



GENDER ROLES AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD

RETHINKING WHAT WE WERE
TAUGHT ABOUT MEN AND WOMEN
IN THE CHURCH

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A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK



ZONDERVAN

Gender Roles and the People of God

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Chapter One

THE DANGERS OF A MISLEADING READING



Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

1. As you think about your own ways of interpreting what you read in the Bible, how would you describe your “hermeneutic”?
2. How does a knowledge of the cultural and historical background of any part of the Bible help us understand a text’s meaning?
3. How do you deal with things in the Bible that seem to contradict or collide with other things you’ve already read there?
4. As you begin this study, what are the most important questions you have?

Chapter Two

THE BIRTH OF PATRIARCHY



Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

1. Read through Genesis 1–3. What is your most important takeaway from this story?
2. As scholars have wrestled with the implications of the first three chapters of the Bible, where do you come out on the question of gender equality or subordination?
3. As you think about women being created as *ezer* “helpers,” how does this change your idea of what a woman can or cannot do in every part of her life?
4. What difference does it make for a woman whether she is “equal” with men or is in a subordinate position to men?

Chapter Three

EZER WOMEN IN A PATRIARCHAL WORLD



Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

1. Why do you think God would create women as *ezer kenegdo*?
2. Each of these women was blessed by God for the actions she took.
How does this shape your concept of a woman as *ezer kenegdo*?
3. How do Deborah and Huldah exemplify what it means to be created as an *ezer kenegdo*?
4. Gender-based hierarchy restricts women in both home and church.
As you review the ways in which God raised up female leadership in various periods of Israel's life, what implications do you see for women in the church today?

Chapter Four

JESUS AND WOMEN: THE DIVINE COUNTERPUNCH



Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

1. How do Jesus' instructions to his disciples at the Last Supper (John 13:12–17) inform your understanding of true leadership?
2. In what ways do you see Jesus' counterpunch against gender-based hierarchy affecting how men and women are to relate to one another in the home and in the church today?
3. As you look at women's encounters with Jesus in the four gospels, what is the primary takeaway from his actions?
4. What emotions do you experience as you reexamine Jesus' approach to women in the four gospels?

Chapter Five

POSITIVE IMAGES OF WOMEN IN NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES



Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

1. It is clear in Scripture that women were active in ministry with the apostle Paul. How does this shape what we believe about women and church ministry today?
2. A number of prominent women in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Rome were early converts to Christianity. In what ways did their prominence contribute to the formation and growth of local churches?
3. God-fearers were among the early converts to Christianity. What do you think might have compelled them to set aside their faith in the local pantheon of gods and goddesses and search for a better object of belief?
4. In your opinion, in what ways do the ministries of women in the early churches resemble or differ from the ministries of women in Christian churches today?

Chapter Six

THE BATTLE OF THE TEXTS:
I TIMOTHY 2:12 AND
I CORINTHIANS 14:34–35



*Questions for Personal Reflection
or Group Discussion*

1. Why, in your opinion, would biblical scholars insist that “context is king”? What difference would the context of a verse make in how that verse is understood?
2. As you think about the application of 1 Timothy 2:12 to women, what are the main points you derive from a clear understanding of the individual words used by Paul?
3. As you think about 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, which of the four interpretations makes most sense to you? How does this inform how you would apply these verses?
4. In light of this chapter, how would you evaluate the case for a gender-based hierarchy for Christian ministry?

THE BATTLE OF THE LEXICONS: WHAT DOES *HEAD* MEAN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?



Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

1. How do you respond to the battle over the first-century meanings of the word *head*?
2. If 1 Corinthians 11:3–12 is actually about issues of shame and honor (rather than about authority structures), why do you think Paul insisted on Christians conforming to cultural expectations about hairstyles at that time?
3. What do you believe Ephesians 5:21–33 teaches about the relationship of husbands and wives?
4. How would you harmonize the teachings in Ephesians 5:21–33 with Paul's insistence in 1 Corinthians 7:4 that authority in Christian marriage is mutual?

Chapter Eight

IS JESUS ETERNALLY
SUBORDINATE TO GOD
THE FATHER? OR ARE
THEY COEQUAL?



*Questions for Personal Reflection
or Group Discussion*

1. What (if anything) does a chapter on this subject contribute to your understanding of how men and women are to relate to one another in the home and in the church?
2. How can the relational analogy of a parent and child (in this case, father and son) help us think about our relationship to God?
3. As you think about God coming to earth as a human being, what would God have to give up in the process?
4. If we are created in God's image and called to image God in our world, what impact would this doctrine of Jesus' eternal subordination to God the Father have on how *we* image God?

Chapter Nine

WOMEN, LEADERSHIP,
AND THE NATURE
OF MINISTRY



*Questions for Personal Reflection
or Group Discussion*

1. How do Jesus' teachings on leadership affect how you think about leadership in the church?
2. How would you define the nature of ministry in the context of the church?
3. What difference does it make whether a church excludes or includes women in its leadership?
4. As you come to the end of your exploration of biblical teachings about women, what do you think are the most important factors to consider?

Chapter Ten

PATRISTIC AND
MEDIEVAL ATTITUDES
TOWARD WOMEN



*Questions for Personal Reflection
or Group Discussion*

1. Even as cultural ideas helped shape Christian theology in the patristic period, what kind of cultural ideas today may impact Christian beliefs?
2. With the strong emphasis on virginity and celibacy as essential to spiritual formation and the knowledge of God, where in your opinion could the medieval church have missed the boat?
3. Weighing the pros and cons of the Reformation on women's lives, how would you evaluate the most important changes for women that came from that movement?
4. While patriarchy in the Middle Ages was harsh to a degree we find unimaginable today, in what ways can patriarchy be harsh today?

CAN PATRIARCHAL IDEAS SURVIVE THE RENAISSANCE AND THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT?



Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

1. Over the four centuries covered in this chapter, what do you see as the most important turning points for women?
2. The century of bloody religious wars was one unintended consequence of the Reformation. Could those wars have been avoided? If so, how?
3. How do you respond to the inconsistency of a gender hierarchy within a supposedly universal egalitarian system? What may have contributed to this inconsistency?
4. Which of the three “revolutions” through which American women passed in the eighteenth century do you think had the most impact on women’s lives?

Chapter Twelve

RECYCLING THE CULT OF TRUE WOMANHOOD



Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

1. How did the doctrine of separate spheres help men in their shift from early markers of masculinity to those appropriate to their lives in nineteenth-century businesses?
2. In what ways did the Cult of True Womanhood backfire as a means of shoring up the doctrine of separate spheres?
3. What were some of the advantages of newly available advanced education for women at the end of the nineteenth century?
4. What (if anything) do you see in today's world that attempts to reproduce the doctrine of separate spheres or the Cult of True Womanhood?

Chapter Thirteen

WHERE ARE WE TODAY? RETHINKING WHAT WE'VE BEEN TAUGHT



Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

1. What difference does it make when people move the goalposts having to do with how men and women relate in the church and home?
2. From the brain difference studies, what do you think are possible consequences of failing to pool brain resources in decision making?
3. If it's true that Jesus has "all authority" and commissions us to work together for his kingdom, what difference can that make in how we think about leadership?
4. If the "Blessed Alliance" is one of God's two load-bearing walls in his world, how does this relate to the enmity between Satan and the woman?