

At Redemption Hill Church, we recognize, even in the best of times, that the topic of gender roles is difficult and potentially contentious. As our world grows increasingly confusing in this area, we have produced a position paper to clarify what RHC means when we say we are complementarian. This is in hopes of creating both understanding and a place to start healthy dialogue on the topic. In short, complementarian means to believe that male and female are equal, different, and complement one another in their distinctions defined by creation. No one has the authority to make such a claim on all humanity, save only the Creator, and He tells us through His Word.

1. Equal

God “created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:27). Here, “man” is used similarly to how we would use the term mankind, which is inclusive of male and female. Both men and women bear the divine image fully. Both receive the blessing, the mandate (to fill and rule the earth), and the direct address from God (1:28-31). The mandate is plural, not singular. Nothing in the creation account makes one sex more fully human, more capable of knowing God, or more essential to His purposes. When Paul later says there is “neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28), he is not overturning creation but reaffirming that before God our standing is not dictated by our sex but by our oneness with Christ (see also 1 Cor 11:11-12).

2. Distinct

The same God who made them equal made them different. This difference is in design and role, and God instituted it before sin entered the world. God, who is one, perfectly displays all His attributes simultaneously. In creation, He made both male and female in His image and, in His divine wisdom, He appointed each sex to highlight the attributes He possesses. While both male and female share in all the communicable attributes of God, albeit imperfectly, God assigned certain attributes to each to champion for the watching cosmos. God designed man with an emphasis on protecting and providing, while He designed woman with an emphasis on nurturing and life-giving. These distinctions are commonly described as masculinity and femininity, and they are ordained by God in creation. While there is a diverse spectrum in how they are expressed in every image bearer, we see these distinctions in design at creation. Neither design is of greater worth, as both are a cross-section of His glory.

In God’s goodness, His design then informs the roles He appointed for male and female. We see this in the garden pre-fall. Adam was formed first, placed in the garden, and given God’s command “to work it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). His masculine design was perfectly crafted for his role to lead in the work God commissioned. The woman was then formed from him and fit for him (Gen 2:18), to share in that commission as a helper in the endeavor to subdue the earth and fill it with image bearers. God gave her a feminine design empowering her to fulfill her God-given role.

God designed men and women differently, and in His sovereign plan those differences complement one another.

3. Complementary

a. The Family

Marriage, as designed by God, is to be a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5:22–33). Christ is the head of the church and has authority over her. He used this position to give Himself up for her. He showed selfless, sacrificial love to the point of death on the cross for her. The church is called to submit joyfully to such a Savior and carry out His purpose as a helper and co-laborer (Matt 28:16–20; 1 Cor 3:9). When the dying, watching world looks at a biblical marriage, it should see a divine picture of the gospel. This picture only works when men and women live out their God-ordained designs.

Just as Christ is head of the church, so the husband is the head of his wife, holding a position of authority over her. In this position, he reflects Christ by exemplifying sacrificial love and never selfish, domineering leadership. The wife, likewise, is called to submit to her husband as the church is to Christ. This submission is not based on the merit of her husband but on obedient worship to God. In her position, she reflects the church by being a helper and co-laborer, never competing for authority. God put together two distinct creations in marriage that, when empowered by the Holy Spirit, fit perfectly together: the husband leading with sacrificial love and the wife joyfully submitting and helping. As marriage is a covenant, neither of these roles is earned or lost by performance. God's order does not authorize the husband to be domineering or abusive, and the wife is not to submit to her husband where her submission to Christ would be compromised. Domineering leadership and compromised submission alike distort the image the individual was made to bear and what the marriage is meant to proclaim.

The complementary distinctions of male and female in the household are also clearly seen in the household of God.

b. The Church

The unique designs of male and female equip the church to fulfill the mandate of creation, and God displays them in her governance. He charges the elder with the duty to lead, and He reserves that office for men (1 Tim 3; Titus 1). God grounds this qualification not in cultural convention but in the order of creation itself (1 Tim 2:13). He further maintains the order of creation in the church, where He has not given a woman spiritual authority over a man (1 Tim 2:11–12), but has equipped her to serve as a helper in the body and to use her spiritual gifts to strengthen and encourage. Having designed her with an emphasis on nurturing and life-giving, God uses her in a particular way to foster a healthy and caring body.

Teaching remains one of the many gifts a woman may possess and that a healthy church body needs. The Lord calls on older women to teach younger women in Titus 2:3–5. Such teaching must be grounded in Scripture so that the women can rightly apply God's truth to their lives. This practice respects God's created order while enabling women, gifted as teachers, to disciple

other women well. The gift of teaching can be exercised as long as it does not confuse God's order and does not go against clear prohibitions in Scripture, namely authoritative teaching in the gathered assembly (1 Tim 2:11–12; 1 Cor 14:34).

The word translated “deacon” is the Greek word *diákonos*, which simply means “servant.” Scripture gives examples that the office is rightly filled by both men and women (Rom 16:1; 1 Tim 3:11). Deacons lead by service and example, a role that requires neither teaching nor spiritual authority, and so preserves that order. At RHC, we believe that women better serve in some areas of the church, men in others, and both under the direction, authority, and oversight of the elders.

4. Distorted

When sin entered His creation, God came looking for the man: “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9). Eve ate first, yet God summoned Adam first. Adam, though he did not initiate the sin, was held accountable because he was made, and charged, to protect creation and his household. Headship means that men must answer to God for both abdicating responsibility for those in their care, and for dominating them (cf. Rom 5:12). The curse that follows in Gen 3 does not create the order between man and woman; it corrupts it. Eve was told, “Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you” (Gen 3:16), which describes the wreckage sin makes of God's design: contest on one side, domination on the other. This is why we refuse two errors that mirror each other. One reads the harsh rule of Genesis 3:16 as if it were the good order of Genesis 2, and so gives men license to domineer and calls a woman's silence godliness. The other reads the good order of Genesis 2 as if it were the curse of Genesis 3, and so treats any distinction of role as an injustice that grace must abolish. Both confuse what God made with what sin broke: equals with different roles that by God's grace complement one another.