Biblical Manhood and Womanhood in the World[[1]](#footnote-1)

**I. Introduction: Masculinity and Femininity in a Feminist World**

In 1971, Gloria Steinem issued a rallying cry for what is now known as second-wave feminism. In her “Address to the Women of America”, Steinem said of the women’s liberation movement, “*This is no simple reform. It really is a revolution. Sex and race, because they are easy and visible differences, have been the primary ways of organizing human beings into superior and inferior groups and into the cheap labor on which this system still depends. We are talking about a society in which there will be no roles other than those chosen or those earned*.”[[2]](#footnote-2) You see, Steinem here envisioned a new world order, a society in which the only distinction between men and women is biological. And other than bodily differences, Steinem said, the two sexes are exactly the same and thus can do exactly the same things. Each person should play whatever role he or she desires. Over forty years later, in many ways the world we inhabit is several steps closer to the world Steinem envisioned. And we should be clear: the various waves of feminism have yielded some wonderful results! From the right to vote, to property ownership, the principle of equal pay for equal work, and many careers have opened up to women that weren’t available generations ago. But here’s the problem: As we’ve seen over the last 9 weeks in this class, this fluid view of gender as a created social construct is worlds apart from God’s design and from the historic Christian position. The position that says, God created male and female equal in value, yet beautifully distinct according to His infinite wisdom and glorious purposes.

So, today we address the question, “What does it look like to express our God-given gender in the world at large?” And we’ve stated before, I’m using that term “gender” as a catch-all to refer **both** to our physical sex and the psychological, social aspects of our identity and how we behave. In the last few weeks we looked at what the Bible has to say about men and women in the home and the church. In both those contexts, Scripture lays down clearly prescribed roles – for husbands and wives, and for how leadership is expressed in the church. **But what about when we think of other spheres – the workplace, the military, our neighborhoods, and our responsibilities as citizens?**

This is a challenging question, because the Bible doesn’t give us clear prescriptions or restrictions for gender roles in *these* settings. So what do we do? Should we just close our Bibles and assume that anything goes? No – we should approach this subject in the same manner we approach other topics that aren’t as clear in Scripture. We prayerfully turn to scriptural principles, priorities and patterns, and apply them to the topic at hand in the context in which we live. In other words, this is a question of ***wisdom, not law****.* Wisdom therefore is figuring out how to live in God’s created world according to God’s design and for godly purposes. So we’re going to consider several areas this morning in a search for wisdom, and I’ll conclude by interviewing ***Annie Hsiao*** about her life and career so we can hear how she’s thought through some of these questions.

Let’s start with: **II. Embrace Our Created Dispositions**

We’ve seen in **Genesis 1, 2 and 3** that the distinctions between men and women reach all the way back to creation itself. Thus, they have implications for all of life.

**Genesis 1** teaches that Men and women are, without doubt, created equal in terms of dignity and honor because both are created in the image of God. Yet, from **Genesis 2-3**, we see that God created them to be *distinct* from one another. So in **Genesis 2:15**, God calls the man to work and protect the Garden, and by extension to provide for his family. In **Genesis 2:18**, God creates his wife [Eve] to be his helper. Then in **Genesis 3:9**, we see Adam being held responsible for the spiritual failure of the family. And in **Genesis 3:20**, Eve is called the mother of all the living. Thus, we’ve talked about how femininity doesn’t require having biological children, but often is seen more broadly in cultivating life in others for their spiritual good, as we see women called to do in **Titus 2**. So, there may be considerable overlap sometimes in how these dispositions express themselves, but generally speaking, even if it’s subconscious, we should expect to see men and women expressing them. Men *will tend* to work in God’s creation and to provide for and protect others. Women *will tend* to cultivate life in others and help others flourish. These qualities may look different in different cultures, and I do recognize they’re quite broad. And because of the fall, some men or women may live out these inclinations more or less easily, or may even struggle to feel them as natural. But, these broad differences simply flow from the reality that God didn’t make two *identical* sexes. He chose to display his image in distinct, complementary genders. So no matter what challenges or temptations we may face on this topic, we should remember that God’s plan is always for OUR GOOD, and the good of human flourishing.

