

Women and the Scriptures: What does God REALLY say?

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Introduction

One of the very first decisions God made about you and the life you would lead was made the very moment you were conceived: your sex. Did an X sperm or a Y sperm combine with that egg to form the blueprint of each and every one of your body's cells? It's the first thing said when a baby is born, and the first question we ask when we hear that someone we know recently had a baby. And that's *after* at least six months of questions and silly baby shower "tests" involving strings and rings and household chemicals to try and figure out the mystery before the baby is born, if an ultrasound doesn't reveal the news first. Sexual differentiation is obviously an important issue to us, but we rarely stop to consider why we care so much about it. Does it make a difference? Does it really matter today?

According to the Scriptures, God thinks so. By making you female, God placed you into a set of circumstances with unique characteristics that are different from those He made male. He gave you the vocation of "woman." You were not born female by accident, but carefully and according to His will because He loves you and wants you to receive the very best gifts He has for you in Christ. The fact that you are female is not insignificant to Him. It is not something that God is indifferent about. He made you a woman on purpose and for a good reason. He wants to give you certain vocations that are only available to women.

I didn't figure out until I was almost 30 that it's OK to be a woman. Until that point, I believed the politically-correct ideas that define how supposedly enlightened women today understand the world. I sincerely thought there was nothing a man could do that I couldn't do just as well, maybe even better, if I set my mind to it and worked hard enough. After all, we are taught that a woman has same basic human potential as a man in every area but biology, and there are ways to counterbalance that difference. Conveniently, many professions requiring certain physical aptitudes have different (usually lower) requirements for women! I didn't think my being a woman should prevent me from becoming whatever I wanted when I grew up, including a pastor – even pope!

But that's precisely the problem. I despised my sexual identity. I looked at the gift of being created female that God had given to me – and I saw it as a flaw. Like many other women, I thought of my "femaleness" as something that could only get in the way of my goals for myself. It became something that I needed to ignore or, if that proved impossible, overcome. I had learned to despise being made a woman.

It's actually pretty confusing. Our society holds up an ideal super...person who is an androgynous, sex-less, human being who is not restricted in any way by whichever sex he or she is born with. Yet we also want certain exceptions made for us to make things fair and level out any differences that do exist. They usually involve increasing accommodations for women's needs and desires, and proportionally decreasing those for men.

This is the insidious lie attacking women today (ironically, from a movement that's supposed to exist for the *support* of women). And I know I'm not the only one who has not only believed it, but passionately defended it from any unenlightened idiot who would dare to say, think, or even so much as imply otherwise, including those patriarchal culture-bound writers of the Bible. There are certain passages in Scripture that we have learned to deftly dismiss, that we relegate to the back corner of the doctrine basement, where all those ideas and dusty remnants of a bygone era are stored and never seen again. And that's the way we like it.

Confronted by the Gospel

I was doing just fine, living my life and going on about my business of eventually becoming a pastor, which had been plan since confirmation. I was studying at Luther Theological Seminary (ELCA), working up the courage to switch from the MA program to the MDiv one. And then I encountered a young LCMS vicar in an internet chat and nothing was the same again. Upon finding out that he was one of "those" types of LCMS Lutherans who actually believed what Synod taught about women's ordination, I (to use a Texan term I have learned) "bucked up." I was fully prepared and more than willing to put yet another snot-nosed bigoted misogynistic jerk in his place for thinking that women had no business in the pulpit just because they didn't have certain anatomical parts that aren't all that special anyway. I worked myself up to just haul off, let him have it and leave him a blubbing pile of deflated testosterone on the chat room "floor," when he said something that literally stopped me in my tracks: "Why would you want to be a pastor? Women are way too important to God to be pastors."

He had to have heard my jaw hit the floor over the internet from 2000 miles away. I couldn't even think of a snappy comeback. What in the world did he just say? What did that mean? *Too* important? No one had ever said such a thing to me before. They usually just rattled off legalistic Bible verses and foamed at the mouth. This guy wasn't playing by the rules! What was I supposed to think, much less say? None of the arguments I knew and had used successfully in the past would ever win against that one. What I *did* know was that I had to learn more. What if this guy was actually RIGHT and I had it all screwed up? What did the Bible really say about women?

So what does this all mean? What does it mean to be a woman? What does the Bible say?

The Ordering of Creation

Let's start looking at the beginning, when God first created man and woman. Contrary to what the world tells us about being female, a woman is a very special thing in creation. As the world is created, each day things become more and more complex, until finally God makes man in His own image. The creation of humanity is the crowning achievement of God's creative work on earth. At the conclusion of each day that first week, God analyzed His work and concluded, "It is good."

After He created Adam, God said something different. He said, "It is not good..." Something was not right. Something was missing. But that's not all He said – "It is not good *for man to be alone.*"

Humanity was designed to be in relationships with others. People were not created to be completely autonomous and independent beings. To begin the process of finding a proper companion to be in a good relationship with the man, God brought the other creatures before Adam, all the beasts of the field and birds of the air, to see what Adam would name them. Whatever Adam called each creature became its name. But, by the end of the line, none were found suitable enough to make things "good" in God's sight. Fortunately, God had one more trick up His robe. Because God loved Adam and only wanted to give him things that were good for him, God made Adam fall into a deep sleep, opened up his side, took out a rib, closed up the gaping wound, and proceeded to make a woman.

Notice how God didn't just create a brand new human being from a fresh pile of dust again, making another batch of the same recipe he used for Adam earlier that day. This is important. This tells us that woman was uniquely created for the purpose of being in a relationship with the man, solving the problem that he was alone. Because the very stuff she was created from came directly from his own body, she was *already* in a relationship with the man even before God was finished forming her from the man.

When He was done, God woke Adam and presented the woman to him. And *somehow* Adam knew it all immediately – what this strange and beautiful new creature was, what (and who) she was there for, and how she had come into being for him. He loved her as he loved life itself. They were reunited in marriage and as one flesh.

After all that, at the end of this last day of Creation, God doesn't just say "It is good," as He had the other days. He says, "It is *very* good."

A Marriage Made in Heaven

In Eden, there was this "very good" relationship between the man and woman. What was it like? What did a truly perfect marriage look like, even if it probably didn't last very long that way? Unfortunately, Genesis doesn't say much about this before everything became corrupted by sin in the Fall. But God gives us the example of another perfect marriage in Scripture, that of Christ and the Church, to help us see how husbands and wives, men and

women, have been created to conduct their lives and vocations in faith together. One of the places God describes this relationship for us is in St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. (Ephesians 5:22-24, NKJV)

“Submit.” That word stuck out like a sore thumb when you heard it, didn't it? That's a dirty word in this day and age. We have been taught us to immediately understand “submission” not only as suspiciously negative, but even view it suspiciously as potentially abusive. Obviously, that can't be what God's talking about here, since the Church also submits to Christ as her Head and Savior and He doesn't make His Bride submit and cower like a frightened dog. He's certainly not going to harm her. Maybe that's not quite what the word means. The word itself doesn't carry the implications of subservience or inferiority we tend to ascribe to it.

Christians usually have no problem with the idea of submitting to the Lord – it's God after all! He's the Almighty Omniscient Creator of the Universe and Savior of the World. We're clumps of insignificant dirt. We kind of *have* to submit to His sovereign and omnipotent will, one way or another. As Baptized children of God, we also know that, in Christ, He is our Father and only does what is good for us. Even treating others as more important than ourselves, “...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ,” (Ephesians 5:21, ESV), isn't so bad to consider. But bring up the vocations unique to our sexes and order that relationship, “Wives, submit to your husbands?” A statement like that makes us bristle in alarm. We start looking for reasons *not* to submit, and we don't have to look far.

At every turn, the world teaches us to put ourselves first, watch out for Number One. Whatever feels good, achieves our personal self-centered goals, or seems right to us – that is what we are told we should pursue at all costs. “What good are you to anyone else if you don't make yourself happy and take care of yourself first,” the self-help world asks. Every woman *knows* that men aren't really any better than women, so why should we voluntarily submit to anyone, much less a man, apart from doing so as a manipulative means to an end of our choosing? We often think we're the ones who are more important! Besides, a lot of men would abuse that kind of authority, so we shouldn't trust any of them with it.

What in the world is God thinking? Well, for one thing, He's not thinking “in the world.” He's thinking of a perfect relationship between man and woman that is untainted by sin. Take a look back in Eden again, to the first perfect relationship in Scripture. There we see that woman was created especially for man, to keep him from being alone in the world and without a perfect companion work in the Garden with him and receive his love.

Lest we let ourselves give into the temptation to think of woman in this relationship as only slightly better than an imaginary friend or an equivalent to a nice lap dog, remember what

Adam said when he received her as a gift from God: “Bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh.” This is no lapdog! She is as precious to him as his own body, so how does he regard her? With love, honor and gratitude, like the amazing and beautiful gift she is for him. As the recipient of this gift of woman from God, made from him, for him, and given to him, the authority God gave the man over creation and his body also places him in authority over the woman, charged with the responsibility to care for her as he cares for himself...more so actually.

Just as woman was created out of man’s side as he slept, the Church was created from His Body as He hung “asleep” on the Cross, pouring out water and Blood from His side. Neither were created independent of their head, both were created out of and for their other. Yet both woman and the Church are created to receive the gift of a Husband. Neither man nor woman was made to face the world on their own, but are given to each other. Man’s love for woman is expressed in his selfless sacrifice for the women given to him to tend, and woman’s love for man is expressed by her receiving it and trusting him to always do what is best for her, even if it means giving up his own life. Christ loved the world by His sacrifice of Himself, and those who receive it, trusting Him to be the Savior He already is, are His Bride.

Having been created with the purpose of being a perfect gift for man, it really only makes sense that she is placed under his leadership and protection. Keep in mind that this relationship was arranged before the Fall, when man’s authority meant that he perfectly cared for all of Creation, sought the best for everyone and everything, and would do whatever was necessary to carry it out for them. It wasn’t until after the Fall, when sin entered the picture, that the God-given responsibility of authority over creation would be despised and abused.

The Church, like Eve, trusts her Husband to happily provide for all she needs because she knows that He has been given the husbandly vocation to do just that. He’s just *that* happy she’s there to be his perfect, “very good” companion, and receive all the love He has to give her for her good.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” (Ephesians 5:25-31, NKJV)

The Bible doesn’t just leave things with women unquestionably submitting to whatever whims that men might dream up. There are specific instructions for the man of the

relationship too. Here, Paul's letter to the Ephesians continues by saying that husbands are given to love their wives just like Christ loves the church. As if you need to be reminded -- Christ loved the Church by dying for her! He was born incarnate into this sinful world to live, suffer, and die for her to save His Bride from eternal death and separation from Him. In the same way, a wife is given to be considered with the love and respect a man has for his own body, sacrificing even his own life to cherish and provide for her if necessary.

That whole submitting business sounds like the better end of the deal now! It's not such a scary thing to submit to a man you know is willing to sacrifice Himself to the point of death for you.

Christ has set apart, the Church, His bride, from the rest of the sinful world. He has made her, by faith, utterly perfect, without any flaws whatsoever, sinless and pure. He won't hear otherwise about His Bride, and He's right. Because of Christ we truly *are* sinless, holy, innocent, clean, and alive. The Bridegroom has nothing better or more important to do than to love and care for his beautiful, perfect Bride. That is how Christ sees the Church. That is also how husbands get to see and think of their wives in Christ – sinless, beautiful, and set apart just for them. And men know as well as women do, that's certainly not how we look or behave most of the time. They know how readily we let ourselves fall prey to the temptations of the world to be aggressive, competitive, and manipulative in order to achieve our own selfish goals.

But Christ has cleansed His Bride, the Church, making her holy and pure for Himself with water and the Word by the sacrament of Baptism. In Baptism, using ordinary water and our pastor's voice proclaiming God's Word, we receive forgiveness for our sins and are delivered from sin, death and the Devil. Christ earned for us through His suffering and death 2000 years ago all the Baptismal gifts we are given, and in Baptism those gifts are applied to each of us. Through Baptism, we are born again in Christ, new creatures, *"...radiant, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and blameless,"* (Ephesians 5:27, NKJV). That's how our beloved Bridegroom sees us, not on our own, not because we are that way in and of ourselves – we're not. But in Christ, in Baptism, He has made us that way and so we must be.

This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:32-33, NKJV)

What an image God has given us for marriage! But this isn't just about earthly husbands and wives. St. Paul shows us here that the relationship between Christ and the Church is an icon of the ideal relationship God created between man and woman.

It Is Better to Receive than to Give

Christ gives Himself up unto death for His Bride to make her holy. Even today, to forgive your sins and make you holy, He gives His body and His blood for you. He feeds and cares

for the Church in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in which He, through the Office of our pastors, places His Body and Blood into our mouths, which He gave for the remission of our sins. By faith we receive forgiveness for our sins, as well as life and salvation. Through that sacrificial Meal we are strengthened in faith and in fervent love toward one another, which spurs us to live out our vocations in faithful service to our neighbors.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper aren't just meaningless rituals we do or purely symbolic, "Outward signs of inward faith," as many other Christians misunderstand them. They're the sure ways Christ loves us, and gives Himself for us, His Bride. We, as the Church, in turn get to serve God by faithfully receiving His gifts. That's why Lutherans call what happens on Sunday morning, "Divine Service" and not worship. We're there to receive God's service to us, not to tell God how swell of a god He is – He already knows that, look at what He does for us!

Faith is receiving gifts from God. Our confessions state that, "Faith is that worship which receives God's offered blessings..." (Apol. IV:49). Unfortunately, receiving gifts is probably one of the most difficult things in the world to do, especially for women who are designed not only to receive love from God, but also to receive love from men. We always want to repay the giver and even up the score. If someone sends you a Christmas card, you add him to your list for next year. If someone gives you a birthday gift, you get her a birthday gift. If someone invites you over for dinner, you do the same. That's just good manners, we've all been taught it. But sometimes, as in the case with God's gifts for us in Christ, the Giver just gave you a gift without any consideration or desire for reciprocation.

A miraculous gift exchange took place at the Cross, "For our sake he made him to be sin who had no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God," (2 Corinthians 5:21). All that was ours – our sin, our profane-ness, our guilt, our filth, our death – God gave to Christ. And He willingly took it all upon Himself and bore, in our place, the righteous punishment from God that we deserved. At the same time, all that was rightfully His became ours. Christ, and Him crucified, now stands between us and God. Now God sees us through Him and, in Him, we are as perfect, sinless, holy, and righteous as His own Son. Through the gifts of Word and Sacrament, the marks that identify Christ's Bride, God gives the gift of Himself and all the benefits and privileges He possesses. He serves us, saying, "This is given for you." Thank God for the liturgy or we might be tempted to say, "Aw, God, you shouldn't have..." or "Gee, thanks, God – I owe you one," or even, "Holy cow, how am I ever going to repay you?" By faith we say with God, "Amen. It is so. This is given for me."

The People in Your Neighborhood

As part of the Church, we are given to serve and submit to Christ as our Head, and so we serve others by putting them before ourselves as Christ has done for us. A good picture of this in action is seen in St. Matthew's Gospel:

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." (St. Matthew 25:34-40, NKJV)

To help us figure out how and whom to serve, God has given all of us specific vocations through which we serve others as husbands, wives, siblings, parents, sons, daughters, friends, employees, students, citizens, neighbors, or any of the people that we encounter every day in our normal and mundane lives.

Married people have been given a special gift – the gift of a husband or wife as a particular neighbor for them to serve in a particular way, as we have learned by the image of Christ and the Church. But they're not the only ones with neighbors. Unmarried people also have a special (and rare) gift, says St. Paul:

The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. (1 Corinthians 7:32-34, NKJV)

Since single people don't have a husband to submit to or a wife to sacrifice for, they're in a better position to serve more neighbors than those with spouses and families. In fact, Paul says it is preferable for men and women to remain unmarried so that they can serve God through their vocations with undivided attention.

Serving our neighbors is nothing new to Christians. Jesus taught us to love our neighbors as ourselves and told the parable of the Good Samaritan to show us who our neighbors are: anyone we encounter in the regular course of our lives, which is probably a much wider definition of "neighbor" than we'd certainly prefer! We serve them by faithfully carrying out our different vocations that form the relationships we have been given with them, cheerfully attending to the needs of those around us. The term "vocation" tends to be misunderstood these days as being synonymous with the career choices we make. However, Lutherans believe that our vocations are much more encompassing than a job track and that they are not chosen but are given to us by God. Each of us has quite a few of them at once.

I'll use myself as an example here. I'm a mother, a daughter, a sister, a citizen, a friend, a volunteer, a neighbor, an employee, a church member, etc. Each of these vocations has different ways in which I serve the neighbors associated with them. The same is true of you too – you are mothers, grandmothers, wives, daughters, sisters, neighbors, friends, classmates, students, confirmands, sports team members, orchestra members, and the like. In each of these vocations, you are given unique opportunities to serve God, simply by faithfully serving your neighbors and fulfilling whatever you are given to do for them.

It's such a simple and obvious concept that we often think it's too good to be true and go looking on our own for more "glamorous" ways to serve God and bear witness to Him. It sounds like a much more "Christian" endeavor to do to stand on a street corner handing out tracts and preaching to passersby or volunteering all your spare time at a homeless shelter than to simply serve your teachers as faithful students by being well-behaved and attentive in your classes, doing the work you're given to the best of your abilities, and maybe even by helping out your classmates with their work as well. This doesn't seem like much, that's what a student is given to do. It doesn't take a Christian to do any of these things. Atheists and pagans can be good students, sons, daughters, citizens, etc. too. But they do them without faith in Christ. And unfortunately for them, anything done apart from faith in Christ is sin, no matter how good it appears to the world because "...without faith it is impossible to please him," (Hebrews 11:6, NKJV). Since you were given faith through Baptism, you are holy and perfect before God, and so anything you do in faith, no matter how humble, menial or unappreciated by others, is a good work and pleasing in God's eyes.

Separating the Kingdoms

Are there any specific things that we need to keep in mind when talking about vocation that are unique for us as women? We talked about the different roles men and women play within a marriage relationship, but do those apply at all outside that situation? We also talked about what it means to be the Church and the Bride of Christ and all that He does for us. What does it look like when we put these different concepts together?

First of all, we need to acknowledge that there are differences between the secular world and the church. The same rules don't always apply in both the Kingdom of the Left and the Kingdom of the Right.

For all intents and purposes, men and women have equal rights and opportunity in the sight of our government. It is illegal in this country for an employer or public institution to discriminate on the basis of a person's sex (among other things). Women are free in our country and society and are encouraged to pursue careers in any secular field they choose. Women work at all levels in the corporate world and the government – some suggest we may even have a woman or two as presidential candidates in the next election. Ours is largely a merit-based society. If you have the will, the ability, the drive, the energy, and the opportunity – in time you will most likely be rewarded for your efforts.

There's nothing sinful about women pursuing an education and having a successful secular career. As in other areas of life, the key is keeping your priorities in order. As Christians, we believe that God created hierarchy among men and women for the family and church. But this system is not often how things work in the secular world, in fact it is opposed. Women can and do have positions of authority over men in the secular realm. However, at home and in church, it does apply and she can relax in the knowledge that others provide the leadership for her there. Some women have trouble making the psychological switch between kingdoms, especially with regard to headship so pursue your future career with your own gifts and abilities in mind.

