

Gender Equality is God's Original Design: Refuting Complementarian Claims

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It was the summer of 1977. My wife, JB and I were flying from Phoenix, Arizona to Maui, Hawaii. JB^[1] had brought a Bible to read during the long flight. Sue, our flight attendant, noticed the Bible and a conversation about the Christian faith soon developed among the three of us. Other passengers had previously witnessed to her about Christianity. She personally knew women who had accepted Christ. What Sue learned from them was that to be a female in the Christian church was to be treated as a second class person. For her this meant being subordinate to her future husband, having no role in decision making, and deferring to men within the church. Sue stated that while the message of the Gospel was appealing to her, she would not accept any religion that treated women in this manner. What a tragedy to think that souls are lost because of such a teaching! Our hearts grieved over this exchange, and we prayed for Sue for many weeks.

Millard J. Erickson states “women have at times been regarded as, at best, second-class members of the human race.”^[2] Author, Patrica Gundry said “we drive away unbelievers even now by some of our rigid rules regarding women. Women outside Christ reject a God who treats half His human creation as second-class creatures.”^[3] Such treatment repels women from Christianity. The struggle for gender equality continues today. It is my opinion that gender equality is one of the most important issue facing the Christian community. When commenting on Galatians 3:28, Gary Kinnaman, a church pastor, said: “The body of Christ has come a long way in recognizing that there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, *but we haven't begun to understand that there is neither male nor female.*”^[4]

My thesis maintains that the egalitarian view of Scripture accurately reflects God's original design. This egalitarian prospective means that in the home, a marriage reflects a union of equals where neither may lord it over the other and neither are assigned “roles” based on gender. In the church, ministry including leadership is open equally to both men and women without restriction. Christians should manifest this design both inside and outside the church. I contrast the failures of complementarianism with the positive effects of egalitarianism. The final section discusses some congregations that have adopted an egalitarian approach to ministry.

Scope of the Paper

The foundational issues and passages which surround gender equality are rooted in the biblical account of creation. This paper presents an analysis of biblical passages found in the Genesis account of creation and the Fall. Complementarians claim that Genesis 2 teaches and is the basis for the eternal subordination of women in the church and home and therefore women should not teach or lead men. They deny the right of a woman to exercise God's call to public ministry. This paper refutes those claims and demonstrates that the egalitarian view of scripture was and still is God's preferred model for our lives. Scripture references are taken from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

Defining Gender Equality

Gender equality is a conceptual term used to describe our common humanity, shared responsibility, and how we relate to others as male and female. From an egalitarian perspective, gender equality recognizes that both male and female were created in God's image. God's image incorporates ontological, relational, and functional qualities. Additionally the male and female were created as equals and possessed equal authority. God does not subordinate one to the other nor place restrictions based on their gender.

Women and men are divinely gifted and empowered to minister by the Holy Spirit to the whole Body of Christ. In personal and family relationships, Christians are to relate to one another with the love of Christ, exhibiting mutual respect and interdependence. Equality and mutual cooperation represent the basis upon which all relationships including marriage are meant to function.

Genesis Accounts

According to Genesis 1 God created humanity as male and female, and God gave both of them dominion over the earth. Genesis 2 provides a supplemental account of creation. Genesis 3 depicts the Fall of humanity. Regarding the correct understanding of these chapters, a theology professor said: "To the degree that we misunderstand these chapters, we will fail to discern the direction Christ is moving in his church through the impulses of the Holy Spirit."^[5]

Genesis Chapter 1

The Bible states that humans are made in the image of God (*imago Dei*). This is an ontological reality. Genesis 1.26, records God intention with a declarative statement: "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion." In verse 27, the narrator records God's completed action: "So God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." God blessed them in verse 28 and commanded them to "be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over ... every living thing that moves upon the earth." From Genesis 1.26-28 I conclude that:

