

A Summary of the Complementarian Position

I. A Broad Overview of the Complementarian Position

A. Created Equality of Essence and Distinction of Role

Male and female were created by God as equal in dignity, value, essence and human nature, but also distinct in role whereby the male was given the responsibility of loving authority over the female, and the female was to offer willing, glad-hearted and submissive assistance to the man. Gen. 1:26-27 makes clear that male and female are equally created as God's image, and so are, by God's created design, equally and fully human. But, as Gen. 2 bears out (as seen in its own context and as understood by Paul in 1 Cor. 11 and 1 Tim. 2), their humanity would find expression differently, in a relationship of complementarity, with the female functioning in a submissive role under the leadership and authority of the male.

B. Fallen Disruption of God's Created Design

Sin introduced into God's created design many manifestations of disruption, among them a disruption in the proper role-relations between man and woman. As most complementarians understand it, Gen. 3:15-16 informs us that the male/female relationship would now, because of sin, be affected by mutual enmity. In particular, the woman would have a desire to usurp the authority given to man in creation, leading to man, for his part, ruling over woman in what can be either rightfully-corrective or wrongfully-abusive ways.

C. Restored Role Differentiation through Redemption in Christ

Passages such as Eph. 5:22-33 and 1 Tim. 2:8-15 exhibit the fact that God's created intention of appropriate male leadership and authority should now, in Christ, be fully affirmed, both in the home and in the church. Wives are to submit to their husbands in the model of the Church's submission to Christ, and women are not to exercise authoritative roles of teaching in the Church in view of Eve's created relation to Adam. Male headship, then, is seen to be restored in the Christian community as men and women endeavor to express their common humanity according to God's originally-created and good hierarchical design.

II. Primary Rationale Supporting the Complementarian Position A. Evidence that God's design was male/female equality of essence

Gen. 1:26-27 – shows that man and woman share the same human nature, both are made in God's image, and both are given God's commission to rule the earth. How they are, together, to rule the earth on God's behalf, is not here explained. Thus, at this point, neither egalitarianism nor

complementarianism is demanded. Clearly, the thrust is that male and female are equal in essence (i.e., both fully human, both full imago Dei, both of equal value and worth to God) and together commissioned to rule over the earth.

Gal. 3:28 – God's redemption and regeneration of those whom He would save involves no distinction between male and female. Gender is absolutely irrelevant regarding who may or may not be saved. The clear implication, then, is that men and women are equal in essence because their salvation comes to humans with no consideration given to gender.

1 Cor. 12:7-11 – Clearly, God distributes His gifts to His people as He so wills, but one’s gender is not a factor in His giving any particular gift to a person. Women and men alike are recipients of all of God’s gifts (e.g., see 1 Cor. 11:5 for a statement of women having the gift of prophecy). Again, this indicates that women are equal in essence with men in God’s sight, but it does not preclude the possibility that God may prescribe just how those gifts be used in the Church.

1 Pet. 3:7b – Saved women (wives, in this text) are to be treated with honor, precisely because they, along with saved men, are fellow-heirs of the grace of life in Christ. It is so important for husbands to understand this principle and so respect their wives in this fashion that Peter warns that husbands who do not treat their wives with the honor accorded them by God will not be heard before God in their prayers.

B. Evidence that God’s design was for male/female role differentiation

Gen. 2 – There are at least four features of this chapter which support the idea of male-headship (i.e., male God-given authority over female). 1) The order of creation (male created first) indicates God’s design of male priority in the male/female relationship. This is also Paul’s observation both in 1 Cor. 11:8 and 1 Tim. 2:13. 2) God gives instructions to Adam, before the creation of Eve, not to eat fruit of the forbidden tree (2:16-17). Implied in this is Adam’s responsibility to instruct his future wife and guard her from violating this prohibition (hence, the significance in 3:6 that the woman gave to the man “who was with her,” showing he failed to guard his wife as he should have). 3) Eve was created to be Adam’s helper. While it is true that this same Hebrew term is often used of God’s “helping” people, it is clear that Paul understands Eve’s role as helper to require that woman ought to be under the rightful authority of man (see 1 Cor. 11:9-10 – “man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake. Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head”). 4) Adam’s naming of Eve indicates, in an OT cultural context, Adam’s right of authority over the one whom he named. And interestingly, Adam named his wife twice, first when she was formed from his flesh (2:23), and second after they had both sinned (3:20), indicating that his rightful authority over her continued after sin had come.

