Feminism & Christianity

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The feminist movement has become such a force to be reckoned with in our society with its aim of advocating for women's rights and equality of male and female. There are many causes linked to this movement, and some of them are justifiable given the history and prevalence of abuse, harassment and devaluing of women. Even in a Western society where women enjoy more rights than their foremothers, global statistics on the mistreatment of women and other related atrocities such as sex trafficking are staggering.

Has the Biblical worldview on womanhood perpetuated the subjugation and ill-treatment of women? It is evident that the Biblical view of male leadership and its responsibility to care and build-up has been distorted. Against God, His heart, and His ways, many have abused their God-given authority as a means to control and mistreat women, whilst others have mistakenly assumed that male leadership implies men are superior. It could be argued that this provides a rationale for all women to espouse feminist thinking and ideals and for the infiltration of the same into evangelical circles.

However, the question begs itself, is feminism compatible with Christianity?

To answer this question, we have prepared an article, The Roots of Feminism, that evaluates the roots of feminism and reflects upon some of the key thinkers, their views of God and the Bible,

and feminism's core ideas and spiritual associations. In this article, we examine the Biblical worldview on womanhood related to the design and roles of men and women and the practical outworking thereof.

Godly Order

> "both male and female were created in the image of God and thus have equal worth and dignity"

The Biblical view on womanhood is rooted in God's creation or design which has implications for the purpose and roles of both women and men. From the Genesis creation account, we learn that both male and female were created in the image of God and thus have equal worth and dignity. We also learn that the man and the woman were created to be a team in fulfilling God's purpose or plan by exercising dominion over God's creation. The creation account and events that occur in the garden prior to and after the fall offer us clues about the roles of men and women. Furthermore, a Biblical survey of both the Old and New Testaments support the pattern emerging in the creation order about the roles of men and women.

Male Leadership

We learn that the exercise of authority or leadership in both the home and the church is a role of men. Stated differently, the Bible teaches that the role of man in the home is to exercise Godly leadership in love and sacrifice, and the woman is to come alongside as his suitable helper in submission to him. Similarly, in the church, the Bible teaches that eldership, which is a governmental or authority function, is a role of men. This is God's order.

In order to explain the bold statements above, the table below makes reference to portions of Scripture in Genesis and infers the significance of those verses in illustrating the function of authority as a role of men. The middle column also cites a New Testament reference/s.

Passage in Genesis	New Testament Reference	Significance

Genesis 1:27; 5:2		The name for the man (Adam) is the Hebrew name for the human race.
Genesis 2:7,22	1 Corinthians 11:8-9; 1 Timothy 2:13	God created the man first.
Genesis 2:15-17		The man is the recipient of the Divine command prior to the creation of woman.
Genesis 2:15, 19-20		The man is put in the garden to work and name the animals.
Genesis 2:18, 21-22	1 Corinthians 11:9	God created the woman FOR the man and FROM the man.
Genesis 2:18, 20		The woman is called the man's suitable helper.
Genesis 2:23; 3:20		The man names the woman before the fall and after the fall -Eve.
Genesis 3:9, 11, 17		After the fall, God calls the man first and holds him primarily responsible for the rebellious act.
Genesis 3:16	1 Timothy 2:15	As a result of the fall, harmonious relationship between husband and wife is replaced with a pattern of struggle where woman will seek to exert control over her husband ("desire" interpreted as "desire for control" as per Genesis 4:7), and the man will respond by asserting/abusing his authority. Consequences for the woman pertain to her role as wife and mother, and for the man pertain to his role to work the land.

Extract from "God's Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey" by Andreas and Margaret Kostenberger

In Summary: The account of creation and the garden points to Adam as the leader. In the Old Testament, kings and priests were male. Jesus, though He had both male and female disciples, chose males to be the twelve Apostles. The rest of the New Testament teaches Christian husbands and fathers to be leaders in their homes. It also teaches that for the church, God's household, eldership or authority is a male function.