1. God intended to create humans in the image of God. (v. 26a)
2. God intended that the male and female exercise dominion, (v. 26b)
3. God created humans. Both the male and female represent what it means to be made in the image of God. (v. 27)
4. God commanded them to reproduce. Being made male and female represents a physical difference necessary for reproduction, (v. 28a)
5. God commands both of them to exercise equal dominion over the earth. They were to perform this task together. God did not assign separate tasks or roles based on their gender. (v. 28b)

Made in the Image of God

Scripture does not explicitly state what it means to be made in the image of God. The meaning of *imago Dei* is debated among theologians. Being made in God's image incorporates fellowship between male and female and is basic to all humanity.^[6] This observation correctly identifies the need for horizontal relationships. Humanity uniquely reflects God's image.^[7] But how? How do we reflect God's image in relationship and function?

Relational Qualities

I believe the most significant aspect of being made in God's image is to be in a relational fellowship which incorporates two aspects. We were created for fellowship both with God and humankind. First, we are to express our love, direct our prayers, worship and communicate vertically with God. Second, we are to show mutual love, encourage, respect, and communicate horizontally with others as male and female. In summarizing the commandments, Jesus tells us to love God with our whole being and love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:36-40). Jesus also warns us not to exercise control over anyone (Matt. 20: 25-28). In both cases, Christ is talking about our relationships and how they are meant to function. In horizontal relationships we are to live in fellowship and relate as equals in a spirit of cooperation and reliance upon one another with no hint of subordination.

In creation, God made the male and female as equals just as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit represent a Trinity of equals, an ontological reality. The male and female were also meant to mutually work together and exhibit interdependence in the tasks God gave them to perform just as the act of creation was jointly performed by equal members of Trinity.

Functional Qualities

The created male and female were commanded to actively perform tasks together. God commanded them to procreate (v. 28a). Their unique physical bodies were designed in order to accomplish this specific directive. God also commanded them to jointly subdue and exercise dominion over the earth (v. 28b). In Genesis 1.26-28 God's command to exercise dominion is not given exclusively to either gender. They were empowered to rule together. They carried out all their tasks in mutuality, thus reflecting another aspect of being made in the image of God.

It is of utmost importance and essential to remember that God, who created everything including humanity, functions as a Trinity of equals. The Trinity does not function as a hierarchy in descending order or that the Son or Holy Spirit function subordinately in their “roles” as some recent scholars continue to argue.^[8] Furthermore, subordination within the Trinity is contrary to all historical orthodox understanding of Scripture as reflected in various statements and creeds.^[9] While creeds are no substitute for God’s Word, they properly reflect the nature and function of the Trinity. Contrary to what some hierarchical complementarians claim, any form of subordination is absent from the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds through all the Reformation confessions of Faith.^[10]

Today, many contemporary conservative evangelical scholars, “all argue that the Bible and creedal orthodoxy disallow any suggestion that the Son or the Spirit are eternally subordinated to the Father.”^[11] Millard Erickson, regarded by many as the “foremost conservative evangelical systematic theologian alive” today, considers ontological equality of members of the Trinity and the eternal role subordination of the either the Son or the Spirit to be a logical impossibility.^[12] To counter any attack on the historical orthodox view of the Trinity, the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS), a professional academic society of Biblical scholars, educators, pastors, and others involved in evangelical scholarship, found it necessary to expand their doctrinal statement by adding this statement: “God is a Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory” thereby reaffirming the ontological identity, equality, authority, and honor or status among the three persons of the Trinity.^[13]

Complementarians, such as Wayne Grudem, persist in teaching the eternal subordination of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to God the Father and then use that belief as a basis for claiming the eternal subordination of women. They should not be taken seriously. They are guilty of error. Their claim is not biblical. Gilbert Bilezikian states: “it smacks of the Arian heresy.”^[14]

Jesus, during His incarnate state, voluntarily and temporarily humbled himself for the purpose of obtaining our salvation and in that context we understand these words: “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28), “but I do as the Father has commanded me” ... (John 14:31). “Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered” (Heb 5:8), “he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death--even on a cross” (Phil 2:8).

