unique from the male he had created.

As evidenced by both God’s words and actions, we see how deeply God wove into us our uniqueness as males and females. What does that reality say to us as we consider where this unique aspect of our creation will impact our lives?

Part 2: The gift of interdependence not independence

➤ ***Read Genesis 2:18***

It is critically important for our whole understanding of what is unique about how God designed male and female to notice this verse that stands out in big, bold, red letters in Genesis 2. Consider what God said repeatedly in Genesis 1 about the goodness of his creation. That makes this stark statement in verse 18 stand out so powerfully. Suddenly we find that something is “*not good*”! Obviously, God is not pointing out a flaw in his creation.

In what sense, then, is something “*not good*” here?

Certainly, the most obvious application of what God says about it being “*not good*” for the man to be alone is fulfilled when God brings one male and one female together in the lifelong union of marriage. However, what God says here has a broader application to our very existence in this world as male and female.

What is the broader point for every male and every female to consider that God is making here?

➤ ***Read 1 Corinthians 11:11,12***

In Paul’s inspired words, we have confirmation that we are not drawing too large a point from the “*not good*” of Genesis 2:18. And just as our study is doing, Paul makes this point right after pointing out the complementarity, not duplication, of God’s intention in creating male and female as he did.

Why is it so important to hold on to both our unique complementary creation as male and female as well as the interdependence that God had in mind for this partnership?

Since God wove deeply into us our maleness and femaleness, we never leave that behind wherever we go in life and in whatever we are doing. Yet, what does this parallel truth of our interdependence indicate we should expect to see wherever we go in life and in whatever we do?

Part 3: Allowing Scripture to define selfless leading (head) and selfless yielding (helper)

We struggle to find adequate terms and language as we seek to name and define what Scripture is holding before us in how our Creator lovingly and wisely fashioned us uniquely as male and female. No matter what terms and language we use, Satan is quick to exploit human sinfulness to distort the terms and language in order to make God's beautiful unique creation look and sound like something wholly different from what God created it to be.

Words such as "submit" and "submission" and "authority" and "headship" are all good words that have unjustly suffered greatly from such distortions and misunderstanding. This Bible study seeks to lead us to confess the same biblical truths those words sought to confess but in a way that helps us to wrestle anew with the concept rather than getting stuck arguing about individual words.

This study does this knowing full well that no matter what words or phrases are used, Satan's work of distorting their meaning will begin immediately. This is why in doctrine after doctrine every generation must wrestle anew with Scripture so that we are grounded firmly in each biblical concept and not just parroting words generations before us chose to use!

Here are the terms this study will now ask us to ponder as we seek terms to describe God's unique callings of male and female in this beautiful interdependent and complementary partnership our loving Creator designed. For the gift of the unique calling *in this interdependent and complementary partnership* that God has designed for the male, this study asks us to ponder the usefulness of the phrase *selfless leading*. For the gift of the unique calling *in this interdependent and complementary partnership* that God has designed for the female, this study asks us to ponder the usefulness of the phrase *selfless yielding*.

Defining selfless leading (leadership, headship, oversight) from Scripture

As with every teaching of Scripture, in order to hold a biblical middle ground, we need to speak the truth while guarding errors on two sides. That often means speaking two things since grasping only half of the concept quickly leads sinful human beings to distort the biblical concept. That's why, after all, we are intentionally repeating the double-emphasis phrase: the *complementary and interdependent* partnership of male and female.

A careful study of all the various leadership terms in Scripture confirms that they all carry with them the concept of authority.

How does each of these passages help us understand Scripture's definition of what this thing called "authority" is?

- **Matthew 28:18,19**
- **Matthew 8:9**
- **1 Corinthians 12:28**

But we can easily get a distorted picture of authority unless we also note equally that Scripture repeatedly points out that authority from God always comes with responsibility before God.

How does each of these passages help us understand that element of responsibility before God that is always in play in the biblical concept of leadership?

- **Philippians 2:5-8**
- **Ephesians 1:22**
- **Matthew 20:25-28**
- **2 Corinthians 10:8**
- **2 Corinthians 6:3-10**
- **Hebrews 13:17**

Since selfless leading is done in the context of an interdependent and complementary partnership, what does that suggest for how selfless leaders will view the gifts and wisdom of those under their care?

For what multiple reasons is it critical that selfless leading honor the God-given gifts and wisdom of those being led?

Go back to the “it’s not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). How does that verse confirm the wisdom of selfless leaders valuing the gifts and influence of those they lead?

In summary, what are the errors on either side of biblical truth that we are seeking to avoid when we speak with Scripture about authority from God along with responsibility before God to exercise that authority with a humble servant’s heart?

Here’s how the proposed restatement of our synod’s doctrinal statement on male and female seeks to draw together these scriptural insights to define selfless leading:

- When God calls someone to reflect his protecting love by serving in a calling of selfless leading (head), God entrusts that person with authority to be exercised in humble service. As seen preeminently in Jesus (Philippians 2:5-8), leading in humility means serving for the benefit of those under the leader’s care and not for self. Leaders distort God’s design when they lead with a domineering spirit or to the harm of those under their care (Matthew 20:25-28).
- The authority that leaders exercise is pictured in Scripture as the responsibility for determining direction to be followed (Matthew 8:9) for the benefit of those they lead (Luke 12:42). Exercising authority does not give the leader a higher status before God but rather a greater responsibility. That responsibility includes encouraging those he leads to use their God-given wisdom and gifts.
- Only God has ultimate authority. The authority he entrusts to any leader is limited since it is exercised always under God’s own authority. The scope of entrusted authority varies greatly from calling to calling. When God calls someone to reflect his protecting love by serving in a calling of selfless leading (head), God entrusts that person with authority to be exercised in humble service.

Where do these paragraphs help you understand selfless leading? What further questions do these words raise for you?

Defining selfless yielding (functioning as a helper) from Scripture

By working through the passages about selfless leading, we have really already gone a long way toward defining selfless yielding since it is almost impossible to talk about one side of the partnership without talking about the other (so tightly has God intentionally woven the two sides of this partnership together).

But there are a couple challenges still needing to be addressed. Just as with the concept of leadership, so also with the concept of yielding (often translated in English Bible translations with the word “submission”), human sinfulness has caused error and misunderstanding on every side to cloud the beauty of what God designed. So, once again, we will seek to walk a careful biblical middle ground between distortions that either overstate or understate what Scripture means by selfless yielding.