Men and Women as Equal in Value

In response to the prevailing view that the Bible subjugates women and is thereby responsible for their ill-treatment, as a woman, I would argue the contrary. The Biblical view sets forth or upholds and illustrates that men and women are of equal value and they have common humanity (worth and dignity), yet it distinguishes between their roles. The distinct roles or functions are the Creator's intent through His unique and complementary design of men and women. What is profound about this is that complementarity reflects a facet of God's own nature. The Godhead, who is Three-in-One and One-in-Three, is equal in Personhood, and yet there is a distinct definition of roles within the Godhead. We see that the Father takes the role of leadership or headship and the Son has taken a place of submission to the Father, "But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man and the head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3, NIV, and 1 Corinthians 15:28.)

Where it all went wrong with God's order for humanity is the fall. As a result of the fall, humanity was relationally alienated from God, and His image in humanity was distorted. In the fall, there was a usurping of the God-given male authority role by the woman and relegation of that authority role by the man. As a result, there's a wrestling in the male and female relationship whereby the woman grasps for that authority, and the man abuses that authority. Of course, we also note that as a result of the fall, there's spiritual warfare between satan and humanity. It's no wonder that there's such enmity or hostility between the sexes.

> Through this lens of Christ and redemption, we see a model of how Godly leadership is exercised.

The good news? There is redemption in Christ Jesus. We are reconciled with God and one another; there's restoration of the pattern of Godly leadership and submission; and victory over satan and his schemes. In the words of John Piper, "Sin didn't create headship and submission; it ruined them and distorted them and made them ugly and destructive. Now if this is true, then the redemption we anticipate with the coming of Christ is not the dismantling of the original, created order of loving headship and willing submission but a recovery of it from the ravages of sin."

Through this lens of Christ and redemption, we see a model of how Godly leadership is exercised. Male authority is not self-arising or self-appointed but is God-given, so males are to exercise this authority in submission to God and in representation of Him. They express their leadership through servanthood and not domination. They lead with a heart of love, not lording their authority over those they lead. The goal is not power but to build up God's people (2 Corinthians

10:8).

The Woman as Helper

Now we turn to the function of woman as a helper. It is interesting to note that, in the Old Testament, the same Hebrew word "helper" used in Genesis 2:18 in reference to the woman is often used in reference to God coming alongside His people to 'help' them, for example: "Blessed are you, Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword." (Deuteronomy 33:29, NIV), "Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob" (Psalm 146:5, ESV) or "You are destroyed, Israel, because you are against me, against your helper." (Hosea 13:9).

The New Testament also refers to God as our Helper, and specifically, the Holy Spirit is called our Helper, "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." (John 16:7, ESV) and "So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?" (Hebrew 13:6, NIV).

There is a lot to be gleaned about the female role of helper from the Scriptural depiction of God as a helper. In general, we learn that God as our helper is our assistance, support, strength, encouragement, comfort, and shield. Scripture also tells us that God is a helper of the fatherless, the widows, and the afflicted, and this portrays a nurturing facet of God. From this, we conclude that a **helper comes alongside to nurture, assist, advise, support, strengthen, encourage, comfort, and defend**. Before considering the practical implications and outworking of the woman's role, it is worth looking at the submission.

> "Practically, submission is positioning your heart and your whole life to go where the leader is going and give effect to their purpose, vision or plans."

According to the Century dictionary, submission is defined as "the act of yielding; entire surrender to the authority or government of another." Its etymology is from Latin submittere, which means "to yield, lower, let down, put under, reduce, let go, to obey" According to the Strong's Concordance, submission in Greek is hupotasso, which means to "place or rank under" Usage: I place under, subject to; I submit, put myself into subjection; to resist no longer, but to give way, yield metaphorically, to yield to authority and admonition." It is associated with words such as humility, meekness, and obedience. No one so aptly explains and models submission than our Lord Jesus! Philippians 2:5-8 exhorts us as follows: "Have this mind among yourselves,

which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (ESV)

Jesus, whose nature is God; Jesus, who is equal with God – yields and surrenders to the authority of His Father. He ranks Himself under the Father. Jesus says, "the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28, ESV), "I do not seek my own glory" (John 8:50, ESV), "I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment – what to say and what to speak" (John 12:49, ESV), "the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing" (John 5:19, ESV). Jesus models that submission is an inclination of the heart to follow and obey the leadership of someone. Practically, submission is positioning your heart and your whole life (your priorities, gifts, talents and resources) to go where the leader is going and give effect to their purpose, vision or plans.