However, even in Christ’s earthly state he could claim full equality with the Father saying: “The Father and I are one” (John 10:30) and “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father ... Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” (John 14:9,11). Jesus by calling God his own Father was “making himself equal to God” (John 5:18). After his resurrection Jesus said: ... “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” (Matt 28:18-19). Christians confess that Jesus is Lord. As the risen Savior, Jesus has all authority and reigns as Lord, no longer in a humbled state.

Genesis Chapter 2

¹⁸Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” ... ²²And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.” ²⁴Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

The central idea of these passages regarding the creation of humankind can be described as follows: The man (male Adam) was not meant to live as a solitary being as the man represented only one half of humanity. The woman was not an afterthought, as God being omniscient already knew that the male would be alone and needed a suitable partner formed from his own substance. Humanity, now completed, lives in perfect union. The progression of thought can be illustrated by the following sequence of events:

1. God formed a human being, man (Adam), from the dust of the ground (v.7)
2. Because it is not good for the male to be alone God makes him a partner suited to him (v. 18)
3. God forms a woman from the rib or side of the man and brings her to him (v.22)
4. The man rejoices because he is no longer alone. He calls her woman (v.23)
5. They become one flesh (v.24)
6. The climax of creation,^[15] naked and not ashamed (v.25)

Chapter 2 tells us how God handmade the male and female. Both creation accounts reveal the communal nature of God and the male and female were to enjoy fellowship with each other, the rest of creation, and their Creator.^[16] The chapter ends with both the male and female living as God originally intended in perfect harmony and equality.

The Complementarian's Hierarchical Claim

Complementarians and traditionalists disagree with the egalitarian view of Scripture. Some scholars have concluded that women do not fully reflect God's image.^[17] “One bluntly states: ‘The image of God is in man directly, but in woman indirectly.’”^[18] The complementarians’ core beliefs, in part, state that “distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart ... Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin.”^[19] This view claims that Genesis 2 teaches the eternal subordination of women in the church and home and therefore women should not teach or lead men. Complementarians justify their hierarchical position based on the following arguments:

Their Argument:^[20]

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|--|---|
| 1. Woman was created after man (v. 18) | Order of creation, a subjective inference |
| 2. Woman was created from man (v.23) | Order of creation, a subjective inference |
| 3. Woman was created "for" man (v. 18) | The male needed a subordinate helper |
| 4. Woman was named by man (v.23) | Naming implies authority over |

Their Rational

Does Being Created After or From Man Imply Subordination?

Arguments 1 and 2 are actual statements taken from the biblical record. The woman was created after the man (v. 18) and the woman was created from the man (v.23). Those who argue a hierarchical structure with women in subordination to men do so simply based on the order of creation.^[21] However, there is nothing contained in Scripture that God made the female subordinate to the male by virtue of God's creative sequence. Following this logic, one could easily argue from the ascending order of creation that God intended the female, the crowning achievement of creation, to be the leader with the male in subordination.

Regarding Genesis 2:23, one hierarchicalist states that “being taken out of man” implies subordination and submission.^[22] He fails, however, to give any “hard exegetical documentation” as support for his assertion.^[23] If God intended subordination, the female would have been formed from the ground and presented, just as the animals were, to the male.^[24] God could have also formed the female from his feet, indicating she would be under his rule, but He did not! Instead God formed the female out of the rib or side of man to signify that they were equal and “one flesh.” This agrees with purpose of verse 24 ... and *they become one flesh*. Arguments 1 and 2 amount to speculation and unfounded inferences and do not support the complementarians claims.

Does Being Created a "Helper" mean a Subordinate Position?

