

Galatians 3:28

Women in the Kingdom: Egalitarianism

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / May 1st, 2022

Today, we're jumping back into our three sermons looking at complementarianism, egalitarianism, and a hybrid view of women in ministry (complementarian in the home, egalitarian in the church). Last week, we looked at complementarianism, which generally believes God only calls men to preach and serve as elders, starting with 1 Timothy 2:8-3:7. Today, we're looking at egalitarianism, which believes that God calls both men and women to preach, serve as elders, and serve in ordained pastoral ministry. Next week we're doing a Mother's Day message then we'll finish with the hybrid view.

	Complementarianism	Egalitarianism	Hybrid
Value	Believes men and women are of equal dignity and worth.	Believes men and women are of equal dignity and worth.	Believes men and women are of equal dignity and worth.
Church	Believes men and women have distinct roles in church. (1 Timothy 2:8-3:7)	Believes men and women have interchangeable roles in church. (Galatians 3:28)	Believes men and women have interchangeable roles in church. (1 Peter 3:1-7)
Home	Believes men and women have distinct roles in the home. (Ephesians 5:21-33)	Believes men's and women's roles are interchangeable in home. (Galatians 3:28)	Believes husbands' and wives' roles are distinct in the home. (Ephesians 5:21-33)
Creation	Believes gender distinctions are a result of Creation and Christ's redemption as a return to those distinctions.	Believes gender distinctions are a result of the Fall and Christ's redemption as removing those distinctions.	Believes marital distinctions are a result of Creation and Christ's redemption removes distinctions in church body.

Egalitarianism – Full Inclusion of Women in Teaching & Leadership

Egalitarians believe that God not only made women and men equally, but they have equal roles within the church and family, and each can do what the other does. Egalitarians do not believe that gender doesn't matter; we certainly function differently, but that God does not mandate gender roles. Egalitarians generally go back to Genesis one and look at Adam and Eve co-ruling in the garden, and then they interpret the rest of the scripture in light of that, interpreting male-centered hierarchy and patriarchy as a result of the fall.

Today we're going back to 1 Timothy 2:8-15, and I'll be mentioning Galatians 3:28. But since I'll be referencing 1 Timothy 2, I need to read it again.

1 Timothy 2:8-15 (NIV)

Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. ⁹I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, ¹⁰but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

¹¹ A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ¹⁵ But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

When Egalitarians approach 1 Timothy 2:8-15, they often take a contextual approach, trying hard to understand the culture that might have led Paul to make his prohibition. Here is their **basic understanding**, recognizing that just like the complementarian perspective, there are a lot of variations on this.

A. Paul is responding to false teachers who elevated women in inappropriate ways. (1 Tim 2:8-10, 13-14)

When Paul wrote 1 Timothy, he was writing to Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3). Some egalitarians argue that if you look at the historical background of Ephesus, you find there was a cult of Artemis there. For example, when Paul preached in Ephesus, the silver-smiths sparked a riot because Paul was ruining their idol-selling business; and they all changed, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” (Acts 19:34) That cult elevated women. Artemis was the goddess of fertility and childbirth, even helping her own mother give birth to her twin brother Apollo right after she was born, or so the legend goes. They propose that cult elevated women in improper ways, and Paul is correcting them. Within Paul’s letter, it’s clear there are false teachers at Ephesus.

1 Timothy 1:3 (NIV)

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer.

1 Timothy 6:3–4 (NIV)

If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions

They think this is why Paul mentions Adam coming before Eve, to correct the Artemis cult that women are superior or that women came first. Another perspective is that throughout the Roman culture, there was a class of women called “new Roman women” who were drawing attention to themselves through elaborate displays of jewelry, even declaring themselves to be extra-maritally available that way.¹ Thus, Paul tells these women not to draw attention to themselves with jewelry and for them to be silent until they’ve learned and their teaching doesn’t become a cultural stumbling block. Egalitarianism continues:

B. Paul's prohibition is not-permanent but limited to disorderly church situations or misuses of authority. (1 Timothy 2:11-12)

The church may have a noisy environment that needs quietness and order and humility for proper teaching. Perhaps we see this in Paul’s second letter to Timothy (c.f., 1 Cor 14:34-35).