➤ ***Read Psalm 27:9***

How does it help us to see the beauty of serving in a calling of selfless yielding—often referred to as being a “helper”—when we find that God himself is the one most often referenced in Scripture in terms of offering “help” or being a “helper”?

➤ *Read Galatians 3:26-29*

What is the beauty of Paul's words in Galatians 3:26-29 as we live in the midst of a world so confused about what gives any of us our status (worth, value) in life?

➤ *Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-17*

How do Paul's words here provide gospel power to overcome our sinful nature's tendency to play favorites?

➤ *Read Acts 5:29*

One of the greatest challenges for believers who take seriously honoring those in positions of God-given authority is knowing when to say, "I'm sorry, I cannot follow your leadership here." At times those who abuse others prey on the tender conscience of those they seek to control and harm.

In Acts 5, the Jewish Sanhedrin, a clear authority in Jewish culture, was forbidding the apostles to speak about Jesus.

What does the apostles' response teach us about when we would refuse to follow the direction of a God-given leader?

What misunderstanding does this answer regarding what selfless yielding is all about?

Here's how the proposed restatement of our synod's doctrinal statement on male and female seeks to draw together these scriptural insights to define selfless yielding:

- When God calls someone to reflect his supporting love by serving in a calling of selfless yielding (helper), he entrusts that person with the responsibility to submit to the authority of a God-given leader. Helpers are to use all their wisdom and gifts to support their leaders in a way that calls to mind how God is helper to us all (Psalm 121). Since God designed head and helper to function interdependently and not independently (1 Corinthians 11:11), God intends helpers to have a beneficial influence on those leading them.
- Selfless yielding to a God-given leader does not indicate a lesser status in God's eyes. Scripture affirms an equality of status before God by proclaiming that all believers are one in Christ (Galatians 3:26-29).

Where do these paragraphs help you understand selfless yielding? What further questions do these words raise for you?

Here are some additional useful points to keep in mind about selfless leading and selfless yielding:

- All people, male and female, are under God's authority. It is interesting to note that one way to define the sinfulness of human beings by nature is to say that they refuse to recognize the great blessing it is to be under God's authority in their life (Romans 8:7). All sinners, male and female, are by nature predisposed to look on all authority with skeptical eyes. Since our sinful human nature does not trust God; it therefore does not trust him to lead wisely and well.
- Because some try to paint this interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female in the most negative light possible by making it an absurd caricature of itself, it needs to be stated that every female does not need to consider every adult male to be her God-given authority. Selfless leading and selfless yielding do not function as free-floating abstractions divorced from specific earthly callings and settings. God designed the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female to function in his world wherever women and men partner together in concrete relationships in the midst of their callings in life. They form these relationships to find God's blessing in those relationships for themselves and others. Male and female often find themselves entering these partnering relationships such as when they decide to get married or when choosing a particular place to work. Our next two lessons will seek to lead us to apply such selfless leading and selfless yielding in just such concrete relationships at home, in church, and out in the world.
- God does not entrust all males with specific callings of leadership. Also, all males, almost without exception, will find themselves under the authority of God-given leaders at work, at church, or in government.
- Women will also find themselves serving in callings as selfless leaders, for example, when entrusted with leadership over other women or over children. Callings in the world where females find themselves in authority over both adult males and females will be discussed in the final lesson of this Bible study.



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Lesson #3: Selfless leading (head) and selfless yielding (helper) partnering in the home and in Christ's Church

Introduction

The author of this Bible study grew up in a congregation where women wore hats to church and men did not. He pastored a congregation where within the living memory of no small number of its members, men sat on one side of the sanctuary and women on the other. Now as the equivalent of a lay member of his congregation, he helped author a revision of bylaws that saw men and women beginning to partner together on four of its seven standing committees. Are such changes in practice clear signs that we have changed our confession of the biblical principle? Or are they evidence that, while the biblical principle is unchangeable, the applications that reflect that principle can change as they are impacted by shifts in culture and setting over the decades and centuries of the church's history.

Let's begin by stating what should be obvious to anyone who studies Scripture on this topic. God has given us a clear principle (the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female) that he has woven into our very creation, but he has refrained from giving us multiple specific applications of what this will look like.

If we don't recognize this in our homes and our churches, we easily end up exalting "the way things were done" in the homes and churches in which we were raised from the level of application (which may change) to the level of principle (which does not change). We end up saying more than Scripture says.

Or, the reverse happens. When we fail to carefully distinguish unchangeable principle from changeable application, we may carelessly jettison a particular application assuming we are wise and free so to do only to realize that the change sent an unintended message that clouded or distorted the biblical principle itself. We end up saying less than Scripture says.

That's why it remains forever important to grasp very clearly the principle from Genesis 1 and 2 that we've spent two lessons studying. It is always important to reaffirm in our minds the beauty of the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female before

we start with questions of application. If we do not, we can easily make (or reinforce) applications that call sin what is not sin or wink at what clearly is unwise or even sinful.

Here's how the proposed restatement of our synod's doctrinal statement on male and female seeks to state the relationship of the principle and its application in our homes:

God's Word provides few specifics for exactly what the interdependent and complementary partnership will look like in each marriage. Providing a general principle with few specific applications leaves room for Spirit-worked faith to bear fruit in ways that make the most of the unique gifts God gives to everyone in the household. It also leaves room for applications of the unchanging principle to look quite different from household to household, from culture to culture, and from age to age.

Here's how the proposed restatement of our synod's doctrinal statement on male and female seeks to state the relationship of the principle and its application in our churches:

Within the Christian church God has supplied us with the unchanging principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of selfless leading and selfless yielding, but he has given few specific applications. This leaves room for Spirit-worked faith to bear fruit in ways that make the most of the unique gifts given to each believer, in applications that may change from setting to setting, from culture to culture, and from age to age.

Where do we see God's wisdom in providing a clear principle but few specific applications?

What challenge does this lay before us since God is dealing with us as his mature children in Christ?

In this lesson, we will look at one key application section of Scripture for our Christian homes and three key sections that apply the principle to our Christian congregations. May God give us wisdom to recognize what makes for wise application in each setting of his principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female!

Part 1: The partnership of selfless leading and selfless yielding in the home

➤ *Read Ephesians 5:22–6:4*

This is Scripture's most extensive treatment of selfless leading and selfless yielding as those unique callings partner in the home.

What does it say about the responsibility before God for the welfare of the home that God has given Christian husbands when we note that Paul speaks of the wife's calling of selfless yielding in three verses but it takes him eight verses to address husbands in regard to their calling to selfless leading?