In argument 3 complementarians attempt to claim the woman was created as a “subordinate for man,” because the male needed a suitable helper. The verse in question is: “Then the Lord God said, It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper (*ezer kenegdo*) as his partner.” At issue is the correct biblical meaning in context and use of the Hebrew words *ezer kenegdo*.

Complementarian John Piper believes: “God teaches us that woman is a man's ‘helper’ in the sense of a loyal and suitable assistant in the life of the garden.”^[25] Another believes God made the male head and the female the helper.^[26] “She was not his equal in that she was his “helper”.”^[27] They offer no biblical support to substantiate their claim.^[28] No exegesis of the words *ezer kenegdo* is presented. However, Scripture tells us exactly the meaning and how the term is used.

Victor P. Hamilton notes that *Ezer* is always used in reference to Yahweh's being Israel's help(er) because he is the stronger one. (see Exod 18.4; Deut. 33.7, 26, 29; Ps. 33.20; 115:9-11; 121.1-2; 124:8; 146.5). *Kenegdo* appears only in Gen. 2:18, 20 and means “corresponding to” or “face to face.” What God now creates for the male will correspond to him, and will be his equal. Any suggestion that the word *ezer* denotes an “associate or subordinate status” is refuted by scriptural evidence. The verb supporting *ezer* is *azar* meaning: “succor”, “save from danger,” “deliver from death.” Thus the female “delivers or saves the male from his solitude.”^[29] She also saves him and humanity from extinction; he needs her to procreate. As the female is described with the same term used to describe God, the strong helper, she is presented as the male’s equal and certainly not someone who is in need of help or in any way subordinate to him.

A preponderance of Bibles translate *ezer kenegdo* (referring to the female) as “an authority corresponding to him” (ISV), “a helper comparable to him” (NKJV), “who corresponds to him” (NET), “a partner suited to him” (REB), “a helper as his partner” (NRS), “one like himself” (BBE), “a helper who is like him” (CBS), “an helper - as his counterpart” (YLT), “a helper {as his counterpart}” (LEB), and never as a subordinate helper. In Gen. 1:28, God commanded them to exercise equal dominion over the earth. The complementarians’ Argument #3 that being made a “helper” for man implies subordination is without any merit.

Does Naming Imply Authority Over?

The complementarians’ argument 4 claims the naming process indicated authority in the Old Testament.^[30] Raymond Outland, Jr. regards the fact that God named the human race “man” and “not woman” in Genesis 1.26-27 as an indication of God's intention for male headship.^[31] However, God said “let us make” not “let us name.” Furthermore, the word translated as “man” (c.f. ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB, YLT) in verses 1.26-27, does not refer to the “male” half of humanity. The word, *adam* in Hebrew, *anthropos* in Greek, is being used as a collective noun referring to humanity as *male and female*. This word is translated as either “humans,” “human beings,” “humanity,” or “humankind” (c.f. CEV, CEB, GW, NCV, NLT, NRSV, TNIV). Even those translations that use the word “man” for *adam* immediately translate that word collectively as “them” saying: “let them have dominion over” (v.26).

Acting as name giver, the male “exhibits a quality of discernment,” but his naming does not suggest the exercise of dominion.^[32] Phyllis Tribble, an internationally known biblical scholar, states “that in order to denote naming, the Hebrew verb “call” must be followed by an actual name.”^[33] In Genesis 2.23, the man recognizes her as “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh and immediately calls her ‘woman’”. This was his acknowledgment that she was “taken out” him. One obvious fact should stand out: Woman is not a name just as Man is not a name. The male does not actually name the woman Eve until Genesis 3:20, after the Fall. The argument that “naming” in Genesis 1 & 2 supports the hierarchical-complementarian claims is a completely without merit.

The complementarian claim that Genesis 2 teaches and is the basis for the eternal subordination of women in the church and home as well as the claim that women should not teach or lead men is biblically unfounded. Complementarians offer no direct biblical evidence to support their views. Genesis 2 does not address the qualifications for ministry nor prevent women of leading God’s people but the text clearly tells us the male and female functioned as equals.

