



## **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!

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#### **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?**

**Leader's guide:** *Moses, the inspired narrator, calls our attention to the difference between God "merely" speaking as the rest of the universe and its various pieces and creatures come together, and then, suddenly, the notable change as we are allowed to listen into an astounding conversation within the Trinity as that which had been our triune God's delight from eternity has come to its moment of realization. The discussion of how they will be created in God's image (which the whole rest of this first part of the first lesson will emphasize) certainly stands out as something of first importance as God mentions the creation of human beings. The rule over the earth and all created things in it also points to the crown that adorns male and female.*

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).**

**Leader's guide:** *God didn't tell Adam that it wasn't good for him to be alone. The LORD trusts the male, created in the image of God, would reach the same conclusion that the LORD had known from eternity. The male, in his evident delight, did indeed clearly think God's thoughts after him. While creation in the image of God does not mean omniscience for human beings, yet the sharpness and clarity of Adam's thinking as one who possessed the image is also seen as he names all the animals. When Moses tells us that "Whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name," we are given a clear indication that the names were perfectly fitting as someone who saw the uniqueness of each of God's wonderful creatures. Adam's emotions are also clearly in tune with his Creator as that which delighted God from eternity (creating male and female in his image) fills him also with delight (listen to Adam's heart leap in the poetic response of verse 23!). And then, the will can also be seen to be in harmony with God as Adam is ready with that eagerness to receive the gift of Eve as his wife. Finally, you see the image in both the male and the female as they find no shame in being naked before God and each other.*

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## **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?**

**Leader's guide:** *To hear a sound and grasp what it indicates quite powerfully that the sound had been heard before. It appears quite clear that the Creator who delighted in his foremost creatures had chosen to make his presence with them a tangible reality from time to time as they lived in perfection. Another powerful biblical allusion to this is how heaven is described in Revelation as the restoration of the perfection of Eden with human beings living in the visible presence of their God.*

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?**

**Leader's guide:** *How beautiful is the image lived out, and what powerful evidence that no human being in a fallen world could ever regain this perfection—first granted as a gift even to Adam and Eve—without receiving it as a divine gift in Christ. And it is only that gift which can enable human beings to live before God in peace and fellowship rather than in fear and hostility!*

### **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?**

**Leader’s guide:** *Any parent who has handed the keys to their new car to a son or daughter knows the answer to this question! The parent’s hope is that the child treats that car with the same care they would. God has just finished shaping and crafting a world that is “very good” (Genesis 1:31), and as he hands the keys of its operation and development over to Adam and Eve and all human beings who would follow them, the gift of the image insures they will treat his perfect creation just as he would as they live as visible glimpses of God’s love and care!*

**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?**

**Leader’s guide:** *Because Adam and Eve knew they could trust God to take care of them perfectly, that freed them to give themselves completely to loving God in return by being his masks (as Luther called the beauty of our vocations) as they loved and cared for each other and the world God had entrusted into their hands.*

**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?**

**Leader's guide:** *To live this out as God intended takes trust in God's loving care that frees his creatures not to worry about themselves but to devote themselves to loving God by caring for his world and those he has placed around them in that world. But since fallen human beings do not trust God, they also have lost any true understanding of what it means to love selflessly. The essence of our sinful human nature is that we do not live in true fear, love, and trust in God, and so we lack that confidence in God that would enable us to live in perfect selfless love for our neighbor. As multiple church fathers have described it, the fall into sin left us "curved in on ourselves"—turned both away from God and our neighbor at the same time! Other people and things in God's creation become tools for our own advantage.*

➤ **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?**

**Leader's guide:** *Notice how the gospel gives the gift back to us! As the Spirit teaches us to trust in God's saving—and providing—love for us, we learn again (and it won't be until heaven that we fully understand this!) that we no longer need to live for ourselves (2 Corinthians 5:15).*

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?**

**Leader's guide:** *Paul speaks of this gift as something that “is being renewed” in us. Daily we will need to return to our baptism to die to the natural sinful inclinations of our natural hearts. But we also rise each day in the water of our baptism as we ponder anew the width, length, height, and depth of the love of Christ that has declared us to be fully loved children of God. The more we ponder that, the more we learn also day by day what it means to live out selfless love just as we have been loved selflessly. We learn to see again the glory of this gift we share as male and female: we are privileged to be glimpses of God's love and kindness in all he has given us to do in all the callings God has given 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?**

**Leader's guide:** *Sharing that triple gift from the hand of a gracious Creator (and Savior) is the foundation of this reality: male and female have equal status (value, standing) before God. The gifts were given equally when God first fashioned male and female at creation. It is this gospel reality that serves as the comfort and power to live again the wonder of the unique partnership God has fashioned for us—which is going to be the subject of lesson #2! Only as we grasp these gracious gifts that we share can we have any hope of delighting in the unique gifts that make us distinct from one another as male and female.*

*At the risk of repetition, it cannot be emphasized too much why this study starts where it did! Unless we delight in the awesome gifts once given at Creation (especially in a world that is so confused about their origins and identity as creatures of a loving Creator!) and then graciously re-given in Jesus, everything else we say in this Bible study will just seem like burdens to bear rather than gifts to be lived out. We are seeking in this lesson to immerse this whole Bible study in gospel-predominating realities. Too often, we so quickly rush to what is different about us, that we have failed to bask in the underlying wonder of this triple set of shared gifts from our Creator and Redeemer: 1) our identical status as male and female created and re-created in his image, 2) our blessed and then re-blessed fellowship and peace with our Creator, and 3) the given and re-given astounding privilege of being his visible representatives (his masks) on earth as we live for and serve our Creator by loving and caring for his world and for one another. Until we delight in that over and over again, everything in the rest of this Bible study will tend to be seen as burden instead of blessing!*

*Consider this also: many in our culture believe what we are teaching is not really uniqueness in some of our callings (we **are** teaching that!) but a hierarchy of value or status before God (which we are definitely **not** teaching!). So, this opening emphasis is also protecting God's people from being confused by how the world will caricature what we teach! We want our people to be able to say: Scripture [and therefore, also our church body] teaches the equality of male and female in their status and importance before God.*





## **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 #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!

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#### **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”?**

**Leader’s guide:** *Since God tells us nothing by accident, this prominent mentioning of our being created male and female speaks powerfully of the reality that our maleness and femaleness, our gender, is no slight or accidental feature in our creation. This is not merely a function of our physical anatomy but is deeply woven into how God shaped and fashioned each male and each female. Our maleness or femaleness is woven deeply into every cell of who we are by our loving Creator as one part of his good gifts to us. We are tugging at the thread of a basic part of the fabric of our Creator’s loving design for his world when we treat as malleable this element of how he fashioned us as male or female. Our uniqueness as male and female is no accidental feature of our creation nor is it some kind of plastic element of who we are that can be refashioned according to our will and wishes as our culture currently teaches.*

*Please note however: the curse of sin on a fallen world does mean that some are born without a clear indication by outward sexual organs of being male or female. Here we need to speak with pastoral caution and compassion as families and their children born with this challenge learn to cope with the inherent gender confusion this presents.*

*Special note to leader: Be careful not to allow this whole lesson to become sidetracked into a discussion on transgenderism and other forms of gender dysphoria (as it is called). Those are worthy topics for study, but for the purposes of this lesson, that could become a tangent that would take over the entire discussion.*

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.