What point is Paul especially wanting to help wives understand when he compares their yielding (submitting) in marriage to the church submitting to the selfless leading of Christ?

To what degree does the blessing we have just outlined remain true if a Christian wife has an unbelieving husband?

What is the clear biblical exception to the "in everything" that Paul speaks in 5:24?

The heart of Paul's encouragement to Christian husbands can be found in 5:25 where he urges them to love their wives "just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

Why would it be helpful to Christian husbands, as they consider what it means to love their wives as Christ loved the church, to ponder not only what we call Jesus' passive obedience (his willing death in our place) but also Jesus' active obedience (his perfect life offered in our place)?

How do verses 26 and 27 answer the husbandly objection that he would certainly sacrificially love his wife if only she were acting more loving herself?

What is the beautiful and ennobling honor God is paying to marriage as we consider this section of Scripture as a whole?

Remembering the beauty of the doctrine of vocation, what does it say to married Christians as they consider the importance of how they live out their callings as husband and wife?

How does it speak to the husband's unique calling to selfless leading to note that Paul speaks to fathers specifically when he talks about the spiritual nurture of children in the home (6:4)?

Why is a daily humbling and yet exalting grasp of our need for, and the beauty of, our forgiveness in Christ such a key element in the functioning of this interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female in marriage and the home?

Here's how the proposed restatement of our synod's doctrinal statement on male and female seeks to summarize the beauty of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female in the home:

- The interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female finds its fullest expression in marriage. In a Christian home, male and female, as husband and wife, seek to live out what it means to be partners for their family's (Ephesians 5:22-33) and society's good. They do this as co-heirs of God's gracious gift of life (1 Peter 3:1-7).
- God uniquely created the male, the husband, for the calling of selfless leading (head). The husband does this by loving and caring for his wife just as Christ loves and cares for the church (Ephesians 5:25-30). Selfless leading includes encouraging his wife to make the most of her God-given gifts (Proverbs 31:10-31) for the good of those influenced by their household.
- God uniquely created the female, the wife, for the calling of selfless yielding (helper). She submits to her husband and acknowledges his leadership in the same way that the church submits to Christ and acknowledges his leadership (Ephesians 5:22-24,33). This includes encouraging her husband to make the most of his God-given gifts for the good of those influenced by their household. Such self-yielding

service does not include consenting to what is sinful since her Savior always remains her ultimate Head (Acts 5:29).

- While God designed the day-to-day spiritual nurture of all those in the household to be a shared task, it is the husband and father, as the one called to selfless leading, whom God holds primarily accountable for spiritual nurture (Ephesians 6:4).

Where do these paragraphs help you understand the partnership of selfless leading and selfless yielding in the home? What further questions do these words raise for you?

Part 2: The partnership of selfless leading and selfless yielding in Christ's Church

We now turn our attention to a brief study of three specific sections of Scripture that most directly make application of the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female.

➤ Read 1 Timothy 2:1-15

In verses 1-7, Paul is addressing all Christians, both male and female, with an encouragement to pray, in particular to pray for their leaders in government. The goal is that they might be able to live in peace and carry out the work of the gospel unhindered.

Before we get to the key verses, it is also worth noting something else about this introductory context of verses 1-7. It is sometimes stated within the church today that we are only doing harm to the central work of gospel outreach by “majoring in minors” in teaching this principle. In the face of such objections, it is rather interesting to note that Paul follows up a clear statement about God's longing for the salvation of all people (verse 4) by going into one of his lengthiest treatments of the application of the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. And he grounds his reason for doing so not in some changeable special circumstances in Ephesus (where Timothy served as a pastor) but on the original foundation of God's creative design for male and female. Apparently love for gospel outreach and love for this principle are not incompatible at all.

In verse 8 Paul begins specific application of the principle we are studying. And he signals that by suddenly shifting his more generic word usage about “all people” (a better translation for the word he uses in verse 4) as he now uses the word that shows that he is speaking specifically to the adult male members of the congregation.

How does the application Paul makes to males in verse 8 speak to the calling of selfless leading?

Why, also, when addressing their selfless leading, does Paul quickly urge them to do this “without anger and disputing”?

As he shifts to Christian females in verse 9, just as he addressed a particular challenge for Christian males at the end of verse 8, so he addresses a particular challenge for Christian females (getting caught up in impressing others with outward beauty rather than the beauty of the believing heart evidenced in faith-filled actions).

In verses 11-14 Paul makes one of his most extensive applications of the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female to the life of a Christian congregation.

While the principle of selfless leading and selfless yielding is nowhere limited in Scripture only to the authoritative teaching of the Word, why would that be an especially important application to mention?

In the original language, Paul uses the term for learning as a disciple (in verse 11), and (in verse 12) he uses the term for the kind of formal teaching that Jesus often did with his disciples gathered around his feet. It helps us picture the kind of setting that Paul clearly has in mind with his application. He is picturing for us someone clearly functioning as Jesus did as an authoritative teacher with others clearly in the position of the learning disciples at his feet.

What kinds of settings within the work of the church come to mind when you picture the kind of teaching with authority that Paul speaks of in 1 Timothy 2?

When we understand the kind of formal teaching with authority that Paul’s words clearly have in mind in the context of 1 Timothy 2, that helps us understand that Christian women are not violating the principle when they take part in discussions in Bible class and also confess their faith whenever God gives the opportunity with both fellow believers and unbelievers. Those are royal priestly privileges that God has given to every Christian male and female, young and old, as Peter so eloquently testifies in 1 Peter 2:9 and Paul also testifies in Colossians 3:15,16.

Another caution about over-application is also in order here. Some have at times made applications as if Paul had used a Greek word in context here that means “complete silence” (he does use such a word in 1 Corinthians 14, which we will discuss later). Furthermore, some have failed to grasp that even if the word meant “silence” here (which it clearly does not), that would still be a part of an application and not the principle itself.

In 1 Timothy 2, the word translated in the NIV as “quietness” and then later “silence” (even though it is exactly the same word in the Greek and forms a bookend repetition in Paul’s line of thought) is not at all forbidding speaking. Rather Paul uses that word twice to bracket the whole encouragement to Christian women to learn in a spirit of humble respect from those to whom God has entrusted a bit of his authority within the church—here specifically the formal teaching of the Word by males in mixed groups of males and females. Such humble respect does not at all forbid asking questions to learn or speaking answers and confessing faith in ways that give evidence the Spirit has indeed blessed their learning.

In all such questions, it is absolutely critical to keep in mind what is principle and what is application.