Genesis 3: The FALL

Genesis 3 marks a decisive change in God's original plan for humanity. No longer will the male and female live in harmony but from this point forward will suffer the consequences of their sin. This chapter records the Fall, God's pronouncements to the serpent, the woman and the man. God curses the serpent and the ground. The man names the woman (vv. 14-20). The Fall temporarily altered God's original design for humanity.

Egalitarians believe that female subordination resulted after the Fall. Complementarians believe in subordination before the Fall. However, the early Greek speaking Church Father and Bishop, John Chrysostom (347-407) left no doubt about the woman's condition and that she was *not subject* to the man until after the Fall and his comments agree with the actual Scriptural account of the Fall.^[34]

There are two major issues regarding the Fall directly relating to the woman's status. The first one deals with God's utterance to the woman, "yet your desire (teshuqah) shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (v. 16). The second one deals with the statement: "the man named his wife Eve" (v. 20) has been discussed in the previous section titled: Does Naming Imply Authority Over?

What Does *Teshuqah* Actually Mean: Desire or Turning?

The Hebrew word transliterated as *teshuqah* appears only three times in the Old Testament: Genesis 3:16, Genesis 4:7 and Song of Solomon 7:10. The Septuagint, the earliest Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, translates this word as "turning" and not "desire." In addition, the other ancient versions (the Syriac Peshitta, Samaritan Pentateuch, Old Latin, Sahidic, Bohairic, Ethiopic, Arabic, Aquila's Greek, Symmachus's Greek, Theodotion's Greek and the Latin Vulgate) translate *teshuqa* as "turning," not "desire" the majority of the time.^[35] Additionally, the church fathers including Clement of Rome, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Epiphanius and Jerome, along with Philo, a Jew who died about A.D. 50, were not aware of any other sense for this word other than the translation of "turning."

According to the Hebrew text this verse reads: "You are turning away [from God!] to your husband, and [as a result] he will rule over you [take advantage of you]."^[36] Remember this passage is descriptive and not prescriptive. *He will* is in the simple future tense describing what will happen, and not in the imperative mood, meaning *he must* or *he shall*. God is simply describing the result of sin and not how relationships were originally intended to function.

Katherine Bushnell's extensive research on Genesis 3:16 and in particular on the Hebrew word *teshuqa* reveals the intended meaning of this passage. Bushnell, an outstanding Hebrew scholar, renders the verse as *Thou art turning away to thy husband, and he will rule over thee*, meaning "Eve is turning away from God to her husband, and, as a consequence of that deflection, Adam will rule over her."^[37] Bushnell's translation of the Hebrew agrees with that of Chrysostom's Greek translation, which states that for the future "thy turning shall be to thy husband."^[38] The subordination of women is a consequence of the Fall (v. 16).

Negative Effects of Complementarianism

Complementarians claim their view "should find an echo in every human heart." Well, if that is true, then marriages based on hierarchical relationships should be the happiest and most intimate of all marriages and should have the lowest divorce rate. However, such claim is beyond comprehension and absent any recognition of reality. Hierarchical views have brought great pain and suffering to women in the past and continues in the present. The plethora of research studies focused on marriages over the past fifty years clearly demonstrate the traditional hierarchical model is fundamentally flawed and brings harm to Christian marriages and the body of Christ.

Following are summaries of extensive research studies about divorce, marriage satisfaction, and spousal abuse as well as examples to illustrate the harmful results than can result from a marriage based on hierarchy:

1. Divorce rates are much higher. Evangelical denominations that promote the a complementarian (traditional hierarchical) view of marriage experience the highest divorce rates among Christians. (Source: Barna Research).

2. More than four-fifths (82%) of traditional marriages are unhappy. That means only 18% of traditional married couples are happy.^[39]

3. Spousal abuse is significantly higher. Traditional couples experienced spousal abuse in 21% of marriages, a rate more than four times higher than in marriages with the highest level of satisfaction.^[40] The majority of spousal abuse is committed by the husband against his wife and is more life threatening.