And on that point, it’s worth acknowledging the general physical differences between men and women as well. This too is part of God’s wonderful and wise design. Women and men have different anatomy, different hormones, different roles in conceiving and delivering children, and, statistically speaking, different average size and physical strength. It’s not wrong if, on the macro level, these differences lead to certain trends in how men and women behave, or the sorts of jobs they take. Yes, there will be exceptions, and we should avoid stereotypes and caricatures that are unhelpful. A soft-spoken senior citizen teaching toddlers how to finger-paint can still be fully masculine. He *doesn’t* need to become “wild at heart,” buy a pick-up truck and kill a deer to be a true man. A muscular woman who builds airplanes can be fully feminine even if she doesn’t have a Martha Stewart cookbook on her shelf. But there *are* macro-level trends in how men and women behave, and that’s OK too. So it’s not wrong, for example, for a woman to work construction; but it’s also OK if more men *tend* to work construction due to factors such as their body type.

So, when it comes to how you live as a man or woman in the world, this point is simply calling us to consider – and celebrate! – that God has made men and women different. He calls us to live within the grain of the gendered dispositions He has given you. And beloved, it’s good to be reminded here, that true joy comes not from ignoring His design, but from acknowledging it as a gift and embracing it!

Next, **III. Gain Wisdom from Our Prescribed Roles in the Home & the Church**

We’ve learned in previous weeks that God calls wives to submit to their husbands. But He *doesn’t* call all women to submit to all men. And God calls only men [and only men qualified according to 1 Tim. 3 & Titus 1] to lead the church through formal teaching and holding the office of elder. But we must be very careful here! Beyond the home and the church, the Scriptures do not restrict leadership to men in *other* spheres in life, such as government or the workplace.

Still, we should be mindful of the roles that God prescribes in the home and the church, *as these roles represent a formalizing of men’s and women’s God-given dispositions.* In other words,they aren’t arbitrary. They’re not random. Instead, we should see them as consistent with how God has created men and women. In other words, it would just seem odd that God would intend for his people to pursue the biblical vision of masculinity and femininity in the family and church, but then completely abandon those patterns and dispositions whenever they’re outside of those specific contexts.

So, for example, we talked at length about the general trait of godly femininity described as a “gentle and quiet spirit” from 1 Peter 3. Here, Peter’s talking not about a woman’s personality but her spirit, her heart – how she rests content in God. Even though the context of 1 Peter 3 is marriage, we agreed that that passage and others commend the inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit to *all* Christian women, whether married or not. So for my sisters here, wisdom would say to find a way to express that gentle & quiet spirit, that Godward heart, in ALL your various endeavors.

And the same is true of men. A man who isn’t married shouldn’t read the Bible’s instruction for husbands to be servant leaders to their wives, and think “*Great, I’m off the hook! I don’t need to live sacrificially in caring for others! I don’t have to be a spiritual example to others!”* Precisely the opposite! He should see the biblical vision of a husband as *something* of a blueprint for his own masculinity, but with the obvious caveat that husbandly authority and wifely submission don’t apply in his various relationships.

So to clarify: The biblical roles we see in the family and the church do not automatically apply in the world and workplace, in a formal sense. BUT, they *can* still teach us something about masculinity and femininity. When it comes to the question of whether a woman can be CEO of Apple or President of the United States, there is no COMMAND in scripture to heed. So there seems to be some level of freedom there. The point we’re making in this class, is that whatever job or public office a woman takes, she will fulfill that role *as a woman* – bringing her God-given femininity to bear. And the same is true of a man. So, what should we do? By thinking through the lens of wisdom, we should ask the question of, “What would be most *wise* for my life in this situation?” “What would be most beneficial and helpful in order to live out my God-given disposition *as a man* or as a woman?” And to help us consider that, we need to turn to our next point:

**IV. Consider Your Particular Stewardships and Responsibilities**

When any believer considers on how to express their manhood or womanhood in the world, he or she must consider: **what are those non-negotiable duties that God has called me to?** Often this answer will help give some shape to what life *should look like* in this particular season.

