ANSWERING COMMON QUESTIONS[[1]](#footnote-2)

1. **Introduction**

**Proverbs 18:17** says, “*The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him*.”

Whether it’s in a courtroom, in a conference room, in a coffee shop, or even within the walls of a local church, at one time or another we’ve all found ourselves participating in or watching two people engage in a conversation, where one person is in disagreement with or at least *questions* the validity of another person’s claim. In other words, it doesn’t take very long to find out that in life not everyone always agrees with what you believe about any given topic. And the topic of manhood and womanhood, as it is taught in the Scriptures, is one of those areas that Christians haven’t always agreed upon – which will be the focus of our talk today.

So just to summarize: Over the last 11 weeks, we have been staring at the important topic of Manhood and Womanhood as it is taught throughout the Bible. We’ve looked at our theological foundation from the creation account in **Genesis 1-2**, where we find that both men AND women were created in the image of God. Therefore, by their very being or essence, men and women are created equal in value, worth, dignity, and importance. And though men and women are created equal by God, He has given them distinct dispositions which they will display as they bear his image. In scripture, these created inclinations are formalized into particular roles that men and women are called to fulfill in the home and in the church. So, whether you’re single or married, and serving in the local church or living out your callings in the workplace, the *essence* of Biblical Masculinity and Biblical Femininity remain true. So if you look at the back of your handout, here are the two summaries we have been working with throughout our class:

* First, “Biblical masculinity is displayed in a sense of benevolent responsibility to work God’s creation, provide for and protect others, and express loving, sacrificial leadership in particular contexts prescribed by God’s Word.”
* And secondly, “Biblical femininity is displayed in a gracious disposition to cultivate life, to help others flourish, and to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in particular contexts prescribed by God’s Word.”

So what we are doing in this morning’s class is seeking to accomplish two things at once:

1. We want to recognize that not all Christians agree on the distinct roles God has given men and women, particularly in how it gets lived out in contexts like the local church and the home.
2. We want to answer *some* (though not all!) of the most common questions to the Bible’s teaching on gender.

So you might be sitting here and asking yourself, “Why do people who profess to be Christians differ on this issue?” (Maybe some of you here presently hold a different view, or still wrestling through this – We’re glad you are here!). **So why is there disagreement?**

* **Culture** – All of us hold certain values, expectations, and beliefs that are largely unquestioned. In other words, we all grow up in a particular culture. While culture has much that is beautiful and good, every human culture is fallen in different ways. Rom 1 says we have all suppressed the truth about God. Jer 17 says our hearts are deceptive. So it is possible that certain invisible cultural values have shaped our instincts so that the Bible’s teaching seems off in some way.
* **Tradition** – Generally speaking, the longer you sit under a particular teaching, the deeper your conviction will be. If that’s what you were taught growing up, or if your particular denomination has taught this regularly, you may begin to accept it without further investigation.
* **Ignorance** – if a person has only been exposed to one view, then they will have more difficulty weighing out if their position is right or not
* **Poor Examples** –If someone has seen a particular view used to support sin or abuse, this naturally will affect his or her perception of that view.
* **Incorrect Interpretation of Scripture** – simply not reading a verse or set of verses in its immediate biblical context and how it fits with all of Scripture. **2 Timothy 2:15** calls us to “*rightly handle the word of truth*”
* **Unbelief in the Authority of Scripture** – Sadly, there are those who believe themselves to be Christian, but only pick and choose (somewhat like a “spiritual buffet”) which parts they will believe and are binding on their lives.

Because of these things, all of us need to constantly be submitting our understanding to the authority of God’s Word.

So this morning we’ll consider a series of questions/objections to the Bible’s teaching, broken into two major categories—**biblical objections**, that is, based on particular biblical texts, and then more **general objections.**

1. **Biblical Objections** (When a Scripture reference is given, open your Bibles to it)

***#1****. In* ***Eph 5:21****, Paul says that all Christians are to “****submit*** *to one another.” Doesn’t the Bible then teach* ***mutual*** *submission? And doesn’t that rid us of any idea that the husband is the head of his wife?*

Christians should certainly submit to one another, just as Paul says. It is in fact characteristic of Christians that they consider others better than themselves (**Phil. 2:3**) and that they “*outdo one another in showing honor*” (**Rom. 12:10**). *The question here is whether that kind of characteristic of Christian love and humility flattens or negates all other distinctions in gender roles*.

Well first, I don’t think it does, and clearly neither does Paul. (The main reason is really context!)