Gen. 3:1-7 – Eve was tempted and deceived by the serpent and ate the forbidden fruit, and then gave it also to Adam. Eve, that is, sinned first. Despite this fact, God seeks out Adam after their sin to inquire why they were hiding (3:8ff). God approaches Adam, not Eve, as the one ultimately responsible for the sin. Likewise, Paul clearly teaches that the line of sin in the human race begins with Adam (Rom. 5:12ff; 1 Cor. 15:22). But he does this in full recognition of the fact that Eve sinned first (1 Tim. 2:14). Adam only rightly bears the responsibility as the head of the sinful human race, when Eve sinned first, if he is viewed by God and Paul as having authority and ultimate responsibility over the woman.

Gen. 3:16 – Sin brought about, not the beginning of a male/female relational hierarchy, but a disruption of the God-intended role of male-headship and female submission in the male-female relationship. Most complementarians understand the curse of the woman in 3:16 to mean that sin would bring about in Eve a wrongful desire to rule over her husband (contrary to God’s created design), and that in response, Adam would have to assert his rule over her. This understanding comes from comparing the sentence structure and terms of Gen. 3:16 with Gen. 4:7. In 4:7, God tells Cain that sin is seeking to destroy him, and so He says “its [sin’s] desire is for you, but you must master it.” This means, of course, sin desires to rule over you, but you in response must rule over it. Now, the exact sentence structure is found in 3:16, where Eve is told “your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” This

means, in light of 4:7, Eve's desire will be to rule illegitimately over Adam (note: certainly sin could not be credited with giving Eve a loving or caring desire for Adam, could it?), and in response Adam will have to assert his rightful rulership over her. Most complementarians hold, then, that sin produced a disruption in God's order of male headship and female submission, in which a) the woman would be inclined now to usurp the man's rightful place of authority over her, and man may be required, in response, to reestablish his God-given rulership over the woman, and b) the man would be inclined to misuse his rights of rulership, either by sinful abdication of his God-given authority, acquiescing to the woman's desire to rule over him (and so fail to lead as he should), or by abusing his rights to rule through harsh, cruel and exploitative domination of the woman.

1 Cor. 11:1-16 – As already noted, Paul uses Gen. 2 to support his contention that women need to display, in the church, their submission to male leadership. The woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head (11:10), because she is the glory of man (11:7), because she originated from man (11:8), and because she was created for the man's sake (11:9). Because Paul links the woman's submissive role in the Church to God's created design, it is evident that these instructions to the church at Corinth are not applicable only there, but instead are applicable universally in the Church.

1 Cor. 14:34-36 – Clearly this prohibition on women speaking cannot be absolute, for Paul previously acknowledged women prophesying (1 Cor. 11:5). What complementarians hold on this, though, is usually one of two positions: either that women may never be involved in an official capacity of teaching the corporate assembly, presumably with men present, or that women may not function in the elder role of judging prophecies (a la Grudem, Carson). In either case, what is clear is the principle that women are to display their submission to male headship and learn quietly from those (qualified males only) responsible for the teaching ministry of the church.

1 Tim. 2:8-15 – Again here, Paul links his command that women receive instruction with submissiveness rather than teaching or exercising authority over men (2:11-12) with God's created design for man and woman. Women are to submit to male leadership and teaching because Adam was created first (2:13), and because Eve was deceived and sinned first (2:14). And again, it is evident that these instructions can only rightly be seen as universally applicable for the Church, because the basis for them is God's created design.

Eph. 5:22-33 – Wives are to be subject to their husbands in response to their submission to the Lordship of Christ (5:22). The reason for this, says Paul, is that the husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the Church (5:23). The next verse makes the matter even more explicit: "as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives to their husbands in everything" (5:24). The key notion here is the parallel of the headship of the husband with the headship of Christ. As the Church submits to Christ as the one who has rightful authority over her, so the wife is to submit to her husband as the one who has rightful authority over her. Husbands, for their part, are to love their wives as Christ loves the Church (5:25-29). When husbands truly love their wives and wives submit to their husbands, we see the sinful distortion of the male female relationship defeated and a return, then, to what God intended in his creation of man and woman.