So let’s take the situation of trying to choose a job, and how your gender, plus your responsibilities, might play into that. So for example, I do think a woman has a lot of freedom to pursue countless jobs and careers in accordance with her abilities, opportunities, and desires. BUT, if she is a mother of young children, she is NOT free to neglect the role of nurturer in her children’s lives. Titus 2 encourages women to be busy at home, not meaning primarily decorating her physical house, but caring for the people who live there. After all, both men and women work. And some work earns a paycheck; other work in the home may not bring in cash, but it is still nonetheless of tremendous value. Yet, what this looks like will vary from woman to woman and culture to culture. So, a single mom or widow will apply it differently than one who is married. But what an opportunity we have to rejoice in the beauty and goodness of motherhood, especially in a culture that so often undervalues it! And what an opportunity we have to show charity to believers who share our high valuing of motherhood but choose a different career path or work arrangement due to various circumstances that may be outside their control. To this same end, a father isn’t free to neglect his family duties for the sake of a career either. He is called to provide financially, but he is also called to bring up his children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Maybe in order to do that he actually says no to a promotion, to get more time at home.

Everyone’s financial and family circumstance may have different challenges. While at the same time we must also recognize that some believers get more of a choice in what job to pursue than others. There is no one “right way.” So how do you figure out what to do? YOU NEED WISDOM! Seek counsel from others. Be ready to make sacrifices. If you’re weighing a particular job or educational opportunity, don’t just talk to people you think will agree with you. Ask other voices for advice. Try to identify your blind spots.

Where can we go for a good example of the interplay between family responsibilities and work activities? Again, we can look at Proverbs 31. I’m not going to take the time to read the whole passage, because we’ve already done that in prior weeks. I just want us to notice a few things about this idealized woman that Proverbs presents for us.

* Verse 15: “She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household.” This is a woman whose main burden is to provide for those under her care.
* Verse 16: “She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.” So, this isn’t a woman who literally stays within the 4 walls of her home. She’s involved, essentially, in real estate development!
* Verse 18: “She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.” Verse 24: “She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant.” So she is making goods and selling them and running a successful business. She even seems to have some sort of distributor or middle man!
* Verse 27: “She looks well to the ways of her household.” Verse 28: “Her children rise up and call her blessed, her husband also, and he praises her.”

So the summary of Proverbs 31 is a woman who is quite ambitious with her professional endeavors! Yet it’s not primarily for her own self-fulfillment or reputation, but in order to serve others, starting with her own family. In all of that, she’s a good example not just to women but to men as well. This woman’s work with the vineyard and the garment business isn’t in conflict with her family responsibilities. It’s in harmony with them and enables her to nurture her children and help her husband. What should this look like for you? Again, I don’t know – this is only one example, and a particularly idealized one at that. In other words, it’s a poetic picture of a woman who’s almost too good to be true. But we shouldn’t be overwhelmed by her example. This isn’t a full picture of all her sins and struggles, but instead we should learn whatever we can from her about how we can attempt to live out our gendered dispositions, and be faithful the various responsibilities God gives us.

**QUESTIONS?**

**V. Applying These Considerations**

So let’s try to put the pieces together. How do we wisely apply what we’ve been talking about so far? I have one broad encouragement for us. *Pursue endeavors that seem consistent with your identity and responsibilities as a man or woman, rather than endeavors than might undermine or suppress them. And in whatever position or endeavor you find yourself, do your best to express it in a way that EMBRACES and UPHOLDS your God-given masculinity or femininity.*

For example, one common question is if women should take secular jobs that place them in leadership and authority over men. Is it inherently wrong or unbiblical for women to hold such positions? No, I don’t think so. Women who are in the military and have authority over men, can still use it in a way that honors those men and their sense of masculinity. But it would be wise to think about the *type* of authority any given job involves, and whether it’s authority that can be expressed in feminine ways. **Will she be comfortable living out this role *as a woman*? Is it the type of position where she will feel pressured to adopt the world’s more fluid view of gender? Will the environment she works in cause her feel ENCOURAGED or EMBITTERED towards the Bible’s teaching of authority in the home and the church?**