1. “*Submitting*” here is a participle, which means it is a description of what Paul teaches will characterize the *wise*, Spirit-*filled* believer (**v.15**, **18**). Ex: “the *working* woman”, which describes the type of woman she is.
2. **V.21** serves somewhat like a heading that introduces the following section **5:22** – **6:9**). Paul goes on to describe three categories of relationships (Wives and husbands in **5:22-33**; Children and parents in **6:1-4**; and then slaves and masters in **6:5-9**). So without taking too much time, notice how in **v.22** Paul tells *wives* to “***submit*** *to your own husbands, as to the Lord*”, but the husbands are never told to submit to their wives. In **6:1**, Children are instructed to “***obey*** your parents in the Lord”, which necessarily involves submission. Note that parents are not instructed to submit to their children (think of how disastrous that could be if a parent has young children!). And in **6:5**, slaves are instructed to “***obey*** *your earthly masters…”,* and again masters are never instructed to obey or submit to their slaves.

**So a more faithful way to understand Ephesians 5:21. Paul means:**

**“**submitting to others according to the authority and order established by God**”.** Or as our definitions in this core seminar have said: “…in particular contexts prescribed by God’s Word.”

***#2.*** *In* ***1 Tim 2.12****, isn’t Paul teaching that women can preach/teach, at least under the delegated authority of the elders?*

So in other words, though a woman can’t hold the office of elder, can she preach underneath the *oversight of her elders*? In this verse, Paul writes, “*I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet*.” It’s simply very clear in context that Paul is not speaking to the *office* (that comes later in **chapter 3**), but to the related yet distinct *functions* of teaching and exercising authority.[[2]](#footnote-3) **V.11** right before it makes it clear that the godly woman’s attitude and disposition is to be one of *learning* and *listening*, with the purpose of *submitting* to Biblical teaching AND Biblical leadership. And as you keep reading on to **v.13** Paul writes, “***For*** *Adam was formed first, then Eve*”. From this reasoning, we see that Paul grounds his argument in creation (**Genesis 2**), which is always binding and trans-cultural, and not simply to just one context like Ephesus.

**So *can* women teach?** Yes, they can be exceptional at explaining God’s Word to God’s people! Therefore, ***should* they teach?** Absolutely. We desperately need women to teach in a variety of contexts, some of which are shown in the Scriptures.

So for example,

* **Titus 2:3-4** > Older women are exhorted to “*teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children*”
* **Proverbs 31:26** > the virtuous woman is described as, “*She* ***opens her mouth with wisdom****, and the* ***teaching of kindness*** *is on her tongue*”
* **Proverbs 1:8** > The son is commanded “*Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s* ***teaching***”
* **Ephesians 4:15 >** Paul instructs ALL believers (men and women) to “***speak the truth*** *in love*” to one another for their spiritual upbuilding.

But to reaffirm the particular point we’ve been discussing: ***Should women teach in mixed settings (adult men and women are present) in the publicly assembly of the church?*** Not according to what we see in the Scriptures, particularly **1 Timothy 2:12** with teaching and authority, and in **1 Timothy 3** with the qualification of an elder (see also **1 Timothy 3:15**).

1. *Doesn’t Galatians 3:28 remove gender as a basis for distinction of roles in the church?*

**[Read]** “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one* ***in Christ Jesus****.*”

It’s true that **Gal 3:28** isdispensing with gender distinctions—BUT only in a very specific context. **Galatians 3:28** affirms the full equality of male and female ***in Christ***, as the text says. That phrase “*in Christ*” refers to the covenantal union of all believers in the Lord. Paul is saying that *in the context of* ***salvation***, which **Gal 3** is all about, the justification of sinners is by faith apart from works. And the great divisions that separate classes of people from one another are erased. Jew and Gentile, slave and free, man and woman are not saved in different ways, nor do they inherit different promises from God. No matter what one’s ethnicity, gender or social standing, salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone.

And Paul isn’t wiping out distinctions altogether. After all, he can still speak to Jews and Gentiles *as* Jews and Gentiles, and to slaves and masters *as* slaves as masters—and to men and women *as* men and women.

1. *Didn’t Priscilla teach Apollos in Acts 18:26?* In this verse, we read, [Apollos] “*Began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately*.” Many have asked, *doesn’t this show that the early church didn’t exclude women from the* ***teaching office*** *of the church?*

Of course Priscilla helped teach Apollos. Praise God for how she clearly helped put this fervent yet misguided teacher on the right path! Nothing in our understanding of Scripture says that when a husband and wife visit an unbeliever (or a confused believer, or anyone else for that matter), the wife must be silent.

But note that this situation is *private*, and Priscilla and Aquila take Apollos aside.

It doesn’t speak to whether their instruction was ongoing – the text says they “explained” things to him correctly in what was essentially a crisis situation of false teaching. This text simply doesn’t speak to the question of whether women should teach publicly in the gathered church. For that we go back to 1 Timothy 2 which we discussed earlier.