**Leader's guide:** *We wisely make the hermeneutical distinction between descriptive and prescriptive passages of Scripture. That means we are careful in narrative sections not to read into the narrative our own ideas and then draw conclusions that are actually at variance with the rest of Scripture. That is the case because those narratives often show us the thoughts, emotions, and actions of sinful human beings. What is thought, felt, and done by those sinful human beings may not be something for imitation by us but for warning to us.*

*However, we need to be careful that we do not over-apply that distinction as if narrative portions of Scripture have no authority to teach. Just as with secular literature, narrators have powerful rhetorical tools at their disposal to signal to us subtly and more openly how we are to understand and what we are to gain from the narrative. That, of course, is especially true when the narrators are inspired by the Holy Spirit! While the distinction between descriptive and prescriptive passages helps guard against adding to Scripture, if we do not pay attention to how biblical narrative works, we will quickly find ourselves in the opposite ditch of saying less than Scripture teaches.*

*And, there is another factor to consider as we look at what some have called the foundational narratives of Genesis 1 and 2. We are viewing God shaping and forming his created world with precise care, not accidental whims of the moment. There is no sin in the world to mar God's clear patterns and intent in his creation. We are watching God in eternally-planned wisdom form and fashion his world with wisdom and precision.*

*We therefore are acting very wisely to pay careful attention to the details in these foundational narratives of Scripture. We have often been far too timid (and too much in a rush!) to soak in all that is being shared with us in Genesis 1 and 2. This too was written for our learning. And in a world so confused about our basic identity as creatures of God—and his unique crafting of us—we do well to take our time in pondering this.*

➤ **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?**

### Leader's guide:

- *In verse 7 we learn that God did not form male and female simultaneously. (There is a hint of that reality already in Genesis 1:27 if we pause to notice the careful and almost poetically ordered progression of “man . . . him . . . male and female he created them.”)*
- *We also see in verses 16 and 17 that the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is spoken only to Adam and that we have no record of God repeating it for Eve. God appears to have allowed Adam to exercise what we are going to call selfless leading (headship) by having Adam share with Eve what his Creator had told him. That would be consistent with how God honors the combination of the gift of his image and the calling of selfless leading he has given to the male. God tends not to do for people what he has called and equipped them to do!*
- *We also note in verse 18 that the female was shaped in her very creating to be a helper suitable for the male. That speaks powerfully of her creation as a perfect complement corresponding to the man, not as his duplicate. She is, in how she is going to be fashioned, made “for the man.” (We will underline this point in the next question as we note from the example of 1 Corinthians 11 how the New Testament picks up on this detail from the narrative.)*
- *In verses 19 and 20, while God also clearly had another purpose in mind by bringing the animals before the male to have him name them (helping the male to think God's thoughts after him about being not good that he was alone), yet this also speaks to the male's selfless leading that this task is given to him.*
- *In verses 20b-22 we observe that the female was not fashioned from the dust of the ground as was the male. Rather, she is created directly from the male's side. She is, quite literally, created “from the man.” (We will underline this point in the next question as we note from the example of 1 Corinthians 11 how the New Testament picks up on this detail from the narrative.)*
- *In verse 23, Adam also draws attention to the stunning (no doubt!) reality that the female had actually been fashioned by God right from him. It is also not to be overlooked that he names this wonderful creation of God “woman.”*
- *In verse 24, we see the male taking the initiative in beginning a new family unit as he is pictured leaving father and mother and being united to his wife in this God-given one-flesh relationship. While it is certainly evident that the female also would be leaving father and mother and also being united to her husband, the inspired narrator does not state that reality.*

**Leader's guide:** *Right here a division in interpretation in the visible church becomes quite apparent. Those who wish to teach egalitarianism rather than complementarianism will be quick to insist that we are reading these elements into the narrative rather than drawing them out of it. However, there are also many who favor egalitarianism who are more than willing to admit that the narrative is powerfully suggesting the insights we have just marked. (One example would be the article by Pamela J. Milne "Eve and Adam: Is a Feminist Reading Possible?" in the journal Bible Review, Volume 4.) But they will respond by saying this is a patriarchal and misogynistic strain often found in both Old and New Testaments. Of course, with such statements, those egalitarians reveal that they have a very low view of inspiration. The "blessing" we gain from the last group of egalitarians is that they join us in reading the narrative precisely as we have done above.*

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?**

**Leader's guide:** *The apostle Paul picks up on the element of the female being created "for" and "from" the male. Paul uses that as the authoritative basis for his application of the principle we are studying.*

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.

**Leader's guide:** *We need to speak very carefully here. Apart from its setting within its context here, the use of the word "helper" all by itself does not establish the complementarian reality of God's unique creation of male and female. In fact, the most frequent use of the family of words in the Old Testament for "help" or "helper" is to use it for God's help and assistance to us. Obviously, that does not place God into a position of recognizing our authority. (If we speak carelessly, we are opening ourselves up to being put to shame by the egalitarians who will delight to point this reality out to us.) Rather, the complementary uniqueness of the creation of male and female is seen in the whole process of Eve's being uniquely formed by God's design as a helper suitable "from" and "for" Adam.*

*And then, we can go back to the reality of how the word "helper" is used elsewhere in Scripture to discover the beauty of the reality that the female, in carrying out her calling as a helper is carrying out a task in which she is a glimpse of God's own activity. That should not surprise us, since what both male and female do in their God-given callings serves as a glimpse of God's love and protection. That is one of our shared blessings we underlined in lesson 1.*

**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?**

**Leader's guide:** *While the narrative certainly suggests that God had marriage and family especially in mind when he created mankind uniquely as males and females, yet the reality is that how God shaped and formed us as male or female for partnering with each other in his world is not left behind wherever we go. To fail to consider the impact of our maleness or femaleness wherever we partner with one another in relationships in God's world is to close our eyes to part of the beauty and wonder and wisdom of our creation by the hand of God.*

*This reality of what is woven deeply into our very natures becomes limiting and burdensome and oppressive only as sinful human nature distorts God's intricate, wise, and loving plan for us as males and females created in his image. We must be careful that we don't ascribe to God what human sinfulness has often distorted into something ugly, oppressive, and hurtful. Our uniqueness as males and females was not a harmful limit to our lives any more than it hurts fish that they were designed with gills to extract oxygen from water rather than being created with lungs to draw that oxygen from the air. Our unique and complementary creation as male and female is one part of how God beautifully wove and ordered the amazing tapestry of his whole creation.*