A Northwestern University “meta-analysis” of men’s and women’s leadership styles found, not surprisingly, that when women adopt “culturally masculine behaviors,” they are less efficient in their leadership.[[3]](#footnote-3) Other studies have shown that women naturally exhibit several feminine features when they exercise authority on the job. One article summed it up this way: “Women employ a more participative leadership style, are more likely to share information and power, and have strong relational skills that make them seem empathic to their staffs.”[[4]](#footnote-4) In other words, to use biblical language, women are created to cultivate life and help others flourish, and they are actually better leaders on the job when they lean into these proclivities. Of course, just because a social science study draws this conclusion doesn’t automatically make it true. But we shouldn’t be surprised when a social study confirms our expectations from what we see in scripture.

I can think of examples of Christian women who have been worked for the military and have had authority over men, yet they’ve used it in a way that honors those men and their sense of masculinity. Such women have generally embraced a distinctly feminine, “mama bear” style of leadership – under which their employees have thrived.

What about a job that would require a woman to regularly engage in violence, such as certain roles in law enforcement or active combat? We see in passages like Judges 4 that at times in Israel’s history women needed to get involved in warfare – usually as the exception rather than the norm. For almost everyone, it is best to be in a job that’s congruent with the dispositions and roles we see in scripture; but again, this is a question of wisdom. The point is that what is permissible may not always be what is most beneficial.

Let me also say, sisters: Whether you are in leadership or not, it is appropriate for you to stand up against discrimination in the workplace. You are created in God’s image and share equal value and standing with men before Him. When it comes to salary issues, not getting a seat at the table, etc., you can speak up for your rights confident in your eternal worth and that God is a God of justice.

Similarly, when a man finds himself under a woman’s direction and authority, he should fulfill that role as a Christian *man*. He asks, “what are appropriate ways that I can take initiative to provide for and protect others, including my supervisor?” Above all, he should do his work with graciousness and a good spirit, serving his employer, as Paul says, “with a sincere heart . . . rendering service with a good will as to the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:7) He should try as much as possible to show his employer the honor and care that men should show to women generally.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Questions?**

**VI. Interview**

To close our time, we thought it would be helpful for you all to hear from a sister in the church and how she has thought about these issues in her life and at her job. Annie has been a member here for about 11 years and worked in several notable jobs. She’s graciously agreed to answer a few questions about how she applies these principles.

* So Annie, what do you currently for work? What are a few other jobs you’ve had?
* How has embracing God’s vision for femininity brought you joy and blessing? Any ways they’ve sparked evangelistic conversations with others in your life (job, family, or friends)
* What challenges have you faced with expressing your femininity in either your current career or any previous positions? Are there any responsibilities or expectations you have had to fulfill that seem less "feminine" than you might desire?
* Do you currently supervise any men (or in the past)? If so, wow have you do so in a way that takes their masculinity into account, while exercising your authority in a distinctively feminine manner?

Questions for Annie?

1. “Anything you can do, I can do better.” When it comes to manhood and womanhood in the world, and the jobs we have and roles we play, that’s often how the debate is framed – as an issue of competence and strength. But the Bible addresses the subject differently, and that’s what we want to think about today… [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cited by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Margaret E. Köstenberger, *God’s Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 305. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.northwestern.edu/newscenter/stories/2011/07/women-leadership-eagly.html [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-leadership/what-men-can-learn-from-women-about-leadership/2011/08/10/gIQA4J9n6I\_story.html?utm\_term=.f6e3c606dfd7 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [[*Optional Conclusion:* In all this, we must remember that our world either over-emphasizes gender or makes it meaningless. On the one hand, we see slogans like “women run the world” and “girls do it better” celebrating femininity as an end in itself. On the other hand, we hear that gender is merely a construct used to express power over others and that we are entering a post-gender world where gender is more of a continuum than a binary reality. But God’s Word shows us a better way. A way where we appreciate the dignity and beauty of both femininity and masculinity, and seek to live every moment of our lives to express the womanhood or manhood that God has graciously given us. And yet a way where our hope is never in ourselves or our gender or but in the perfect man who gave up his life to set us free.]] [↑](#footnote-ref-5)