➤ **Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-10**

In order to understand this section of Scripture, it is important to note that Paul is dealing with a custom (head coverings for females) that was at work not just within the congregation at Corinth but also within the culture of their city. For an adult female to appear in public in Corinth with her hair uncovered was to advertise that she was not under the leadership of any male.

One other thing is worth pondering as we begin to study this passage. It is very hard for us in this chapter, and in chapter 14 that we will study next, to recreate a detailed picture of what the various gatherings of the Christians of Corinth were like. Notice, for instance, that here in chapter 11 the women are praying and prophesying (remember: silence is not the principle, but only an application where God-given authority would be dishonored). However, in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul is going to make an application of absolute silence for them in that specific setting he addressed there.

Because of the house-church structure of much of early Christianity (many poorer Christians, few large gathering places where they could all easily come together), some have suggested that chapter 11 may have in mind the smaller and thus less formal gatherings of Christians in their homes for study and prayer (something more like a small group discussion or prayer group we might think of today). Then, they would suggest, chapter 14 has in mind those times when those smaller groupings of Christians in the city would all gather into one larger assembly (more as we would picture corporate worship on Sunday morning).

While the specific setting and situation in each chapter would have been perfectly clear to Paul’s first readers, we must acknowledge that we struggle to know precisely how their gatherings were structured. And since the Corinthians had a rich measure of extra-ordinary spiritual gifts (like speaking direct revelation from God [prophecy] and speaking in languages they had never studied [“tongues”]), what worship was like for them is even harder for us to picture. Not to mention hard for them to manage themselves! The challenge of exercising all these special gifts of the Spirit without having their gatherings descend into disorderly chaos (using spiritual gifts as an excuse to ignore God’s created order), must have been great, as Paul’s words testify in both chapters.

While Paul is addressing his encouragement in particular to the women of the congregation, what may be the wisdom of beginning this section (verse 3) by saying that the head of every male is Christ, and also that, as the incarnate God/man, even Christ recognizes the headship of his heavenly Father?

Why would Paul speak so strongly to the women of Corinth about observing this custom when the custom itself was neither commanded nor forbidden by God?

This is one of the most helpful sections of Scripture when it comes to understanding the difference between application (which may change depending on culture or setting) and unchanging principle (which remains unchanged).

Why is it today, while we still honor the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female, that we do not urge females to wear head coverings at worship?

In verse 7, Paul is certainly not disagreeing with the reality that God gifted in creation (and in recreation in Christ) both male and female with his image. However, he is drawing attention to something that does mark us as unique as males and females.

In what special sense is the man—wherever he honors his calling to selfless leading— “the image and glory of God”?

In what special sense is the woman—wherever she honors her calling to selfless yielding— “the glory of man”?

Though we have already studied it, let’s remind ourselves here how quickly after his statements about our complementarity (uniqueness, not duplication) as males and females in verses 4-10, Paul turns our attention back to our interdependence in verses 11 and 12. He is guarding the beauty of the biblical middle ground by saying two things as he stresses both the interdependent and complementary nature of the God-designed partnership of male and female. That’s why, after urging us, “Don’t act as if you are carelessly formed duplicates of each other . . .”, he

hastens to add, “. . . but remember that God didn’t fashion you as complements for you to live in loveless and arrogant independence from each other. Men and women—you are a carefully crafted partnership by God’s design.”

➤ **Read 1 Corinthians 14:26-40**

Having already set the scene for both of these sections from 1 Corinthians above, here we need to note another unique feature of the Corinthian Christians’ gathering that Paul is describing. The spiritual gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy (speaking by direct revelation from heaven) was regularly being exercised by multiple speakers in the gatherings Paul is referring to in this section. As Paul describes this setting, to stand up to speak would often have a powerful impact on the previous speaker. For example, if someone received a new revelation while another was speaking, as that person stood to speak that would silence the one currently speaking (verse 30). And, since someone could falsely be claiming to speak prophetically (by direct revelation from heaven) but then share something other than God’s truth, there would also be those with the gift of discernment who would stand up to judge what that prophet had just shared (verse 29).

Imagine yourself in such a gathering of God’s people in first century Corinth. How does that setting, as Paul describes it for us, help us understand why Paul speaks of silence (and the word he uses here is indeed a word for absolute silence) for the women in that setting?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Scripture does not give Christ's New Testament church any specific requirements for how a congregation organizes its governance. While there is a brief glimpse of the casting of lots (an Old Testament practice) used among the believers in Acts 1:46 as a replacement for Judas was selected, that certainly is not a divine mandate—or necessarily even a suggestion—that the casting of lots is a required part of congregational governance. Since in any form of church governance there will clearly be those called to exercise authority on behalf of the whole body of believers, we do well to ponder the implications of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female in whatever way the church in its freedom determines for authority to be operating in its midst.

The most common form of government found in our congregations (by custom, but not by command of God) tends to vest final decision-making authority with the voters' assembly. While we do not believe that all voting is always an exercise of authority, where a vote is clearly exercising the authority to give direction to others they are to follow for their good or for the good of others, there God's people honor the calling God has given to the adult males of the congregation to exercise that authority on behalf of the family of faith.

However, while that application (remember: voting is not the principle) guards the complementary side of the principle, we often still have much to learn when it comes to honoring the equally important interdependent side of the principle. Congregations do well to work hard to make sure that the wisdom, insights, and concerns of all in the congregation are considered as decisions are made. That God intended both men and women to exert such godly influence in the process is the intent of—not a violation of—the interdependent and complementary partnership. Once again, Genesis 2:18 needs to resonate in our ears: "It is not good for the man to be alone."

Christian congregations are certainly free to search for other forms of church governance that may enable them—in their culture and setting—to best carry out the work of the gospel for the edification of the flock and outreach to those not yet in the flock. In fact, throughout the five centuries of Lutheran history, and even currently around the world, Lutheran congregations have been and are structured in many different ways in keeping with the customs and culture in which they were or are found.

However, no matter what form of church governance is chosen, honoring the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female will always play a key role. The God who moved all creation from "formless and empty" to well-ordered still delights today when his people imitate him as they delight in how he has so lovingly and beautifully ordered his world. This may in some cultures mark us as very different from the prevailing culture outside the church. At those times, we remember that embracing the cross as followers of the crucified (not functionaries of our culture) will never hurt us.