1 Pet. 3:7a – While the second half of this verse stresses the equal honor accorded to women along with men (as fellow-heirs of the grace of life), the first half of the verse clearly indicates the fundamental gender difference between a husband and his wife. She, according to Peter, is a "weaker vessel," and she needs to be treated with tenderness and understanding as such. This implies that 1) while she is

fully equal in essence (3:7b), she likewise is constitutionally different from him as a woman (3:7a), and 2) the husband bears particular God-sanctioned responsibility to care for his wife, indicating his leadership and primary responsibility in their relationship.

Trinitarian Analogy – Complementarians understand the Trinity to present an analogy to the male/female relationship, as God designed it. God is one in essence and three in persons. The three persons of the God-head are absolutely equal in essence (in fact, they each share fully, simultaneously and without division the one divine essence), but they are distinct in function. Specifically, their distinction of function is marked by an intrinsic relation of authority within the God-head, by which the Son is subject to the Father, and the Spirit to the Son. 1 Cor. 11:3 states part of this: “God is the head of Christ.” The clearest biblical example of Christ’s subjection to the Father is in 1 Cor. 15:28 where the exalted and victorious Son “will also be subject to the One who subjected all things to Him.” Given this understanding of the Trinity, it makes sense for Paul to say what He does in 1 Cor. 11:3. He speaks here of three authority lines that exist: Christ is the authority (head) over every man, man is the authority (head) over a woman, and God (the Father) is authority (head) over Christ. Just as the persons of God are equal in essence and yet they relate within a structure of lines of authority, so too men and women are equal in essence while relating within a similar structure of lines of authority.

C. Biblical Examples of Male/Female Role Differentiation

Despite the fact that sin has produced in woman an illegitimate desire to usurp the rightful authority God gave to man (Gen. 3:16), God has worked in Israel and in the Church to establish male-headship as the consistent and approved pattern for religious and home life.

Male leadership in Israel

From the Garden of Eden on, God has called out men and held men responsible for religious leadership.

Think of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the 12 sons of Jacob as heads of the 12 tribes of Israel, Moses, Joshua, David, the male priestly order, the prophets to Israel and Judah, etc. Clearly, God purposely called out and intended to work through male leadership in Israel.

Male leadership with Christ

Clearly Jesus was not at all averse to challenging customs and traditions of men which ran contrary to the values of the kingdom of God. He lacked no courage to challenge humanly fabricated restrictions upon the wise and good purposes of God (e.g., Matt. 15:3-9; 23:1-36). And his taking of women with him during his itinerant ministry testifies to this. But what Jesus never did, though He clearly could have and was not constrained by social convention not so to do, is to choose any women to be among the twelve. His choice of 12 men continues the pattern we observe in the OT, of distinguishing a certain level of spiritual leadership as gender-restrictive.

Male leadership in the Church

As observed above, Paul explicitly restricts women from a certain level of spiritual leadership and instruction in the Church. 1 Cor. 11:1-16, 1 Cor. 14:34-36, and 1 Tim. 2:8-15 consistently require that the church’s ultimate human spiritual leadership be gender-restrictive. This is reinforced by qualifications for the position of eldership which requires that one be “the husband of one wife” (see 1 Tim 3:2 and Titus 1:6), obviously indicating that only qualified men may serve as elders.

Male leadership in the home

Eph. 5:22-33, Col. 3:18-20, and 1 Pet. 3:1-7 each establishes the correctness of male-leadership in the home. The passage in 1 Peter is instructive in a particular way not described above. Here Peter envisions situations where a believing wife is married to an unbelieving husband. One might expect Peter to say to the wife, "because you know Christ and your husband doesn't, you need to take over the leadership in your home. Don't leave the leadership up to your husband, because he won't lead your home in a Christ-like manner." But, to the contrary, Peter says even to these believing wives of unbelieving husbands, "be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives."