

Seeking to Apply God's Word to Our Lives

The Roles of Men and Women in the Church

In today's society, there is much confusion over the roles of men and women. Many of society's conflicting opinions have found their way into the local church, causing much confusion amongst congregations and their leadership. This paper seeks to clarify these roles.

Roles within the kingdom of God:

Before we examine the roles of men and women within the church, it is important to understand the function of roles within the kingdom of God. The sun, moon, and planets fulfill roles within the heavens (Genesis 1:15-16, Jeremiah 31:35). The plants and animals of the earth have specific roles (Genesis 1:11-12, 24-25). The role of angels are described as "ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). Even God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have unique roles. The Holy Spirit does not speak on His own initiative, but seeks to glorify Christ (John 16:13-14). As a man, Jesus Christ did nothing on His own initiative, but sought to do the will of the Father who sent Him (John 5:30).

The roles of men and women in the church:

Men and women have been created as equals. They are created in the divine image of God and fully equal in personhood, dignity, and worth (Genesis 1:26-28). They are on equal footing before the Savior (Galatians 3:28). They both were chosen before the foundation of the world, predestined for adoption, have redemption through His blood, and have obtained an inheritance (Ephesians 1:4-12). They both have received the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13) and are recipients of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:7). Men and women are to submit to one another within the church (Ephesians 5:21). Like the Trinity, men and women are equal, but have distinctive, complementary roles for the purpose of fulfilling the will of God.

The roles of men:

- Husbands are to be the spiritual leaders of their marriage (Ephesians 5:23). As head of the wife, the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Ephesians 5:23-25). Husbands are to nourish and cherish their wives (Ephesians 5:29).
- Husbands are to live with their wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel (1 Peter 3:7).
- Men are to have the final responsibility of raising up their children. With assistance from their wife, husbands are to bring up them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).
- Men are to teach and exercise authority within the church, based upon the order of creation (1 Timothy 2:12-13).
- Men are to hold the position of pastor or elder¹. Paul clearly assigns this responsibility to men who aspire to this office and are qualified to shepherd the congregation (1 Timothy 3:1-6, Titus 1:5-9).
- Men are to hold the servant position of deacon within the church (1 Timothy 3:8-10).

¹ The terms elder (*presbuteros*), overseer (*episkopos*), and shepherd (*poimen*) are used interchangeably to describe the leadership of the local church (1 Peter 5:1-2, Titus 1:5-7). The remaining term "pastor" is only used once (Ephesians 4:11). In this passage, the Greek word *poimen* is incorrectly translated "pastor" and should be translated "shepherd." In the New Testament, every usage of the word "elder" or "elders" is of masculine form in the original Greek, referring only to men.

The roles of women:

- Women should be a helpmate to their husbands, using their character and giftedness to complement their husband (Genesis 2:18).
- Wives submit to their husbands with the same devotion as they serve the Lord (Ephesians 5:22).
- Women are primarily to be workers at home² (Titus 2:5).
- Older women are to instruct younger women to be reverent in their behavior, loving their husbands and children (Titus 2:3-5).
- Women are not to teach or exercise authority over men in the church³ (1 Timothy 2:12-14).
- Women should seek spiritual insight from their husbands to avoid becoming disruptive in the church (1 Corinthians 14:31-35).
- Women are to serve as deaconesses⁴ (1 Timothy 3:11).

Conclusion:

God has clearly created roles and responsibilities within His kingdom. The moon and stars, plants and animals, and the angelic host have specific roles. Even God Himself follows specific roles. The Holy Spirit does not speak on His own initiative, but seeks to glorify Christ. As a man, Jesus Christ did nothing on His own initiative, but sought to do the will of the Father who sent Him.

In the world today, people often find their self worth in their possessions and roles in life. This same mindset has crept into the church, causing individuals to question their roles and responsibilities clearly set forth in God's Word. The roles assigned by God to men and women are not based upon a rank or superiority. Men and women were created in the divine image of God and fully equal in personhood, dignity, and worth. Like the Trinity, men and women are equal, but have distinct, complementary roles for the purpose of fulfilling the will of God. Only when we embrace these roles can the local church function in the way God intended.

“Seeking to Apply God’s Word to Our Lives” papers represent an overview of various Bible doctrines. Each paper contains biblical truths that often set TVBC apart from other churches and religious organizations. We invite the congregation’s biblically based feedback as we seek to accurately handle the Word of God.

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² The elders at TVBC recognize that there are times in which wives must work outside the home. Reasons may include being single, financial hardships within the family, or being a widow.

³ This passage has generated much controversy and turmoil in the church. Various organizations who would gain from women teaching men argue that this passage is addressing the husband and wife at home. Please note, after Paul addresses the subjects of corporate prayer, instructions to women in the congregation, and the qualifications of elders, Paul makes the statement, “I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of truth.” (1 Timothy 3:15). The context of 1 Timothy 2:12 is how to conduct yourself within the local church. If you wish to read a more comprehensive paper on the subject, please contact an elder or the church office.

⁴ The term “deaconess” does not occur in the New Testament. The office of deaconess is derived from 1 Timothy 3:8-13. In this passage, we find Paul discussing the qualifications and rewards of becoming a deacon. In the middle of this passage, Paul makes the statement “Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.” Since the context of this passage is the qualifications and rewards of deacons, the mention of women seems to denote the existence of female deacons called deaconesses.