*Yet, also a part of the wonder of Scripture is that it teaches us not only to see our complementary creation but also to grasp that we were created in complementary fashion. However, God did not create male and female uniquely so that they could live in independent isolation from one another but in interdependence with one another. It is to that truth—which helps us keep our biblical balance solidly in the middle—to which we turn next.*

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## **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?**

**Leader's guide:** *God's statement, recorded by Moses, is not confessing a flaw in his creation (as if he somehow had not anticipated that the male's aloneness was going to be a problem). Rather, God is simply alerting us to the reality that he is not finished with the creation of the crown of his creation. In that sense, of incompleteness, this is not good!*

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?**

**Leader's guide:** *It isn't just in marriage that we find the blessing of the man not being alone. Since we were shaped in our very creation by God as complements of each other, there is great blessing in not going it alone as males or females in almost every area of life. When we partner with one another as males and females we are expressing an interdependence that God has also woven into our reality as male and female.*

*We will notice Paul making the same broad application of this very reality—that God did not create us for independence from one another but interdependence—in our next passage from 1 Corinthians 11.*

*The author of this Bible study would like to add a personal aside here. Growing up in the middle of the 1960s in a small town in the Midwest, he was convinced that God had pretty much designed two parallel and seldom intersecting worlds. There was the “men's world” and the “women's world” and seldom would the two meet. (Although my very existence, I would later learn to realize, was evidence that they did at least occasionally intersect!) The kitchen—at home and at church—was the turf of the females. Government and much of the work world (except for nurses, teachers, and secretaries) was primarily the turf of the males. Raising and nurturing children was the women's world. Paying for those children was the men's world. My child's-eye-view of my world could have many more areas to list. Now, without giving way to the opposite extreme (as if we are indeed little more than interchangeable duplicates of each other), a large part of my continuing education was to learn the beauty of the interdependence that God intended all along. The two worlds were one, even if there were unique callings God had in mind for males and females as they partnered in that world. I am convinced that I am not alone in our church body and congregations in still having much to learn when it comes to understanding the implications of treasuring the beauty of the interdependence side of this complementary partnership.*

➤ **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?**

**Leader's guide:** *Holding on to our complementary creation guards us against treating each other as duplicates of each other as male and female, as if God had no unique callings in mind in fashioning us as male and female. But holding on to the reality of our interdependence helps us grasp that we were designed to function together in this partnership in his world.*

*Holding on to the reality of our complementarity helps us avoid under-applying the principle that is the focus of this study. Holding on to the reality of our interdependence helps us avoid over-applying the principle. That is why, with no small degree of repetition, this Bible study again and again refers to the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female.*

**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?**

**Leader's guide:** *Here talk about the author's simplistic and childish view of the world with sharp separations into a "man's world" and a "woman's world." The partnership was obscured in too many ways—in ways that our own agricultural background as a church body should have taught us to see through! In the days of pioneering farming, the critical nature of a fully functioning partnership of male and female in making a living on the frontier would have been so obvious it would hardly need to be mentioned. In the more compartmentalized urban life that developed in our culture, the compartmentalization of the "male's world" and the "female's world" we at times learned to accept as a given hinders us from grasping how interconnected God intended us to be as male and female everywhere in his world in the partnership he designed.*

### **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**

**Leader's guide:** Notice how Jesus mentions the all-embracing-authority (unlike the always limited authority of all merely human leaders) as the prelude to giving his church her marching orders until the end of all time. Authority in Scripture always carries with it the idea of the responsibility of giving direction to others that they are to follow for their own good or the good of others they serve.

- **Matthew 8:9**

**Leader's guide:** Notice how this centurion—blessed with great faith by God's gracious work on his heart—shows us human authority (always limited: “For I myself am a man under authority . . .”) also having the responsibility to give direction to others that they are to follow for their own good or the good of others they serve.

- **1 Corinthians 12:28**

**Leader's guide:** While the Greek word for leadership here—κυβέρνησις—is used only once in the New Testament, the picture it paints before us is exceedingly helpful for grasping where the authority that comes with the biblical concept of leadership is in play. The picture is of the helmsman of the ship in whose hand is the rudder that steers the ship. Can't you picture the leader—perhaps in stormy congregational seas—saying, “This is the way, my dear brothers and sisters, follow me!” (Some translations lose much of the unique meaning of this word by translating with the word “administration.”)

**Leader's guide:** *We need to think carefully about how differently Scripture and current culture may use the word "leadership." In our culture, leadership is often used to speak about someone influencing others without any formal authority. Such influence (in the highest and best sense) is also often at work in the church, but that isn't what Scripture means by leadership. Also, because our world is so fearful of the many kinds of abuse those in authority have often inflicted upon those they lead, many positions that once were true leadership positions in the biblical sense have been stripped in whole or in part of any true authority. Understanding those distinctions can keep us from talking right past one another as we try to discern where true biblical leadership—with authority—is at work.*

*However, as mentioned briefly above, it is also important to note that when Scripture uses any of its leadership words, the concept of authority is always in play. As far as the terms it uses, Scripture does not know of leadership without authority. (A study of the New Testament's use of various forms of ἡγέομαι and προΐστημι for leadership can be instructive.) Where God asks someone to lead, he always entrusts them with a bit of his authority.*

*In all of this it's important to remember that we are dealing with a concept (the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female) not just words. That can keep us from playing games with words (for example: not calling someone a leader when they obviously have leadership authority).*

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**

**Leader's guide:** *This is the quintessential passage of the humility of heart, and the willingness to suffer personal loss for the sake of those being led, in which biblical leadership is to be exercised. At his incarnation, there was gifted to the human nature of Christ true equality with God (we call this the genus maiestaticum in systematic theology as we study the communication of attributes in the person of Christ!). Yet though given to his human nature was this equality with God, he humbled himself by living as the servant of all in his appearance and saving work during his visible walk on earth. By that, the Lord of heaven and earth in the person of his incarnate Son willingly made himself obedient to death. Without a loss of any of his authority, in fact, in the true spirit of what leadership is in God's kingdom, he lays down his life for those he leads!*

- **Ephesians 1:22**

**Leader's guide:** *There is great beauty of the dative of advantage found in this passage (τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ). The Bridegroom who has been given authority over everything exercises his authority for the advantage of his dear Bride! More than we can ever grasp, everything from headlines to blog posts must serve the benefit of the church because her head rules all things! This is the biblical concept of selfless leadership always exercised for the advantage of those being led or those they serve in concert with their leader. Such leadership, as noted in Philippians 2 above, often comes at a great personal cost to the leader! That, not leadership as perk and privilege for the benefit of the leader, is the biblical concept at work!*