1. *Don’t you think that all these texts we’ve studied are simply a temporary compromise with the cultural status quo, while the main thrust of Scripture is toward the leveling of gender roles?*

It’s true that Scripture does sometimes seek to regulate relationships that are broken, without condoning them as permanent ideals. So for example, Jesus said to the Pharisees, “*Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.*” (**Matt. 19:8**) The same can be said about Paul’s instruction to slaves to obey their masters, even though Paul longed for every slave to be received by his master “*no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother*.” (**Philemon 16**);

Having said that, we can’t understand gender roles to be in this same category. **Why?** This is because, for one thing, *the role distinctions we’ve been talking about are rooted in the created order*, even **before** the introduction of sin. So the redemptive thrust of the Bible does not at all aim at *abolishing* gender distinctions and roles, but rather at *redeeming* them. (repeat) Also, and maybe most clearly, the Bible contains no condemnations of loving headship in marriage and the church nor does it give any encouragements to abandon it.

**\*We’ll stop there for a moment for any questions/comments you might have\***

*6. What about Deborah’s leadership in the book of Judges? Doesn’t that undermine the understanding of gender roles we’ve been teaching in this class?*

Any faithful student of the Bible should affirm that women play significant religious, and even *at times* crucial leadership roles in the Bible. For example: Think of **Esther** and her role in the deliverance of the Jews. But consider two things: First, most examples of female leadership appear in roles *other than* those of the highest human religious authority. While there are prophetesses like Huldah (**2 Kings 22**) in the Old Testament and Anna (**Luke 2:36**) in the New Testament, it’s worthy to note that there are not any women priests, women heads of tribes, or women kings (**2 Kings 11** - Athaliah wrongly usurped the throne; was a murderer, and the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel). And when we open the New Testament, we read that Jesus chose His Twelve disciples [later named “Apostles”] who were all male, and there is no evidence that there were ever women pastors in the early church. The Bible seems to provide a general pattern of male leadership in God’s people.

**So what about Deborah?** Deborah, who was both a prophetesses and judge, is the notable exception (cf. **Judges 4-5**). However, the events recorded in the book of Judges are *not* illustrating God’s ideal for his people. This book is descriptive, not prescriptive. Judges is a tragic cycle of one mistake after another. In fact, the book of Judges could be outlined by a verse found twice in the book: “*Everyone did what was right* ***in his own eyes***” (**Judges 17:6b**; **21:25b**) Given the awful spiritual state of Israel, Deborah’s judgeship is recorded *not to signal that female leadership is ideal in every time and context. Rather, it shows just how far from God’s design and purposes Israel had strayed*. Properly read in context, Deborah’s role as judge serves as God’s *indictment* of Israel. The fact that Barak (a man) would see the glory of battle go to a woman (Deborah) for his unwillingness to faithfully follow God, just underscores this point.

We should in no way despise or ignore Deborah. We should rather be thankful for her and for all the ways she followed God faithfully when Israel abandoned Him. Remember the issue has never been *can* a woman lead, or teach, etc. The issue is not ability but *oughtness*. Deborah is a strong woman who teaches us much about how to stand up for what is right in tragic times. She is indeed a wonderful example of character to us. And she is a reminder that it’s not necessarily wrong for women to take a job that involves high levels of leadership and authority. When it comes to questions like what jobs are most appropriate for women, scripture doesn’t give us black and white laws but rather principles of wisdom. However, there is no compelling argument that Deborah’s role at this season in Israel’s history somehow undoes the clear meaning of New Testament texts about men’s and women’s roles in the church.

Now that we’ve look at several of the most common ***Biblical questions/objections***, let’s look at a few of the common ***General objections***.

1. **General Objections**

*7. Does teaching male headship encourage domestic abuse?*

Some have argued that the biblical teaching on gender roles isn’t just outdated, but perpetuates harm. A Pulitzer Prize winning story on domestic abuse in South Carolina in 2015 suggested that *“deeply-held beliefs about the sanctity of marriage and women’s place in the home*” lead to a culture where abuse is all too prevalent.

As believers, we must mourn such egregious sin and stand up for victims. We recognize that this world is tragically fallen and long for righteousness to prevail. Tragically, women are mistreated in *both* traditional and progressive settings – just look at the recent revelations of how many women are taken advantage of in Hollywood and Silicon Valley. So we must stand firm in teaching that **The Bible *nowhere* justifies a man *abusing* a woman in any way, be it physical, verbal, or emotional. And the Bible *nowhere* calls a woman *to submit* to such abuse**. So to that end: *We should never confuse the Bible’s teaching with any form of traditionalism that endorses or leads to chauvinism or oppressive forms of patriarchy. (2x)*

To justify domestic violence in the name of Christianity is absolutely appalling, it undermines one’s profession to be a Christian, and God will pour out his fierce wrath on men who unrepentantly misuse their authority to harm others. God cares deeply about those who are most vulnerable, most susceptible to abuse, because He cares deeply how authority is exercised. The misuse of authority is fundamentally a lie about God.