END OF THE FURTHER STUDY

Even as we wrestle to understand the unique setting of Corinthian worship, it is also vital to note that Paul does not ground the stated reason for his application in that unique situation of Corinth. At the close of verse 33, he states that he is making an application that was consistently made “in all the congregations of the saints” when it came to teaching the Word (application) with authority (the principle). Paul is thereby consistently making the same general application of the selfless leading with authority that he asks of the males in 1 Timothy 2. This guards the complementary side of God’s good principle.

At the same time, we are wise to refrain from speaking with certainty that this setting in Corinth is equivalent to the modern-day voters’ assembly. To claim that 1 Corinthians 14 commands that women must be silent in all such meetings of God’s church is to claim to know far more about the setting in Corinth than we do. It also easily does violence to the interdependent side of God’s good principle.

As we close our study of this section of Scripture, it is good for us to notice what Paul does in verse 36. There he reminds us that the Word of God didn’t start with us, nor does it end with us. With that Paul lifts our sights beyond the narrow confines of our congregation’s walls by calling us to see the much bigger picture of brothers and sisters in the Holy Christian Church. We especially think of the Christians who “walk together” (the meaning of the word “synod”) with us in our church body and those who are in fellowship with us around the world in the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference.

Why is seeing beyond our congregation’s walls or our church body’s boundaries such an important insight to keep in mind as we make decisions about how we will make applications of the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female?

Also here there is a need to say two things. When other congregations adopt applications that are different from our own, what debt of love do we owe them?

Here’s how the proposed restatement of our synod’s doctrinal statement on male and female seeks to summarize the beauty of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female in our Christian congregations:

- Just as within the home, so also within the gatherings of the body of Christ (the church), God designed male and female to use their God-given gifts guided by the interdependent and complementary partnership of selfless leading and selfless yielding so that in all things God’s grace in Christ may be honored (1 Peter 4:10,11; 1 Corinthians 12; 1 Corinthians 14:12).

- The unique callings of selfless leading and selfless yielding do not hinder but rather guide the use of the gifts of both male and female. The Scriptures provide abundant evidence of how God used the gifts of both without violating the interdependent and complementary partnership he has established (Romans 16:1-16).
- The encouraging and admonishing with the Word that all Christians are called to carry out as God's royal priests is a shared responsibility of both male and female (Colossians 3:15-17). Likewise, making the most of every opportunity in all their God-given callings to witness the truth to the troubled or unbelieving is a privilege of both male and female (1 Peter 3:15).
- When God's people gather for Bible study and worship, both male and female rightly participate in the singing of psalms and hymns, in the discussion of God's Word, and in adding their voices to the church's corporate prayers.
- When authority is being exercised in the church, God holds males responsible for exercising such selfless leading for the benefit of God's family (1 Timothy 2:12).

Where do these paragraphs help you understand the partnership of selfless leading and selfless yielding in the church? What further questions do these words raise for you?



Male and female he created them

A Bible study on God's loving gift of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female

Lesson #4: The partnership of selfless leading (head) and selfless yielding (helper) in the world

Introduction

Imagine that the chairman of your congregation's board of elders is also an elected judge. One day he realizes that the first case in his courtroom is a man from his congregation who is suing his wife for divorce, claiming irreconcilable differences. As the suit is presented, much to the dismay of the man's believing wife, it becomes clear that the irreconcilable differences are that he's unwilling to continue as her husband despite her evident faithfulness to him. However, because the petition has been handled according to the law of the land, the judge grants the divorce.

But at the end of that day, that judge removes his judge's robe and heads to church to preside over the elders' meeting. With sadness he informs the other elders about the divorce proceedings that their brother in Christ had kept hidden but had now become public record. Now, not as judge, but as elder, he offers to be the first one to approach that man, one on one, to call him to repentance for separating what God had joined together.

How do you explain what seems to be such utter inconsistency? In the morning the judge bangs his gavel and declares the man legally divorced. By evening the judge prepares to knock on the man's door and call him to repentance for a divorce granted in his own courtroom. Does he or does he not respect God's principle of marriage as a lifetime union between one man and one woman?

Yes, he does. And he is not being inconsistent, either. No more than was Moses (really the LORD through Moses) when, because of the stubbornness of sinful hearts (Matthew 19:8), he permitted Israelite husbands to write a bill of divorce and send their wives away (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

The key to the matter is to consider the different callings from God that man has as judge and as elder. As God's representative in government, his sworn duty is to uphold the constitution and the law of the land (even laws he may personally dislike). For the judge to disregard the law in

his courtroom would undermine the very purpose of maintaining order in his world for which God instituted government.

However, as God's representative in his church, as an elder, his calling from God is quite different. As a brother in Christ to the man who sued for an unbiblical divorce, his calling is to be God's tool to lead that man to repentance, forgiveness, and a new direction that honors his Savior's will for his life. God's principle did not change in either calling, but as judge or as elder (or as husband) the application made of that principle in the unique setting of each of his God-given callings was different.

God's principles, written into our hearts and woven into our very creation, define for us what it means to love him and our neighbor as ourselves. God's principles in themselves never truly contradict each other. Yet as we live and work in the midst of the mess of a fallen world, that world is often neglecting or ignoring many of God's principles at the same time. And the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female may be suffering from some of the greatest abuse and neglect.

That's why, as we live out our God-given callings in a fallen world, the responsibilities of our various callings can present us with challenging situations where it may seem impossible to honor outwardly all God's good principles simultaneously. While the new heart the Spirit has planted in us honors all God's good principles, much like that judge, the responsibilities of our callings may make it hard to act in the world in such a way that honors all God's principles simultaneously. The goal is never merely to look outwardly pristine and pious (the Pharisees were good at that), but to actually discern in every setting and situation what it truly means to love as ourselves the neighbors whom our callings impact.

This lesson presents us with the most challenging area in which to apply the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Living as citizens of two kingdoms

Part of what may help us walk through many challenging situations in life is to grasp the biblical doctrine of the two kingdoms, or two realms, both of which are under the rule of our triune God. Sadly, this doctrine is rarely taught clearly (or at all) outside of Lutheran circles, and all too frequently it is not even taught or understood well by Lutherans. Failing to grasp what is meant by these two kingdoms can cause us confusion as we live our callings out in the world and can, in fact, unintentionally do harm to the cause of the gospel we long to further.

What is meant by these two kingdoms? We speak of God's ruling in his world by his almighty power as he keeps his universe and its natural laws operating as he created them. In particular, just as he worked from formlessness and emptiness to a well ordered creation during the six days of creation, so even in a now fallen world God still is at work to preserve outward peace and order and to provide for the outward earthly needs of all who live on the earth, both believer and unbeliever (Matthew 5:44,45).