The Church is a different place, entirely backwards from the world's perspective. Instead of relying on our own hard work to measure our "success" as Christians, we rely only on God and the gifts He has given us through faith in Christ. Since our sex does matter to God, and we believe that it is a gift that He chose for us, there are likewise different opportunities given to us within the vocations of men and women as well.

Women's Ordination

God has irrevocably linked certain vocations with sex. For example, a man does not ever get to be a mother because he was not created female and only those born female can be given the vocation of mother. But because he is a man, he may be given a child and thus the vocation of father. The Church also reveals the ordered authority God gave humanity at Creation as well. This makes sense, given our previous discussion of Christ and the Church as His bride and the ways in which they serve each other through sacrifice and submission. God teaches us in Scripture that some men may be given the vocations of pastor and positions of public leadership within the Church, such as,

If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop must then be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)" (1 Timothy 3:1-5, NKJV).

These vocations are given to men not because men are just better Christians than women and therefore some of them may climb to the highest levels of churchly power. Pastors are actually servants without any authority of their own but only that given to them by God in their vocation as called and ordained servants of Word. It is ridiculous to treat the Office of Holy Ministry like that of a greedy and corrupt corporate executive seeking to lord his power over everyone around him. Also remember that not all men are called to be pastors or elders, but only men. It's often difficult for us as women to accept this created ordering, because we tend to let our worldly views wander across the borders of the secular kingdom and claim that such boundaries are unfair in the Church. This way of thinking is rooted in sinful rebelliousness, and is just as God said it would be at the Fall, "Your desire shall be for

be for your husband and he shall rule over you,” (Genesis 3:16, NKJV). Because of sin, we resent men’s God-given authority over us in the world, no matter how loving and sacrificial.

A Woman’s Beauty

No doubt about it, our culture has a seriously messed-up concept of beauty. We are bombarded in the media with pictures of hollow-eyed, emaciated, air-brushed, big-breasted, mostly-naked, girls who reach their peak by age 25. Music videos and commercials are more sexualized than ever. Elective plastic surgery, body piercing, tattooing, and other permanent “enhancements” are normal. We are obsessed with our appearances and some of us will go to great pains, literally, to feel beautiful.

Do not let your adorning be external – the braiding of your hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing – but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:1-7, ESV)

The problem is that no matter what we do to look better, we rarely feel beautiful most of the time. When we look in the mirror, we always see our flaws and all the ways we fall short of whatever “beautiful” is. The painful truth is, we’re not beautiful. That is, on our own, we’re not beautiful. But beauty really is in the eye of the Beholder. And when the Beholder is God Himself, who has given His own precious Blood shed to forgive our sins, and washed us in water and His Word, clothing us with His perfect righteousness, giving us His own Name, we are truly beautiful in His sight. All the real beauty we have is not our own, it comes from outside us.

It’s really easy to get caught up in the legalistic perspectives offered by other well-intentioned Christians. Most will be happy to tell you what to do, what not to do, and how to be, and about all the supposed fulfillment and joy you’ll have upon your success. But that’s all the way of the Law. Our focus gets shifted from what Christ has done for us to what we do. On the outside it looks good. We suddenly are inspired to obedience and piety in all sorts of areas. Some Christian groups even have institutionalized rules such as women not wearing pants, not cutting their hair, no makeup, no jewelry, etc. All these are perfectly fine personal codes of conduct, there is nothing sinful about following them. The sinful part comes in when they are made rules for everyone or it is taught that doing certain things makes someone a better or more sincere Christian than someone who does not, or when we think that our following such rules is what makes us beautiful.

Submitting can be scary business. There are a lot of people out there who are more than happy to take advantage of women. Many, far too many, women have already been

burned by men in their lives by the time they reach their teens and really struggle with trusting anyone to treat her with kindness, much less trusting a man to put her needs first and do what is best for her. Even those women who have not had their trust, bodies or hearts abused are taught to be on the alert for it at all times. By adolescence, many women have given into the temptation to fear and begun to develop a self-protective hard edge of suspicion regarding men, which feminism encourages under the guise of independence and material achievement.