- **Matthew 20:25-28**

**Leader's guide:** *Here Jesus is dealing yet again with the jockeying for positions of honor among the Twelve (as James and John even get their mother involved in the argument). This challenge comes up repeatedly among the Twelve, and if we think we have grown past this, that is evidence #1 for the prosecution that we have not! Jesus calls them aside to teach them yet again that they were importing their idea of leadership (and confusing it with importance/status—as every sinner does) from the world, not from the kingdom of heaven! The mark of leadership in God's kingdom is imitating the humble and suffering service for the sake of others that was Jesus' joy!*

- **2 Corinthians 10:8**

**Leader's guide:** *Notice how simply Paul shares with us the purpose of godly leadership! It is “for building you up rather than pulling you down.”*

- **2 Corinthians 6:3-10**

**Leader's guide:** *What comes with leadership in God's kingdom this side of heaven? It is not ticker tape parades and accolades and smiling faces on the cover of Time. Quite often, what comes with biblical leadership are some unique God-given opportunities to bear the cross for the sake of being God's earthly mouthpiece to win the elect for salvation during the "time of God's favor" (2 Corinthians 6:2).*

- **Hebrews 13:17**

**Leader's guide:** *Can any passage speak more about the sobering responsibility God gives to leaders? God will ask those who lead to give an account of their leadership before him. No, this is not the leader's ticket into heaven (or no leaders would be present for eternity!). But it does serve as warning and encouragement that positions of leadership are lived out under God's concerned and careful watch.*

**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?**

**Leader's guide:** *Paul said it so simply in 1 Corinthians 12:21, "The head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you.' " God has not given to any leader a "complete package" of wisdom or gifts. We need each other. Once again we see the interdependence of this partnership.*

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

**Leader's guide:** *Leadership is functioning best for the sake of whatever organization it is (home, church, workplace, government, etc.) when the one leading does not seek to go it alone (as if the whole body were an eye) but values the gifts, talents, wisdom and strengths of all in the organization. The wisdom and gifts of those under the leader's care and direction are there to further God's purposes for whatever relational setting is under consideration (again: home, church, workplace, government, etc.). It is also critical for harmonious partnerships that those being led do not get the impression that their God-given gifts and wisdom are superfluous to the functioning of that organization. God certainly did not feel that way, or he wouldn't have given the gifts and wisdom. We tempt ourselves and other toward pride and envious squabbling about "who is the greatest" when those in leadership discount the 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?**

**Leader's guide:** *The ad hoc committee responsible for the production of this Bible study began their work with a survey from called workers and lay leaders within our fellowship. Since it had been made known that a woman was an advisor to the committee, one respondent warned that this might mean the committee would be influenced by her. What was expressed as a fear was actually the purpose of having her present for the committee's study of Scripture, discussion, and development of its materials. The influence of such godly and spiritually mature women is precisely what good leadership needs.*

*To be fair, perhaps the survey respondent was using "influence" in a worldly sense of: "I must have my way, and you better listen!" That, of course, would turn the principle on its head.*

**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?**

**Leader's guide:** *On the one side is a proud abuse of authority so that it becomes a wielding of power to the advantage of the leader and often to the disadvantage of those being led. On the other side is being so averse to living under the authority of God-given leadership that we wash out of leadership any idea of authority at all. We confuse equal status/value before God with equal responsibility. The first is biblical. The latter is not.*

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?**

**Leader’s guide:** *“From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise” (Psalm 8:2). God’s Spirit knows how to confess his truth even from the mouths of the youngest among us! As we as a church body study the Scriptures and wrestle for the clearest way to confess this biblical truth for our time, we do well to take note of any suggestions arising from God’s people young and old—male and female!—that may enable us to clarify our confession for ourselves and for the culture around us.*

### ***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”?**

**Leader’s guide:** *Anyone who saw the movie “The Help” has a good picture of what demeaning and pejorative meanings have come to be associated with the whole concept of being a helper or offering help! But this lifts the whole concept into the realm of the image of God and the doctrine of vocation. The question of value and status before God has already been answered in his gift of his created (and gloriously re-created in Christ) image (our next passage will explore that more directly).*

*Our callings in life—where we get to be masks of God—are not a quest to find out who is important. Rather, we seek in those callings to find the opportunities God designed for us to be glimpses of his compassion and protection! Both selfless leading and selfless yielding are given this same glory: both unique callings are glimpses of God to his world.*

*The more we learn to take these realities to heart, the less we waste our time in joining the Twelve in useless bickering about who is the greatest and the more time we learn to spend in serving as glimpses of God as those whom he has already in Jesus made his dear sons and daughters. In such service as selfless leaders and selfless yielders we find the true joy of being servants of the Savior who loved us.*

➤ **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?**

**Leader's guide:** *Once again, serving as a helper or yielding to someone who has been entrusted with God-given authority over us is seen almost instantly as negative or demeaning, especially in cultures that take pride in seeing themselves as egalitarian. What is often ignored is that even the most egalitarian society cannot function for long without recognizing at least some degree of authority. Otherwise, that society will quickly descend into chaos and anarchy.*

*The problem, however, is even more basic. What people are often confusing is a biblical distinction between status (value) and calling (role). This will forever be a problem in the unbelieving world where there is no firm and objective ground for status. Since people do not believe that their Creator longs for them to be his loved children and heirs through his eternal Son, they endlessly and hopelessly attempt to find their personal sense of value and worth in their various callings in life (or wealth, or friends, or etc.). Think how often in many cultures one of the first questions people ask of those they have just met: "What do you do for a living?" Without realizing it, that question is often seeking to set a value on the person we've met. Think how differently we may be tempted to value that person if we find out they are a high-powered executive who sits in a C-level suite at a Fortune 500 company compared to an entrance-level worker earning minimum wage and cleaning bathrooms at McDonald's. With God there is no such favoritism (see James 2:1-4), but all too often with us there is! We ask a question about calling (role), but we make judgments simultaneously about status (value).*

➤ **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?**

**Leader's guide:** *The gospel tames our sinful nature's tendency to serve things and use people to get them for our own advantage. As the Spirit works tirelessly through the gospel to calm our hearts in the love and provision of our Savior, he enables us to die to living for self.*

*And something else wonderful happens as the gospel fills our thoughts. More and more we lose the desire to see people from a worldly value system of importance (more money and/or higher social standing) and see them through the eyes of Jesus (every individual marked as valuable by the blood of Jesus shed for them—even if they don't yet know or believe that).*

➤ **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?**

**Leader's guide:** *God always remains the ultimate authority for us all. Anyone who asks us to sin against our God in what they ask of us has given us direction we cannot follow. With the apostles, we then obey God rather than any human being.*

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

**Leader's guide:** *This annuls the picture of the selfless yielder as a doormat on whom leaders can sinfully wipe their feet. To paraphrase Luther at the Diet of Worms: our conscience is captive to the Word of God, and it is neither healthy nor safe to act in violation of a Word-of-God informed conscience!*

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?**

**Leader's guide:** *“From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise” (Psalm 8:2). God’s Spirit knows how to confess his truth even from the mouths of the youngest among us! As we as a church body study the Scriptures and wrestle for the clearest way to confess this biblical truth for our time, we do well to take note of any suggestions arising from God’s people young and old—male and female!—that may enable us to clarify our confession for ourselves and for the culture around us.*

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.



## **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 #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?**

**Leader's guide:** *As Christians, we will be confronted with an endless array of situations in both home and church (and in the world—more on that in the next lesson) where we will wonder what the wisest application of this principle may be. Imagine what would happen if we had to have a specific application from God's Word to each situation or we could not act? We would end up with the equivalent of canon law: telling God's people what the precise response is to each situation. Easily lost in all the specific applications is any real grasp on the underlying principle!*

*Instead, God's Word seeks to ground us in the principle, while offering us some examples of the kinds of applications that might be good and wise in various settings. In this way, God seeks to help Christians of every age and place to be prepared for the ever-changing settings of the world in which we live by grounding us in his unchanging Word. This gives us confidence to make wise applications in faith!*

*Please notice how different this is from how God treated his Old Testament church as minor children under the pedagogy of the Sinaitic Covenant. They had a plethora of specific directions given that covered almost every aspect of their daily life in worship, the home, and society. But dealing with us as his "adult" children in the New Testament era comes with a challenge. . . .*

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

**Leader's guide:** *God's way of operating assumes that he is dealing with maturing children of God who are functioning in the home by the Spirit's power through the gospel with a clear understanding of what Scripture says. If we want to see the inherent danger spelled out if we are not growing toward maturity in Christ, we just need to look at Ephesians 4:14.*

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!

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### **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.

**Leader's guide:** *It is worth noting that the verb ὑποτάσσω does not even occur in verse 22. Even in verse 21 it is found not in a finite form but as a participle. This is part of a much larger section in which the apostle Paul lays out with five Greek participles (three are in verse 19, one in verse 20, and one in verse 21) what it means to live as those who are filled with the Spirit!*

*It is also worth noting that verse 21 is clearly a transitional verse to the next major section as Paul uses that final participle to open a new section of his epistle in which he addresses the selfless yielding to God-given leaders that believers will apply in multiple directions. The context makes it clear that in verse 21 ἀλλήλων is not being used in its most common reciprocal meaning.*

*As Wayne Grudem has shown in his chapter “The Myth of Mutual Submission as an Interpretation of Ephesians 5:21” in the book Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood, there is simply no evidence inside or outside the New Testament of ὑποτάσσω being used as a synonym for the mutual service which, in other contexts, God does call all Christians to give one another. But to translate ἀλλήλων with a reciprocal meaning here would compel us to understand ὑποτάσσω as some kind of mutual submission—a meaning it has nowhere in Greek literature. Instead, ἀλλήλων is being used here in a similar way to how John uses it in Revelation 6:4 where John speaks of people slaughtering one another. Obviously, that means people are slaughtering others in multiple directions. There is no such thing as reciprocal murder. In Ephesians 5:21, Paul is opening a section of his epistle in which he speaks of Christians honoring those with authority over them in multiple directions, and then he proceeds to deal with some of those multiple directions one by one.*

*Another helpful discussion of Ephesians 5:21 can be found in an exegetical brief written by Professor John Schuetze. That doctrinal brief can be found in Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Volume 100, Number 3, on pages 206-209.*

**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?**



**Leader's guide:** *God holds selfless leaders to be primarily responsible for the welfare of the relationship in which he has given them their authority. This is not a matter of differing status before God, but it is a matter of greater responsibility for establishing the tone and providing the direction for that relationship. Just as Genesis 2 pictures the husband as taking the lead in the forming of this new home, so Ephesians 5 pictures the husband as taking the lead in being a glimpse of Christ to his wife (and children) as he leads his home in selfless love just as Christ leads his church.*

**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?**

**Leader's guide:** *It is a blessing of God to have a leader who imitates Christ by exercising that leadership with selfless love. While no sinful human husband, no matter how mature in Christ, will live that out perfectly, yet even imperfectly done it is a blessing to the wife as Christ is a blessing as the selfless leader of us all in the church.*

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

**Leader's guide:** *There is a great blessing, obviously, in having a believing husband leading his home since being called to daily repentance and forgiveness provides him with the strength to grow in loving like Christ (and the courage to confess to his wife where he has failed). But even where the husband may be unbelieving, this God-given calling to care for and protect his wife and family is still at work—though at times only dimly understood. It is true that the wife of an unbelieving husband may need even more regularly to remember that behind her husband is her ultimate Head who is looking out for her (Christ).*

*For those who wish to think this through more, point them to where Peter addresses this specific question in his first epistle: 1 Peter 3:1-6.*

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

**Leader's guide:** *Clearly no one in authority has the right to command us to do what is sinful or harmful to others. Our ultimate Head always remains our Savior himself. That's when "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).*

*For the use of a biblical example not often considered (since it is the reverse of the usual male abuse of the female) point out Joseph's words to Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39:9 when she had clear authority over him as a slave in the household. At great personal risk—and it led to his imprisonment—Joseph refused to take the mistress of the house as his mistress. Peter's words talk about not giving in to fear as we live in trust in God (1 Peter 3:6).*

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)?**

**Leader's guide:** *The word Paul uses for "gave himself" is a form of παραδίδομι, which certainly has sufficient room to call to mind not only Jesus' handing himself over to the cross but also his willing submission to all of the law in our place. This consideration of the active obedience of Christ—and not only the passive obedience—helps husbands get past thinking what, for most Christian husbands, is a bit of an empty boast without concrete application: "Yes, I'd be willing to die for my wife!" The much more every day question is this: "Yes, but are you willing to live for her in the day-to-day routine of life as you die to your turned-in-on-self sinful nature?"*

**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?**

**Leader's guide:** *Jesus was not presented with an intrinsically lovely bride but with a spiritual harlot whom he cleansed in baptism with his blood and clothed with a lifetime of his own perfection. We were not a stunning catch, yet he loved us beyond measure. Christians husbands are called to imitate Christ and provide loving and selfless leadership even when she is being less than loving—perhaps **especially** when she is being less than loving. That's when the Christ-likeness of the husband's love has a chance to stand out.*

*While the analogy breaks down since Jesus is the perfect Bridegroom, this question can be reversed for the wife as well. The Christian wife is tempted to compare her husband's leadership to her Savior's and show disdain for how poorly her husband measures up. Serving in the calling of selfless yielding is a gift she has received from Christ, not a reward her husband earns for good behavior!*