4. Douglas Moo, a complementarian, states unequivocally that God established hierarchy, ordained the husband to be a wife's "head" and she must follow him. He told how a Christian women felt obligated to submit to her husband's request to engage in sex with him and another woman at the same time. Obviously she believed this was God's will. Moo counseled the woman that she should have disobeyed her husband; but that she was to still remain under his authority.^[41]

5. Wayne Grudem speaks how his 1981 decision to move to a seminary affected his marriage. Speaking of his wife, he states "She was hurt deeply by the decision-making process, and we paid a price over the next several years in our marriage relationship."^[42] By his own admission Grudem said he did not "honestly listen" or include her enough in the process. One could easily conclude that his hierarchical headship views of marriage caused their marriage to suffer for many years.

The evidence against hierarchical marriages speaks loud and clear. Just as the issue of slavery was incorrectly believed to be God's will for eighteen centuries, so too is the complementarian view of Scripture. This unscriptural and injurious mindset should no longer go unchallenged within the church.

Positive Effects of Egalitarianism

Assuming that churches were egalitarian in practice, what possible effect could result? The egalitarian model would benefit the body of Christ for many important reasons.

First: Women would no longer be disenfranchised like our flight attendant, Sue. Women will be more receptive to the Christian message of hope and salvation when they are no longer treated like second class persons or told they must be under the authority-leadership of their husbands. Otherwise the converse is more likely. Many more women will continue to reject the Gospel message and or avoid Christian churches all together.

Second: Women would be free to use their gifts in the church. Christ's command to go into all the world, make disciples, preach and teach the Gospel, referred to as the "Great Commission," was given to all disciples without restriction to gender. God calls women and men to all areas of ministry in the church. To the extent that women are fully utilized in ministry, the Church is better able to fulfill Christ's continuing mandate. Women equally represent and bear the image of God. The totality of humanity will be better served when the church includes women in all aspects of ministry and leadership. Egalitarian modeling allows the Holy Spirit to freely operate through women to witness more effectively to the power of the gospel. Denying ministry opportunity to women quenches the move of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

Third: Relationships between men and women would be enriched.^[43] Interpersonal Relationships i.e. how individuals relate to one another on a personal level within the confines of Christian fellowship, family and marriage will be strengthened. God desires that we exhibit love, compassion and mutually cooperate with and support one another. Christ never told us to place restrictions based on gender, dominate others or treat women as objects for emotional, physical, and sexual abuse or rule over them.

Fourth: Egalitarian marriages experience greater closeness, joy, and unity. Numerous independent research studies, conducted with tens of thousands of married couples since the 1950s, have consistently revealed that egalitarian couples experience considerably more satisfying marriages than traditional marriages. Extensive studies reveal that 81% of egalitarian couples were happily married. Egalitarian couples were 4.5 times more likely to be happily married compared to traditional couples.^[44]

Perhaps once again, this ancient church historian's comment about men and women will resonate through the egalitarian minded church:

Together they pray, together they prostrate themselves, together they perform their fasts, mutually teaching, mutually exhorting, mutually sustaining. Equally they are both found in the church of God.^[45]

Churches That Have Adopted An Egalitarian Approach to Ministry

Change is not easy, especially when hierarchical attitudes have so deeply pervaded the church and inculcated the minds of many people for centuries. We must collectively and individually be willing to repent and ask for forgiveness. We must draw closer to the Lord; our attitudes and hearts must change. Walls of division that separate us along gender lines must fall. We must be willing to share opportunities and responsibilities. Language and communication must reflect gender inclusiveness. Sexist jokes must cease, ministry must be opened to all, our language and communication must reflect gender inclusiveness. True fellowship in community must abound. The church must remember that God still loves the lost. Who among us would bear to see the faces of those, who because of misogynist practices, have never accepted the gospel message? Following are a few example of churches that have adopted an egalitarian approach to ministry.