Submission gives effect to God's purpose and His divine order. Submission negates the idea of inferiority. Both men and women are called to a role of submission. A husband submits to the Lord and, as a result, lays down his life for his wife and loves her. A wife submits to her husband as unto the Lord. Elders submit to the Chief Shepherd and treat the flock in accord with Jesus' commands, and the flock (both men and women) submit to the elders (Hebrews 13:17).

Practical Considerations for Biblical Femininity

How Do We Approach and View the Role of Women?

In the home, the woman is wife, mother, daughter, and sister. In family life, there is no shortage of ways that women can express their role as helpers/nurturers. The role of a wife is to be a helper to her husband, and she lives in submission to him. She is a nurturer, a homemaker (Titus 2:4-5), and she manages the household (1 Timothy 5:14). This divine order in marriage is a picture of the relationship that Jesus has with the church as her Head.

In the church, women are saints (separated unto God) and followers or imitators of Christ with a calling to make disciples, do good works or bear fruit for God **(**Romans 7:4) and become more and more like Jesus. The Church is God's household or God's family. God sets the lonely in families. He has delegated elders to play a role of being fathers within the church, and the role of women as helpers is essential in creating a sense of family and really making church to be a representation of God's family. We are called to disciple one another, to be sisters and mothers, to exercise our spiritual gifts for the common good and use our talents, gifts and resources to fulfil the vision and plans God gives to the elders. There are various ministries to serve in. Even our gifts of teaching and leading can find expression within Biblical bounds. We encourage,

support, advise, assist, nurture, comfort, defend and submit to leaders. Women's participation as helpers in the Gospel mission is essential for the fulfilment of God's purpose and plan.

What About the Role of Christian Women in the Workplace & Public Office?

Old Testament Israel was a theocracy (a political nation ruled by God). The nations we live in are kingdoms of this world, so we can't expect the world to accept spiritual authority or divine order in the way it conducts its affairs. There is some evidence in the Bible for women entrepreneurs, women who worked commercially and exercised some form of leadership in their trade since they had servants/workers. Lydia (Acts 16:13-15) was a businesswoman (fabric business). She was unmarried, ran a household (servants), and was hospitable and supportive to the Apostles. She had a profession and was successful yet prioritised using her gifts and resources towards God's mission – serving the church and being hospitable. The gospels also talk about benefactresses (Luke 8:2-3), single ladies who used their wealth and gifts to support and serve the ministry of Jesus.

Biblical marks of leadership and the heart of submission hold true in every sphere God places us in. The Bible is very clear about how we should conduct ourselves toward those outside of the church. We are to conduct ourselves with wisdom (Colossians 4:5-6), we are to do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31), we are to be salt and light (Matthew 5:6) and do our work heartily as for the Lord rather than man (Colossians 3: 23-24). Our influence and our strengths are not for status and opulence but for service. They are for glorifying God. They provide us with the opportunity to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Obviously, work is also the means through which God supplies our needs, but importantly, He also uses it as an arena for our sanctification so that we grow in Christlikeness (1 Thessalonians 4: 3-12).

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Godly Femininity

In essence, Godly femininity is expressed as we live out our God-given roles. It is expressed in the submission of our hearts, minds and bodies to God. Godly femininity lives out and celebrates God's order in the home and church. Godly femininity imitates Christ's gentleness and lowliness of heart (Matthew 11:29) in all spheres of life. The mindset and posture of Godly femininity is that I am not my own, I was bought at a price (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), I belong to another (Romans 7: 4), and I am a slave of God – a bondservant of Christ (Romans 6:22; 1 Peter 2:16).

Read **The Roots of Feminism** for the first part of this excellent article on Feminism.