This is a tricky path for men to navigate. But it's nothing new either. In His wisdom, God makes note that it takes some understanding on the part of men to live with women who struggle with these temptations, which is pretty much all of us. He reminds men to avoid the temptation to become frustrated and give up, but instead treat women with honor and care, as the weaker vessel in the relationship.

“Weaker vessel.” That’s almost as offensive as “submit,” isn’t it? We hear those words and think of two vessels on a shelf that look alike and serve the same purpose, but one is flawed and therefore weaker than the other. But think of it another way. In many of our homes, we have dishes that we eat off of every day. I have some sturdy plates and bowls that can hold up in the microwave, the freezer, the oven, and the dishwasher. They sometimes drop on the floor and don’t even crack. For quick meals, I have a stockpile of super-cheap paper plates that are good for one use and then are thrown away. I also have a set of bone china that I have inherited. Well, most of a set anyway. The thing about china is that it is very fragile. It is very expensive, very precious, and often, as in the case of the hand-painted set by my great-grandmother, each piece is irreplaceable. We use it on special occasions only. Each piece is handled with great honor and care. This is what a “weaker vessel” is. It’s not an otherwise perfectly-good vessel that has a flaw that causes it to be weak.

Relationships to God and to Man

Both men and women are both fully heirs of eternal life through faith in Christ. We are the same as men, in that our sex really doesn’t matter, when it comes to is in our standing before God in Christ.

Some try to claim that the ordering of authority in Genesis with man as woman’s head is merely symptomatic of imperfection in this sinful world. Men and women are both created in God’s image and therefore any differences that exist between them must be a result of the Fall. Inequality must be due to sin. They cite Galatians 3:28 as the cornerstone for interpreting all other references to sex roles in Scripture:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus,” (NKJV).

The argument goes like this: since there is no male or female in Christ, and we are all united as one body, it is wrong to limit opportunities for service and positions of authority within the body of the Church on the basis of sex. The problem here is that the relationship we

have with God in Baptism is confused with the relationships we have with one another. Both men and women receive forgiveness and salvation from God in Christ regardless of their sex. In that sense, we are all the same – you're in Christ or you're not, male or female isn't a factor there. In Scripture we are all called the Church and the Bride of Christ, as well as heirs and sons of God regardless of our earthly sex. However, as we see in the examples of Adam and Eve and Christ and the Church, men and women are not created to serve each other in the same ways.

That doesn't mean that women have no voice or place to serve God within the Church. The things we are given to do are not in vocations of public leadership, but in more private and subtle ways. Given that women's influence in the world is often private and subtle, what we do in this regard is often unappreciated and taken for granted. The same applies in the Church. But we don't do the things we do to be appreciated and praised by men, but because they are given to us to do and serve our neighbors. We have all that we already need in Christ.

What Did God REALLY say...?

What God has really said is that being a woman is important. The universe was not perfectly perfect until God made woman. Only after her creation did God pronounce His work, "Very good." God knit you together in your mothers' wombs to be women – on purpose. He wanted you to be female, and so you are. And He made you His own child in Christ through Baptism, and so you are.

You are who you are because He did what He did for you. Don't despise the gifts God has given you by making you women, because then you despise the Giver as well. It an amazing thing to be made woman, to be the crowning jewel of God's creative work on earth, to be specially made just to be loved and cherished not just by God, but by men to whom we gratefully submit because they are gifts from God to us as well. We are truly blessed.

So what does it mean to be a Christian woman in the 21st century? The very same thing it's meant to be a woman since the 11th century, the 1st century, and even the first minute since woman was created. So rest that knowledge that you have been given the gift of being created woman to receive gifts from God in Christ and serve Him in the unique vocations God gives exclusively to women. Say with God again, "Amen. It is so. This too is given for me."

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