Pastor David Yonggi Cho and Pastor (Mrs.) Jashil Choi were the founding pastors of what would become the largest church congregation in the world, Yoido Full Gospel Church, a Pentecostal church located in Seoul, South Korea. Cho attributes the churches enormous growth in large part to releasing women to minister and lead home fellowship meetings. Despite living in an Oriental culture that decisively puts women in a subordinate role throughout society, Pastor Cho writes:

"What else could I do? The Lord made it clear to me that it was His will to use women in the Church."^[46]

Willow Creek Community Church has become one of the largest churches in the USA. Some time ago the leadership took steps to promote egalitarianism by requiring all those on staff to accept the egalitarian model for ministry. They will not allow non-egalitarian literature to be sold in their bookstore. Willow Creek has adopted the "biblical model of church leadership" consisting of a board of 12 elders. Currently 5 women and 7 men fill the office of elder. Their "elders provide spiritual oversight, direction, and leadership for the overall church, entrusting the implementation of that direction to ministry leaders and staff, under the leadership of Senior Pastor Bill Hybels."^[47]

Altadena Baptist Church located in Altadena, California adopted the egalitarian model for ministry. When I spoke with Pastor George Van Alstine, he shared with me the actual effects upon their church of embracing egalitarian values. They first ordained a woman missionary in 1982 and a woman deacon in 1984. Since then the deacon board has become more effect and productive, volunteerism has increased, and girls and younger women have been encouraged to consider leadership. Since 1991, the female co-pastor has been a blessing to the entire congregation.

Altadena Baptist Church has had two co-pastors for the past twenty years, equal in rank and authority and fully sharing in the church's teaching and preaching ministry. This model affirms gender-equality in church leadership, which seems to us to be clearly implicit in Jesus' teaching. In practice, it has also demonstrated through more than two decades of joint service how the church's pastoral ministry can be enhanced and enriched through female and male pastors caring for God's people together.^[48]

Concluding Remarks

Gender equality is God's original design for humanity. *It still is!* The claims made by hierarchical complementarians are incompatible with the Genesis account of creation; nor are they compatible with the redemptive message of Scripture taken as a whole. I hope your eyes will be opened to this truth. Just as Jesus Christ came to set us free from the bondage of sin, I pray the Church be set free of any form of bondage and restrictions placed on one half of humanity. To practice church life on any level less than egalitarian is to deny the full redemptive work of Christ. *To the only wise God; through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen* (Rom. 16:27)

Endnotes

- [1] I thank my wife J. B. Preato, MBA, ASU, M. Div. Summa Cum Laude, Bethel Seminary, for her time in reviewing, editing and suggestions in preparing this paper.
- [2] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 563.
- [3] Patrica Gundry, *Woman Be Free!* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 84.
- [4] Cindy Jacobs, "Women on the Front Lines of Ministry" [article on-line]; available from http://www.wherepeacefulwaters.com/articles/women_on_the_front_lines_of_mini.htm (accessed February 07, 2013).
- [5] Glen G. Scorgie, "Systematic Theology II," (lecture, Bethel Seminary, San Diego, CA., January 16, 2002).
- [6] Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 24-36.
- [7] Walter Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 592.
- [8] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 251.
- [9] Most notably: Athanasius (296-373), The Creed of Nicea (325 A.D.), The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381 A.D.), Augustine (354-430), The Athanasian Creed (500 A.D.), Calvin (1509-1564), The Augsburg Confession (1530), The Belgic Confession (1561), The Westminster Confession (1646).
- [10] Kevin Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: the Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 59.
- [11] *Ibid.*, 101.
- [12] *Ibid.*, 102.
- [13] Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 187-188.
- [14] *Ibid.*, 199.
- [15] Victor P. Hamilton, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 181.
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