Sometimes this work of God to maintain the outward order and provision for his world and his creatures is referred to as God's kingdom of power. As we noted in lesson 1, ever since creation God partners through human beings as he gives us an important part in promoting outward peace and providing for the outward needs of those in this world. We see God's kingdom of power at work through human beings most evidently as God works through his representatives in government. In addition to government, we would also see God at work in his kingdom of power in other focused-on-this-life institutions such as the workplace. Martin Luther was fond of calling God's kingdom of power "the kingdom of God's left hand." The goal of the kingdom of God's left hand is to maintain as much outward peace as possible in a sinful world and to provide for the necessities that preserve the life (the time of grace) of the residents of this world.

And that leads us directly to God's other kingdom (or realm). God's other kingdom is his kingdom of grace. This is what is meant when we read in Scripture about the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. It is God's gracious activity in his world through his gospel (and his law as he calls sinners to recognize their need for the grace of his gospel). In the kingdom of grace, God isn't focused primarily on the outward, but God's Holy Spirit is at work to win hearts to repentance and faith. Then, once God has accomplished by his gospel that change of heart from unbelief to faith, he then also works to renew that heart day by day so that the believer lives and reflects his saving grace in the midst of an unbelieving world. Luther was fond of calling this "the kingdom of God's right hand."

As Christians, while our true citizenship is in the kingdom of heaven (Philippians 3:20), yet as long as we live in this world, we will always hold a dual citizenship. In God's earthly kingdom, the kingdom of his left hand, we live under the God-established authorities in a particular country, and within that country we participate in other institutions of this world such as the workplace. As we live out our callings in the kingdom of this world, we work for the outward

peace and bodily welfare of our neighbors. In the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of his right hand, we live under Christ as our head and seek to advance the cause of his saving kingdom.

And God has given us unique tools fashioned in his wisdom for the work of each of his realms. In the kingdom of grace, the kingdom of his right hand, the tools we use to operate are God's law and gospel, his revealed Word and sacraments. Our focus—like God's—is primarily on people's hearts and how God changes such hearts by the power of his gospel. Then, once God has won a heart to faith through the gospel, we also seek to direct believers with God's law and empower them with his gospel to walk worthy of our high calling to faith as sons and daughters of God (Ephesians 4:1).

But we have different tools from God to carry out his different purpose in our callings that are part of the kingdom of his left hand (government, workplace, etc.). When we are operating in our callings within God's kingdom of power—where God is at work to promote outward peace and provide for people's earthly needs—there we operate according to conscience and reason. Reason and conscience are the tools God has given us when we are serving in a calling where he is seeking to bless people with earthly peace, order, and provision.

It is very important that we do not confuse the tools God has given us by failing to ask ourselves in which kingdom which we are serving as we carry out a particular calling in life. While it is true that the Christian's conscience and reason have a huge advantage because they are instructed by God's revealed Word and empowered by his gospel, yet, when we are carrying out the duties of our callings in the kingdom of his world, the kingdom of his left hand, we operate by reason and conscience, not by quoting chapter and verse of the Bible.

Why is that? When we are operating in the kingdom of God's left hand, if we use the Word of God as a tool of outward coercion, we unintentionally end up distorting the chief purpose for which God gave his Word. God did not give his Word primarily to get us to do the right outward things (that is Pharisaism). Rather, he gave his Word to lead hearts to repentance and faith in his Son. If Christians in their assigned tasks in their kingdom of power callings (for example, in government or in positions of leadership in the workplace) try to use the Word to compel an unbelieving world to outward obedience to God's will, we are in grave danger of teaching unbelievers that what God is most concerned about is their outward compliance with earthly laws. We would be operating in God's kingdom of power (where outward peace and earthly blessings are the goal) with the tool God designed to be used in his kingdom of grace (where the emphasis is on imparting to our hearts his eternal blessings).

Yes, it's true, we do hope that as we model Christ-like selfless love for neighbor in our kingdom of this world's callings, the unbelievers around us will take note and ask us about "the reason for the hope that [we] have" (1 Peter 3:15). But as we speak of that hope, it's important to note that we are then carrying out our calling as royal priests of God—a task of his kingdom of grace. But that doesn't mean that suddenly the revealed Word of God has become the tool we wield in our assigned tasks in the kingdom of power callings God has permitted us to have. Since God is at work through our kingdom of power callings to provide outward peace and earthly provision, we

use the tools God designed for our duties in our for-this-life callings: we use reason and appeal to conscience.

That's also why, as we carry out our callings in the kingdom of God's left hand, we will often need to swallow hard as we serve in the midst of institutions that have turned much of God's will upside down. It is a confused, sinful world. As Christians, we know in our hearts that things are vastly different in many ways from what God designed this world to be. And we know that the structures of this world that deal only with the outward things of this life never will get to the heart of what truly troubles us. Yet, that doesn't mean we retreat from taking part in government or the other structures of this world just because they are messy. God has called us to be salt and light in the midst of the darkness and decay of the world. When we involve ourselves in callings from God in the kingdom of his left hand, we are doing godly work as his representatives by preserving as best as possible in a sinful world a semblance of order and seeing to it that greed and corruption don't rob people of having their earthly needs met. And through it all, Christians know something else: we know we are preserving peoples' time of grace and enabling a climate in which we can carry out the even more important work of the kingdom of God's right hand (see the relationship of the two kingdoms at work right next to each other in 1 Timothy 2:1-4).

So, if we love God and our neighbor, we do not hide from the messiness of taking part in the callings of this world in the kingdom of God's left hand. We take part, even though we know it will often be very difficult to know how to do that wisely and well. It will not always be easily or immediately clear to us in those difficult situations what the most loving course of action would be. (In a perfect world, there would be no such challenges brought on by sin.) In fact, part of the messiness may mean that, in our responsibilities in our callings in the kingdom of God's left hand, we may seem for a time for our neighbors' good to be acting in a way that is in violation of a particular principle of God's will. We do that even though in our hearts our Spirit-created new self still delights in that principle.

In regard to the topic of our Bible study, that means when living out the responsibilities of our callings in the kingdom of God's left hand, we may find ourselves wondering precisely how we can best honor the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. In fact, we may at times act in a way that seems to work counter to that principle. When we are in the Christian home and our Christian churches, where the Word of God has already won other hearts to faith, we know even there it can be difficult to know precisely how to honor the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. But at least there we have brothers and sisters in Christ who are partnering with us and whose hearts have been won to treasure the saving Word of God. But in the world, we may often find that few around us care about this aspect (or any aspect) of God's will for their lives or ours.