2 Timothy 2:16 (NIV)

Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.

¹ McKnight, Scot. The Blue Parakeet, 2nd Edition (p. 250). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

So maybe if the women in the church start to control their tongues and the men stop fighting, they can have greater freedom. However, other principles might be included here, like how if we were to plant a church in a Muslim country, due to the culture, women should not preach and be church leaders.

There's also a great deal of debate around Paul's word for "authority." It's the Greek word, *authenteō*, which was very uncommon and unclear what exactly he means. Paul could have used other clearer words for authority, like *exousiazō*, but he chose this one (1 Corinthians 7:4). You can find other uses of that word that are examples of dominance and abusive authority in ancient non-biblical literature. So the type of authority Paul is prohibiting might be a dominant authority or the type of authority Eve would try to exert over Adam as a result of the fall, "Your desire will be for your husband" (Gen 3:16).

Michael F. Bird does a nice job in his book, *Bourgeois Babes, Bossy Wives, and Bobby Haircuts*, of pulling all these strands together, context, word interpretation, all of scripture. He writes:

Paul does not want women dominating by propounding false doctrine in the Ephesian house churches. Paul is writing to a situation where certain well-to-do women, riding the cultural wave of feminine liberation, are trying to assume aggressively the mantle of leadership before they have properly learned the apostolic faith, and while they have come under the influence of false teachers who are rewriting the creation story to suit the inclinations of the new Roman women. Paul won't stand for it.²

There's a lot going on in the culture at Ephesus, Artemis worship, maybe this ungodly new Roman woman feminism. Some think Paul is restricting these women because of these context-specific problems.

C. Paul provides a pathway forward—instructing women to learn quietly. (1 Timothy 2:11)

Paul corrects the false teachers, and while he does not spell out his permission for women to preach and lead, he lays the groundwork for it. Once the women have learned quietly, it is inferred they will then be able to exercise their gifts in the church in a non-authoritarian healthy way. Elsewhere Paul encourages women to pray and prophesy publicly, and those are public acts. We go back to our letter to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 11:5 (NIV)

But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved.

This says women will pray and prophesy in the church setting. Elsewhere Luke lauds Priscilla for teaching Apollos, listing her first before her husband, perhaps a position of honor or leadership.

Acts 18:26 (NIV)

[Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

What the Egalitarians are getting at is that Paul corrects a situation in a particular context, and does something quite countercultural, invites the women to learn. Remember Mary and Martha, and how Mary was chided for sitting at Jesus' feet? Paul goes out of his way to encourage women to learn, something that is countercultural. But because the culture wasn't ready for women leaders or teachers yet, Paul does not permit it yet. Here are **several strengths** of the egalitarian position.

² Bird, Michael F.. *Bourgeois Babes, Bossy Wives, and Bobby Haircuts* (Fresh Perspectives on Women in Ministry) (p. 47). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

a) It tries to understand the cultural context of the letter.

The Bible scholar Ben Witherington III is famous for saying, “A text without a context is just a pretext for whatever you want it to mean.” He is a deeply egalitarian advocate based on his understanding of context.

b) It emphasizes the world-changing nature of the kingdom of God.

Egalitarians go to this passage in Galatians all the time to show that God is radically interested in re-adjusting our cultural expectations in his new kingdom.

Galatians 3:28-29 (NIV)

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Jesus turns the kingdoms of this world upside-down, elevating the weak, humbling the strong, bridging cultural and gender divides. Now, Complementarians would argue that this passage and its context are about salvation. We’re all saved through Jesus, no matter who we are or where we come from. This makes sense of the Jew and Gentile reference, but not really the slave, free, male, female aspect. The Jews never believed God only saved males or free people. While I don’t think this passage levels the playing field to the extent some egalitarians might argue, I’m often surprised by how the New Testament interprets the Old Testament and would not be surprised if God would extend its application further than we might suspect.

c) It looks at the big picture of scripture and interprets difficult passages in light of it.