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

**Leader's guide:** *How God honors his gift of marriage in that it is one of his most common analogies for his own relationship with his people in both the Old and New Testament! How beautiful is our relationship with our heavenly Bridegroom! How exalting it is to his gift of marriage that he uses it as an analogy of our relationship with him!*

**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?**

**Leader's guide:** *Both Christian husband and wife in selfless yielding on her part and selfless leading on his part are living out godly callings in which they imitate God himself. The incarnate Son—according to his human nature—yielded to his Father's will for how the world would be redeemed, though that cost him everything! The incarnate Son serves as our perfect selfless leader. The world may scoff at our biblical sensibilities, but we are glimpses of God's love and compassion as we live out these callings!*

**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)?**

**Leader's guide:** *Once again we have a powerful implied statement about his calling to selfless leading in the home. The spiritual nurture of children in the home is something for which God primarily holds the husband/father responsible. While, depending on the circumstances of that household, much of this may be carried out by the wife/mother, yet for a husband/father to wash his hands of this is to miss a great privilege and joy of being a Christian husband/father!*

*Note: It would be good to acknowledge here that in a fallen world in which many a Christian wife may not have a believing husband, or may be a single mother, there will be many cases in which she will trust that God will give her the strength and the wisdom to carry out that task without someone in her household partnering with her.*

**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?**

**Leader's guide:** *As God is daily patient with us as he leads us to repentance and back to forgiveness, he is not only comforting us, he is empowering us to also deal with others in such patient grace. Since we recognize the reality that we are simul justus et peccator until the day we die, every husband and wife will regularly test each other's patience. If the gospel is not filling that home with forgiving patience, all of this will break down quite quickly!*

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?**

**Leader's guide:** *“From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise” (Psalm 8:2). God’s Spirit knows how to confess his truth even from the mouths of the youngest among us. As we as a church body study the Scriptures and wrestle for the clearest way to confess this biblical truth for our time, we do well to take note of any suggestions arising from God’s people young and old—male and female—that may enable us to clarify our confession for ourselves and for the culture around us.*

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## **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?**

**Leader’s guide:** *What a great blessing it is when selfless leaders lead us in prayer to the one who is our ultimate Head! They are “preaching” a powerful message at those moments when they testify that we live not by our own wits and wisdom but by the gracious and providing love of God who hears and answers the prayers of all his children who come to him in faith in Jesus.*

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

**Leader’s guide:** *We are very thankful for those who are zealous for the cause of the gospel and who work hard in leading our congregations to follow them in that zeal and hard work. But as soon as there are two leaders zealous to lead, there may very well be two opinions about the best way to direct the congregation (in matters not settled by the Word of God). Apathy creates few arguments and disputes, but strong leaders can easily become sources of angry dispute between them. Then a good thing (strong leadership) is being sidetracked by proud conflict. Here, too, to pray for wisdom in all humility—rather than to argue proudly about whose vision for the congregation is better—offers a way forward that can quiet such “anger and disputing”!*

*Please note: the context suggested by Paul’s encouragement for the males to “lift up holy hands in prayer” seems to strongly suggest the more formal gatherings of God’s people in which the males are being asked to lead the family of faith in these prayers. Paul’s words call to mind settings like Solomon standing before the gathered people of Israel at the dedication of the temple as he “spread out his hands toward heaven” (1 Kings 8:22). He was serving the entire gathered assembly as their anointed leader in taking their prayer to God’s throne.*

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?**

**Leader's guide:** *There may be no more important form of authoritative leadership than to teach the Word with authority since that Word makes and keeps people wise for salvation. Just consider how some of the strongest warnings in Scripture are to those who were giving in to the temptation to mix their own ideas into what they declared to be God's Word (see Jeremiah 23:25ff for one example).*

*Please note: This would be a very opportune time to point out that the principle is selfless leading and selfless yielding. That leads to the application of not having Christian women doing the authoritative teaching of the Word to adult Christian males. Teaching the word is an application Paul makes because it involves authority (the heart of the principle). Some in our midst have called this the primary application, but it is still an application, not the principle. Some, in ignoring this distinction between the principle and the reality end up limiting the principle (authority) as if it only applies to the authoritative teaching of the Word. That turns an application into a principle and ends up limiting the principle in a way that Scripture does not.*

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.

**Leader's guide:** *Some have tried to undermine that we have anything certain we can say from 1 Timothy 2:11,12 by pointing out that Paul uses a hapax in ἀθηντέω. However, the attempts to provide strange or obscure meanings that would undermine any application of the principle have fallen flat. What is also often not carefully enough observed is the tight grammatical construction Paul has set up that offers significant help in translating the admittedly rare verb Paul was inspired to use. In between the ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ bookends by which Paul clearly sets off these two verses as a unit, Paul has two sets of two words that help define the others. One set is μαθητάνω and διδάσκω. Those two words contrast sitting as a disciple at a rabbi's feet and the authoritative teaching done by the rabbi (in fact it is their pairing that helps us grasp that Paul is not talking about the more royal priestly sharing of the Word that διδάσκω does rarely have—see Colossians 3:16) . The other set is ὑποταγή and ἀθηντέω. Even if somehow Paul's intensity had burned a hole in the manuscript at the place where ἀθηντέω would have been, we could pretty well "fill in the blank." He is saying, "Let a woman in quietness learn in all submission, I do not permit her to teach or to \_\_\_\_\_ a man, but let her be in quietness." Clearly the "missing word" (or, in this case, difficult word) would be the opposite of what ὑποταγή (not to mention the double ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ) calls for from a woman when it comes to the process of authoritative teaching. We may struggle with the nuance of this challenging verb, but its general meaning is clearly established from the structure of Paul's sentence.*

**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?**

**Leader's guide:** *No doubt what may first come to mind when we think of authoritative teaching of the Word is the proclamation of the Word that takes place in public worship. We would also think of the setting of a mixed adult Bible study where someone is clearly serving as "the teacher" as others gather to learn.*

*Note: In settings of sharing the Word designed for Christian women (a women's Bible study, an Advent by candlelight devotion), there would certainly be no violation of the principle if a woman led such devotions and Bible study for her Christian sisters. In such settings the sharing of the Word by a spiritually mature Christian woman can allow for specific applications of law and gospel from their shared experience as Christian women that can speak especially clearly to her Christian sisters.*

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?**

**Leader's guide:** *As we mentioned earlier in lesson 2, acknowledging an authority over us is seen by our sinful nature as an infringement on our freedom and independence. By nature we don't willfully recognize anyone's authority over us, human or divine. So, with his interconnected string of "head of . . . head of . . . head of" Paul reminds each believer—both male and female—quite simply and yet powerfully that having a God-given head is a blessing of loving direction and protection. The acknowledgement of a God-given head that God asks of Christian females is not essentially different from what he asks of every Christian. Christian women may simply often have an extra "layer" of loving direction and protection also from a human head. What is more, even the incarnate Son of God, as true man, recognized the headship of his heavenly Father! In all of this, the inspired pen of Paul, quite eloquently, reminds us that having a God-given head is not a curse. It is a rich blessing from God who is the ultimate Head of us all.*