When it comes to wrestling with every part of what it means to love God and neighbor, not just the principle that is the focus of our study, we will often find ourselves praying for sanctified wisdom, seeking wise counsel from others, and then acting in faith in the way that best seems both to honor God and, in that situation, love the specific neighbors he himself has put around us in the responsibilities of that calling. We do this knowing that God delights for us to be salt and light in this messy world. As mentioned above, the goal is never merely to look outwardly

pristine and pious (the Pharisees were good at that), but to actually discern in every setting and situation what it truly means to love as ourselves the neighbors whom our callings impact.

END OF THE FURTHER STUDY

Part 1: Why do we seek to make application of the principle in the world?

While many visible Christian churches have long ago given up on teaching anything at all about the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female, some churches that still seek to hold on to the principle refuse to speak at all about how to apply this in the world. In fact, some go a step further: they deny that this principle has any application beyond the home or the home and church.

So, as difficult as this is for both male and female Christians, why do we even attempt to wrestle with such a challenging issue? Why not just focus on home or home and church as if those were the only places for which God fashioned us uniquely for this partnership?

Some Christians will maintain that since Scripture makes no direct and specific application of the principle to our callings out in the world (government, workplace, etc.), that is evidence that we should not wrestle with such applications. While that statement seems to have a ring of truth to it, here is additional evidence that this conclusion does not stand up under careful pondering of Scripture.

1. In 1 Corinthians 11 we see Christians being urged to honor a custom of their pagan culture (head coverings for women). By honoring their culture's custom, they were really honoring the principle that their Creator wove their uniqueness as male and female deeply into their creation.
2. In Isaiah 3:12, as God was tracing evidence that his Old Testament people had forsaken him, the LORD says this through his prophet: "*Youths oppress my people, women rule over them.*" Clearly, the LORD is describing something turned upside down from how he had created life to be. While in the context it is clear that many Israelite women had abandoned humble faith and hope in the LORD (3:16,17), the root cause also seems to be the brutal lovelessness of the unbelieving men who had lost any concern to offer selfless leading (3:13-15).
3. It is also important to point out a caricature we have noted earlier. Also in our homes and in the church, God gives few applications of the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. Having woven this into our creation, he leaves much to our sanctified Christian wisdom when it comes to making applications. It is not all that different out in the world. The only difference, as we step out into the world, is that those around us will often not be concerned about this principle (or any other principle of love for God and neighbor).
4. Some would like to use Old Testament figures like Deborah (a judge and prophetess in Israel) and Huldah (a prophetess in Israel) as evidence that God does not intend the principle to have such broad application to society as we are suggesting. However, unless

we deny or cast doubt on the inspired reliability of Scripture by claiming it shows a patriarchal or misogynistic bias, the reality that Deborah and Huldah are quite rare exceptions in both Old and New Testaments actually gives evidence that God did take seriously how he uniquely designed male and female to function in this interdependent and complementary partnership. Also, even in the cases of Deborah and Huldah, there is strong evidence given by the inspired narrator that Deborah and Huldah went about their callings as those who were aware of this principle.

5. If we claim the principle has application only to believers in the settings of their home (or home and church), that would put us back into the place of God's minor children (Israel) who had many such laws in the Old Testament both in their worship life and in daily life that did not apply to the rest of the world. These laws marked them as God's special children from whom he would bring the Messiah into the world for all nations.

However, all such barriers between the Jewish and Gentile worlds were various types of shadows that pointed to the Messiah who was to come from Israel. They were part of the Old Covenant that ceased in its purpose once Jesus had come to live, die, and rise again for the world. Those distinctions of the Old Covenant—often a source of hostility and contention between Jew and Gentile—have been nailed to the cross with Christ (see Ephesians 2:14-16 and Colossians 2:16,17).

With all such distinctions of the Old Covenant gone, it would hardly be helpful to tell Christian males and females that they have one way of living their partnership in the home (or home and church) while a completely different way of operating functions out in the world where everyone can do as they see fit in their own eyes.

6. Because a sinful world ridicules or ignores all of God's good principles, it is often difficult in the world for the Christian to know how to make consistent application of those principles. At times, it seems the world takes special delight in making us squirm in situations in which the complexities of living our God-given callings in a fallen world confront us with what appears to be unsolvable conflicts. But it is not just the interdependent and complementary partnership of selfless leading and selfless yielding that is hard to apply in that world. That is true for every good principle of God. All of this is part of bearing the cross as we seek to honor our Creator and Savior's will for our lives. To get rid of any principle of God that is difficult to apply in the world would soon leave us with no principles at work to guide us. Instead, we should expect that seeking to honor what the world is ignoring would make us stand out as different! That's why the apostle Peter speaks at length in his first letter about the reality that we live as "God's elect strangers in the world" (1 Peter 1:1).

What did you find helpful in those six points? What questions did those points raise for you?

Part 2: Practical guidelines to assist us in applying the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female in the world

Here are some practical guidelines as we seek to honor the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female in the midst of a sinful world.

1. ***No application crystal ball is available.*** We don't know exactly what the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female would have looked like as a perfect world began to fill with people.
 - a. Since it "was not good for the man to be alone," that suggests that this interdependent and complementary partnership would have functioned in all the structures of society that would have developed in a perfect world.

Leader's guide: We have no authoritative list from Scripture of the positions men and women would have held in all these structures as they worked together under the principle of head and helper in a perfect world. Our window on a perfect world closes quickly as Adam and Eve fall into sin.
 - b. What we would expect to have seen in a perfect world (men and women partnering in all of the structures of society), we would also expect to see operating in all the structures of a fallen world (though distorted by sin from God's perfect intent).
2. ***Don't be confused by overstated caricatures.*** Beware of overstatements by which some try to make it look foolish to apply the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female in the world.
 - a. Scripture does ***not*** teach that this partnership makes every female subject to every male she meets, nor, in reverse, does it make every male the head of every female he meets.
 - b. While God did indeed lovingly weave this principle into us as he uniquely fashioned us as male and female, the principle finds its application not in broad abstractions but in concrete, specific God-given callings in which male and female find themselves partnering for the good of others (home, church, workplace, government, etc.).
3. ***Refuse to pass judgment on disputable matters.*** Since God has not seen fit to provide specific application for this principle to every situation, our goal is not to claim to know

for ourselves or others the divinely-given only-right-answer to each situation (Romans 14:1).