I want to show you an **interpretive diagram** because I think it illustrates this point. I would argue that complementarians tend to start in 1 Timothy 2 (1 Corinthians 14; Ephesians 5) and then interpret other passages, like Genesis 1-3, Deborah, Miriam, and others, in light of it. So this picture shows that (see slides). Some would argue they start in Genesis, which I’ve added.

But in contrast, I would argue that Egalitarians try to interpret 1 Timothy 2 in light of all the other stories of strong, empowered women throughout scripture. They use passages like Deborah, Miriam, Huldah, Priscilla, and others to say Paul couldn’t have meant a prohibition for all time. I think it’s a good idea to interpret more difficult passages in light of less difficult passages. That being said, complementarians might argue that 1 Timothy 2:8-15 is not that hard to understand. This leads me to **some questions**:

a. Does this view bypass the plain reading of scripture with theoretical context?

I think this is the greatest weakness of many, not all, but many egalitarian positions. You do have to spend a lot of time reconstructing what we think might have been the historical situation in Ephesus. Anytime we use a reconstructed context to interpret God’s word, we risk elevating context over scripture. With enough context, we can make scripture say whatever we want it to say. The most biblically faithful Egalitarians root their context first in scriptural clues, just like we might reconstruct the context or situation of other letters, like Colossians or Romans. However, it is still theorizing.

b. Does this view bypass other seemingly complementarian texts, like Ephesians 5?

Ephesians 5 calls believers to submit to one another, but also for wives to submit to their husbands because the husband is the “head of the wife.” Husbands are to love their wives “just as Christ loved the church” (Ephesians 5:21-33). Complementarians would argue that it’s not just 1 Timothy 2:8-15 that interprets Genesis, but Ephesians 5:21-33, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, and other texts that do so as well. Aren’t husbands called to lead elsewhere? Egalitarianism doesn’t allow for any male headship in the home or church.

This is tough. There are no easy answers. We need God's grace to navigate this difficult topic. We'll come back after Mother's Day for the hybrid position. Let's pray.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA. You can listen to other sermons at CornerstoneWestford.com.

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Service & Sermon

You can watch the full service on Facebook or only the sermon on YouTube.

Discussion Time

Ice-Breaker: Which is your most favorite month and least-favorite month?

Prayer: Do you have a praise or prayer request?

Reflection: 1) Read Galatians 3:23-29. How does the passage inform your interpretation of verse 28? 2) What are some similarities and differences you've noticed between complementarianism and egalitarianism? 3) What's a question you still have?

Debrief: What's one takeaway from today?

Follow-Up

Dear Church,

Thanks for bearing with me as I explain complementarianism, egalitarianism, and after Mother's Day, a hybrid view. Below are a few ways to review (and prepare) if you'd like to go deeper.

- Pastor Jonathan

Worship – In What if Jesus, Kristin DiMarco sings about some of the ways we as Christians divide. I found it helpful to think about the ways Jesus does not meet our expectations, and that is a good thing.

Testimony – Listen to Dr. Nicole Martin share her testimony of serving as a woman in ministry at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Charlotte. This is super-funny and heart-wrenching. I both laughed and cried. You can listen to that here.

Sermon – If you'd like to listen to an Egalitarian sermon that does a good job of explaining the historical context of Ephesians, specifically the idea that Paul is addressing a specific group of Roman women, you can listen to Pastor Brandon Goad's sermon on 1 Timothy 2:8-15. He is a fellow CCCC pastor and works with me in the Nineveh church-planting Network.

Original Language – If you want to get into the nitty-gritty details of 1 Timothy 2:8-15, as well as better understand the egalitarian interpretation, you can listen to Andrew Bartlett's egalitarian teaching here. But, if you'd like, you can read a rebuttal of his book here.

Sermon Slides