*Note: As also mentioned in an earlier lesson, Paul helps us deal here with a caricature against the principle that is often raised even within the church. Some exaggerate the principle by saying that if we say this is a general principle woven into the fabric of God's creation when he fashioned us uniquely as male and female, then that would mean that every woman must recognize every man she sees as her head.*

*However, that ignores that this principle was designed to function in God's world in the midst of partnerships that are formed for the good of those in that partnership as well as for the good of others who are served by that partnership. The principle is designed to be a blessing to us in our various concrete callings in life, not as some abstraction to philosophize about. To treat the principle as some generic abstraction is to distort what God intends.*

*With that in mind, it may be worth pondering how Paul may be offering us in verse 3 a confirmation about avoiding such a caricature. When he speaks about the man, he says the head of "every man (παντὸς ἀνδρὸς) is Christ," but it is interesting to note that Paul drops the "every" as he speaks of the woman! He doesn't say, "the head of every woman is man." But the "every" does come back for both male and female again shortly afterward in this context (see verses 4 and 5) as he makes specific application of the principle to a particular setting (not some generic application everywhere). That presence, absence, and then presence of "every" is worth pondering. It seems to help us lay to rest the caricature we have mentioned.*

**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?**

**Leader's guide:** *The custom was based on the dim understanding even of that pagan culture of what the Creator had woven into our creation as male and female. While head coverings were not a command of God found anywhere in Scripture, for the Christian women of Corinth to use their “freedom” to dismiss the custom would have easily sent a message to their unbelieving culture that they were dismissing the principle it represented. Therefore, refusing to follow the custom would dishonor the principle.*

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?**

**Leader's guide:** *While such a custom once existed (see the author's personal story in this lesson's introduction), it no longer exists in our culture. Since it was not a custom commanded by God, we do not need to reinstate this custom. In our current setting, the principle is not impacted by the wearing—or not wearing—of such head coverings.*

In verse 7, Paul is certainly not disagreeing with the reality that God gifted in creation (and in re-creation 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”?**

**Leader's guide:** *One of God's greatest delights—repeated over and over again in the promises of Scripture—is to guard and protect those who are his own as their ultimate Head. The Christian male, when he exercises such guarding and protecting of those under his selfless leading, is a particularly fitting glimpse of who our God is at his very heart!*

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

**Leader's guide:** *It is a dishonor and disgrace to those in positions of selfless leading if those they are leading refuse to follow their leadership. When a Christian woman, for the sake of love for her Lord and Creator, honors the human leader or leaders that God has given her, she brings honor to those leaders in a special way.*

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."

**Leader's note:** *Our church body has wisely worked hard against the egalitarian views of our culture and much of the church that would try to wash out of our minds any thought of complementarity in God's created design for male and female. But it is worth asking ourselves this question: in fighting so hard against that danger in one direction, have we at times in the applications we have made inadvertently over-protected so that we have lost far too much of the beauty of our interdependence? The author of this Bible study would answer that last question with a repentant "Yes!"—at least in regard to his own life and ministry. Again and again we see how biblical truth is a narrow beam between errors on either side. That means we must hold on to "two things" to stay safely and faithfully in that middle. May God give us the wisdom and courage to fight against both ditches so that we learn even more evidently to rejoice in our interdependence just as we have been so careful about complementarity!*

➤ **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?**

**Leader’s guide:** *In such a gathering of God’s people, where speaking would often be either silencing the previous speaker or judging that previous speaker’s words, it is hard to imagine how a woman could speak without almost instantly seeming to overthrow what it means to selflessly yield to those in that gathering who were her selfless leaders. That may explain the strong words as Paul speaks.*

*There would also be wisdom in mentioning what has been stated several times before. That the women are praying and prophesying in the unique setting of 1 Corinthians 11, but not in this setting of 1 Corinthians 14, helps us understand again that silence for women is not the principle but an application of the principle only where speaking would clearly turn God’s complementary and interdependent partnership upside down. We do well to ponder that carefully as we consider what application to make—or not make—of this call for silence.*

*There is one other interesting point to ponder in verse 33. When Paul says that “God is not a God of disorder but of peace,” he uses a Greek word (ἀκαταστασίας) that is very similar to the Greek word that the Septuagint used (ἀκατασκεύαστος) to translate יהוה in Genesis 1:2 (the word Moses used as part of his describing the “formless and empty” state of the world before God’s crafting day by day his beautifully ordered creation). God does not desire to watch his foremost creatures as they seem to be returning to such formlessness and emptiness. That is certainly true when his believers gather with one another as his family.*

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

**Leader's note:** *This next section could be read at home and then used for discussion at the beginning of the next Bible class session.*

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?**

**Leader’s guide:** *We owe a debt of love not to seem to be treating lightly the delicate bonds of Christian love and peace that join us with our fellow Christians in other congregations or in church bodies with whom we walk in close fellowship. Such carefulness not to run off abruptly in our own self-chosen direction of application of the principle is in keeping with Paul’s encouragement also in Ephesians 4:3: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”*

**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?**

**Leader's guide:** *When we hear of congregations making different applications of the principle than are in play in our congregation, we owe a debt of love now in the opposite direction. We dare not jump to the conclusion that they have rejected the principle. We may be the ones who do not understand the unique culture and setting of that family of faith that may indeed have made a wise application without violating the principle in the least! So we begin by patiently asking questions, and if the answers reveal that a caution or even a rebuke may be needed, we would even do that with the gentleness Paul urges in 2 Timothy 2:25. Even then we speak gently because we value the tender bonds of love that bind us together in the truth of Christ. We don't want our harsh words to drive them further into defending what cannot be defended. If they have truly made an unwise application or even clearly violated the principle itself, it is our prayer that they will value such love from their brothers and sisters by hearing and heeding our words.*

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?**

**Leader's guide:** *“From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise” (Psalm 8:2). God’s Spirit knows how to confess his truth even from the mouths of the youngest among us. As we as a church body study the Scriptures and wrestle for the clearest way to confess this biblical truth for our time, we do well to take note of any suggestions arising from God’s people young and old—male and female—that may enable us to clarify our confession for ourselves and for the culture around us.*

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## 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.