- a. On the one side we avoid telling ourselves or other Christians that the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female has nothing to do with our lives at work or in government or elsewhere in the world.
 - b. On the other side, we also avoid giving the impression that every believer's conscience as it wrestles with the principle—and all God's other good principles that may be in play in any given situation—will always lead every believer to the same conclusion in every similar situation.
4. ***Remember this principle doesn't function in isolation.*** While how we were uniquely created as male and female is not left behind anywhere we go, there are also many other principles God has given us to ponder that can come into play in any God-given calling in which we might find ourselves as Christian men or women.
- a. The principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female is a helpful gift of God as we consider in every area of life how we can most wisely partner with one another in this world. We fall into the ditch on one side of this truth (under-application) if Christian men or women don't even allow this principle to be part of how they make decisions about how they are called in their vocations to love their neighbor as themselves in the world.
 - b. Yet nowhere in Scripture is this principle listed as that which trumps all other good principles of God. Many principles of love for God above all things and love for our neighbor as we love ourselves are often in play as part of how we operate in our God-given callings in the world. We fall into the ditch on the other side of this truth (over-application) if Christian men or women fail to take into consideration other principles that are also in play in their vocations for how they are to love their neighbor as themselves in the world.
5. ***Be prepared to bear the cross.*** We can always expect that seeking to honor the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female will mark us as different in this world (as will honoring any part of what it means to love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves). This is part of bearing our cross (Matthew 16:24,25)!
- a. In a perfect world there would have been no such apparent conflicts between equally good principles God has woven into his world. In a fallen world, such apparent conflicts confront us regularly with every principle of what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves. Be prepared to be considered foolish for wrestling

with what the world has long ago discarded as a useless or even damaging relic of a bygone era.

- b. A key element in bearing our cross is to crucify our sinful nature that is turned in on itself and away from God and neighbor. Often when confronted with challenging options in life, it can help clarify what may be the wisest path by asking ourselves: “Is a certain choice before me appealing because it serves primarily for my personal benefit or for worldly praise and honor from others? Is there an option before me which most clearly serves the most good for the neighbor or neighbors God has given me to serve or witness to in this calling (even if that means that option brings with it a personal loss as the world would define it)? How will this decision impact my other God-given callings? How will this decision impact my witness to the world or to my fellow Christians?” Such questions can help protect us against justifying a self-centered course of action.

6. ***We are not left alone in these decisions.***

- a. God never fails to hear and answer his people as they pray for wisdom (James 1:5). His promise, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5), is at work for us also in the midst of these decisions.
- b. Part of how God answers our prayers is by putting mature Christian brothers and sisters around us who can help us make a wise choice in difficult situations. We can learn to treasure the sanctified advice of our brothers or sisters who may themselves have prayerfully and carefully wrestled with similar difficult decisions (even though we may not all reach identical conclusions—see, again, Romans 14:1).

7. ***We act in faith as those who stand in grace rather than allowing fear to paralyze us into inactivity.*** Having prayed and considered the advice of those who love us in Christ, we then act as those who stand in God’s grace (Romans 5:1-5). We trust that God delights as we follow his loving encouragement to be preserving salt in a decaying world and godly light in a confused world (Matthew 5:13-16). On the night before he died, Jesus didn’t ask his Father to take us from this world but to protect and strengthen us in his saving truth so that we might live his restored image amidst the fallen world for which he died (John 17:15-19).

- a. We recognize that there will be times when our sinful hearts may still temporarily confuse us. No one this side of heaven will ever perfectly understand the motives of their own natural hearts (Jeremiah 17:9).
- b. Yet in these decisions, we are *not* under the burden of trying to make God pleased with us by finding the perfect answer (which may not exist in this

fallen world). Instead, we prayerfully make our decisions as those with whom God is already well pleased. His grace has already washed us in Jesus' blood and clothed us in his perfection (Galatians 3:26,27). Even if it should later become clear that our sinful hearts blinded us to selfish motives, here too our confession of that reality simply finds that "the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

What in these practical guidelines do you find most helpful? Is there anything that could be stated more clearly? Is there something missing from this list that could be added?

Here's how the proposed restatement of our synod's doctrinal statement on male and female seeks to summarize the beauty of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female as Christians seeks to live it out in the world:

God wove into his creation the interdependent and complementary partnership of selfless leading and selfless yielding as a blessing for males and females wherever they would partner in his world. Dearly loved children of God in Christ seek to discover what it means to be unique blessings to each other as male and female while simultaneously seeking to use their God-given gifts and aptitudes to love God and their neighbors in their God-given callings in the world (Genesis 2:18, 1 Corinthians 11:3).

Just as in the home and church, God provides male and female with an unchanging principle but leaves much to sanctified Christian wisdom when it comes to application. He treats us as free sons and daughters and not as minor children. This leaves room for Spirit-worked faith to bear fruit in ways that make the most of the unique gifts given to each believer, in applications that may change from setting to setting, from culture to culture, and from age to age.

Two elements combine to make it challenging in the unbelieving world to apply the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. The unbelieving world either ignores this principle or so distorts its applications to make the principle seem repulsive. In addition, Christians living out their callings often wrestle with how to honor multiple good principles of God that may appear to be in conflict.

However, God does not want such challenges to paralyze his children. He delights when his children are actively engaged in the world as salt and light. He invites believers to pray for sanctified wisdom so that they might know how to honor the heart of what is behind all the principles of God's law: to love God and neighbor selflessly. They trust that the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female is a good principle from God. They understand that other godly principles may also need to be considered as they decide how to serve. They weigh the unique

responsibilities God has given them in each of their callings. Finally, they act in faith and not fear, trusting that God knows how to bless them as they wrestle with decisions.

Christians wrestling with such difficult decisions are wise to seek the counsel of other spiritually mature Christians to guard against being deceived by the motives of their own hearts. Christians are also wise not to rush to judgment on applications made by other Christians as they also wrestle with how best to love God and neighbor in their callings.

Christians will also want to remember that it is a confusion of law and gospel to seek to compel unbelievers and an unbelieving world's institutions into outward conformity with God's will (1 Corinthians 5:9-10). Proclaiming the truth of God's law and gospel is the task God has given his church. If Christians use the Word to compel outward obedience, they have lost sight of the Word's God-given purpose to win hearts to repentance and faith and to empower believers to be salt and light in a dying world.

Where do these paragraphs help you understand the partnership of selfless leading and selfless yielding in the world? What further questions do these words raise for you?

Soli deo gloria!