To the contrary, it ought to be the case that women feel most prized in Bible-teaching churches, where they are loved uniquely as women, and prized uniquely as women: Where their distinct attributes and contributions are cherished and exalted, not ignored or suppressed.[[3]](#footnote-4) Pray that our congregation would always stand up for the good of women generally and the women of this church in particular.

*8. If God has genuinely called a woman to be a pastor, who are you to say she can’t be one?*

The simple answer here is that we don’t believe that God calls women to be pastors. That’s because God *always*, without exception, acts consistently with his Word. So if the Bible teaches that God wills for men alone to bear the primary teaching and governing responsibilities in the church—that is, the office and function of elder/pastor—then we do not think that God will ever act contrary to that.

It may be that many women who feel a call to such ministry are indeed being called to ministry—just not to *pastoral* ministry. As we’ve discussed, there are numerous ministries, including vocational ones, in which women should be encouraged and welcomed. So when a woman senses such a subjective sense of call to ministry, the best course of action would be to recognize the boundaries Scripture draws and then enter into conversations and prayer, as other mature believers (such as the elders) help you think about these aspirations.

*9. It’s just not fair.*

At the end of the day, I think many of our common objections to the Bible’s teaching on gender fall into this category. In our age of “equal rights,” to deny access to any position or reserve any duty for one gender alone is seen as sexist and downright unfair. But we must remember that authority structures don’t entail greater human value or essential superiority of those in charge, or minimize the human value or imply essential inferiority of those under their charge.

That’s the fundamental error of our cultural presuppositions. That for two people to be equal, they must be able to do the same thing. The assumption is that we can’t have differentiation and hierarchy without also having inferiority of dignity and worth. **But the Bible simply rejects this assumption**. The fundamental issue is one of biblical authority. At the end of the day, Christians must be willing to submit to God’s Word even when it challenges our instincts or preferences.

***Brothers and sisters, be encouraged by the reality that*** ***men and women experience their full humanity when they function in the manner God intended in his creation of them.*** We are most free as humans when we affirm the way God made us to be. His instructions to us in his Word aren’t intended to burden us. They are given in kindness, as he invites us into the abundant life only he can give.

***So Why Does All This Ultimately Matter?***

Gender is central to our personhood and how God made us. It effects

* + Who we are – our sense of identity
  + Our individual discipleship
  + How we act as husband and wife, how we parent
  + How we live together as members of a local church… and
  + our witness to the world.

Lastly, sisters: If you ever struggle to see value in your labors and how God can use you through His design of femininity, just remember the history of our own church here at CHBC. In 1867, Celestia Ferris, chief washer-woman at the Bureau of Engraving, started a prayer meeting on Capitol Hill. By 1876, this prayer meeting had grown into a Sunday School Society, at which time the plot of land on which Capitol Hill Baptist Church (CHBC) now sits was purchased and a building was built. Then, in 1878, the Sunday School Society incorporated as the Metropolitan Baptist Church, only later to become Capitol Hill Baptist Church. Dear sisters, remember the example of our sister Celestia Ferris, and countless other women that God has mightily used throughout history!

**Any questions or comments?**

**Let’s pray.**

1. Class Intro: Throughout our class on BM&W, we’ve seen how men and women are equally created in the image of God, and yet with distinct complementary roles. Yet to suggest any distinctions between sexes today smacks of discrimination, repression, even abuse. So how do we think and respond the to the chorus of questions that often arise? That’s the topic for today, answering common questions about the Bible’s teaching on gender. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. The only way to get around this is to argue that “teach and exercise authority” is a hendiadys (one concept communicated by two words, literally *hen* (one) *dia* (through) *dyos* (two)) meaning “authoritative teaching.” In other words, a woman can do everything a non-ordained elder can do (e.g., Kathy Keller, *Jesus, Justice, and Gender Roles* (Zondervan, 2012, ebook location 205 of 684) But later in 1Tim 3.2, 4-5, and 5.17 Paul distinguished teaching from authority. They’re related, overlapping ideas, but yet clearly distinct ideas. See Andreas Kostenberger, “A Complex Sentence: The Syntax of 1 Timothy 2:12” in *Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (Crossway, 2016), 145ff. Additionally, hendiadys are usually side by side, and here, they are separated by 5 words in Greek. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Will there be domestic abuse – both physical and emotional – in a fallen, sinful world? Tragically yes. Will some abusers attempt to justify their abuse by grossly misapplying the idea of biblical headship? Even more tragically, Yes. Is domestic abuse – or the misuse of God’s word to justify it – ever legitimate in God’s eyes or in the eyes of any true church? Absolutely not. Is the sinful misuse of a truly biblical idea a reason to discard the idea itself from the Christian life? No. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)