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## FOR FURTHER STUDY

**Leader's note:** *There would be wisdom in encouraging that this brief essay on the two kingdoms be read before session four of this Bible study. Having pondered the distinctions of the two kingdoms ahead of time can be very helpful for understanding the concepts being discussed in this lesson.*

### 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.

**Leader's guide:** *What makes this even more challenging for those who live in "Evangelical" America is that most Christians around us badly confuse the two kingdoms and seek to use government and elections to bring the kingdom of God on earth. At first glance, we can easily seem to be timid and almost ashamed of our faith (and, of course, those are very real temptations!), but that isn't necessarily so.*

**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?**

**Leader's guide:** *As our Bible study has been confessing all along, God wove deeply into his creation of human beings our being male and female. Such an important part of our created identity is our being male and female that God mentioned it almost immediately as he announced his intentions to form us as the crown of his creation (Genesis 1:27). If God has indeed created us uniquely to function in this interdependent and complementary partnership, to ignore that reality of our creation anywhere we go is to rule out a significant part of how God fashioned us to live. We don't cease being uniquely created for this interdependent and complementary partnership when we step over the threshold of our homes or our churches. The more we understand how God has uniquely formed us as male and female, the more we begin to grasp why it is loving to help one another ponder how this principle impacts how we will live in all our various callings in God's world as we interact as male and female.*

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).

**Leader's guide:** Here is a useful commentary on Isaiah 3 from Walter Roehrs on page 457 of the *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*:

*The Lord's "day" of judgment (2:5-22) will not bring only slight inconvenience or a minor dislocation of life. Law and order will collapse like a building deprived of its supporting pillars. Unprincipled and inept officials will produce civic chaos (3:1-5). No one will have the will or the resources to assume leadership in the existing state of anarchy (3:6-8). Those posing as leaders are oppressors and do all they can to create confusion (3:9-12). The elders and princes, responsible for justice, fatten themselves with the spoil of the poor (3:13-15). The breakdown of society will be apparent in a debased womanhood. Parading in every finery of the current fashion and glancing wantonly with their eyes, the insipid ladies will hasten the day when, stripped of every glittering ornament and violated by cruel invaders, they will be forced to adorn themselves with the sackcloth of mourning. (3:16-26)*

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.

**Leader's guide:** *As we are introduced to Deborah, we do not find her publicly gathering a following in Israel. Unlike the other judges, the people longing for spiritually wise leadership seek her out where they knew they could find her: "She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided" (Judges 4:5). Notice also that she works to convince Barak to lead Israel's army, and only after he refuses does she accompany him to rally an army to fight against their oppressors. In the case of Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), we do not find her entering the temple to preach like Jeremiah or stepping into the king's court in Jerusalem like Isaiah. Instead Josiah's advisors, aware of Huldah's presence in her home in Jerusalem, seek her out to hear a message from the Lord.*

*Finally, we would be quite myopic not to notice that Deborah serves during a time of spiritual chaos and apostasy in the book of Judges while Huldah serves only a few years before Judah's complete spiritual and governmental collapse in the face of the Babylonians.*

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.

**Leader' guide:** *Some who quarrel with saying the principle applies in the world do so because of the difficulty of making application in the world. It is worth asking: is it really any less confusing to teach believing men and women that they live by two completely different principles when they are in their home and church and when they are in the world?*

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?**

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## **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).

**Leader's guide:** *Authority as Scripture knows it (responsibility to give direction in servant love for the benefit of those being led) has been washed out of many positions in society, often because of an understandable fear of the all-too-frequent abuse of authority. We need to be cautious not to read authority as Scripture knows it into positions where it no longer exists. Without much in the way of objective principles to live by, much of what is called "leadership" in the world is simply facilitating discussion in an otherwise almost completely egalitarian structure.*

- 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.

**Leader's guide:** *No believing woman walking down the street should consider herself as needing to submit to every man she sees as if he has been appointed by God to be her selfless leader. No believing man walking down the street should see himself as having been appointed as the selfless leader of every woman he meets as he walks down the street.*

- 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?**

**Leader's guide:** *A concrete example might be helpful here.*

*Picture a Christian husband and wife in their 40s who run a medium-sized business (50 employees). This husband (trained in leadership with his MBA) and the wife (trained as a CPA) function well in their interdependent and complementary partnership as they operate their business, each with their unique set of God-given gifts. He, in daily consultation with his wife, serves as the company's CEO. She, again in daily consultation with her husband, makes sure the company's accounts receivables and accounts payable are in good order and that the paychecks reach each worker with absolute regularity. They both care deeply for the dozens of families who depend on their company for their livelihood and the many more customers who rely on the quality of their product.*

*Suddenly, the husband, after being diagnosed with cancer, is quickly taken from this life to heaven. His wife is now left as the sole owner of that company and its 50 male (mostly) and female employees. There is no one who knows and loves the business and its employees and families as she does. The couple's only blind spot in leading the company had been that they had not even begun to think about a strategy for raising up new leaders to take over the company. There is no evident successor for her to hand over the business for a smooth transition that keeps the company functioning well for the sake of its customers and for the sake of the families who depend on the income the company generates. However, since she and her husband communicated daily about each of their responsibilities and sought advice from each other routinely, she would be able to take over his tasks almost seamlessly.*

*One Christian woman in that situation, after much prayer and consulting with her pastor and other mature Christians whose opinion she values, might be convinced that taking over the CEO position puts her into too difficult and uncomfortable a situation in regard to the interdependent and complementary principle of male and female. So, despite the loss of income it would bring for her household, she determines as quickly as possible to bring in a new CEO for the company whom she prays will quickly be able to lead the company well as her husband once did.*

*However, another Christian woman, in that identical situation, also after much prayer and consulting with her pastor and other mature Christians, believes that love for her employees and customers would still mean holding that position of CEO for the long term. While parts of the work may make her uncomfortable as she leads 50 male and female employees, she believes it is still to their greater advantage for her to maintain her family's leadership of the company by serving in that position.*

*Both women know and trust in God as the one in whom all things depend. Both women also know and trust that part of our trust in God is also finding his strength to meet the responsibilities of the callings he himself brings our way in life. Both love and honor God's principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female (they had lived it beautifully in the company for years). Yet as they weighed all the principles of love for neighbor that were involved, they came to different decisions about what would be the most loving way forward for all those impacted.*

*While we might lean toward one or the other in the decision we might reach in a similar situation, we have no biblical reason to call either decision "wrong" or "sinful." God can bless either decision for the good of those involved. Neither woman treated the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female as if it didn't matter (they had given evidence of honoring that beautifully for years), and neither ignored the other principles of love for neighbor that their vocations as owners of the company brought into play. With personal grief compounded by personal discomfort in one direction and personal loss looming in the other direction, they both sought not to act with their own advantage as the deciding factor but for the good of those impacted by their lives.*

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?**

**Leader's guide:** *“From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise” (Psalm 8:2). God’s Spirit knows how to confess his truth even from the mouths of the youngest among us. As we as a church body study the Scriptures and wrestle for the clearest way to confess this biblical truth for our time, we do well to take note of any suggestions arising from God’s people young and old—male and female—that may enable us to clarify our confession for ourselves and for the culture around us.*

***Soli deo gloria!***