

61 Roles for men and women

The Bible teaches that men and women have an equal standing before God regarding salvation. Yet God designed men and women to be different from each other, and to have different roles. In this chapter we explore these roles, and consider the instructions in the scriptures that are given specifically to men or specifically to women.

Focus passage: Galatians 3:22–29

Paul wrote this passage to explain some of the basic aspects about who can be saved and on what basis they will receive salvation. He was arguing against the Jews who believed that they were superior to Gentiles because they had the Law of Moses, and that this Law was sufficient to save them.

1. What must a person do to be saved according to God's promises?
2. How is "oneness" achieved between all believers?
3. What does the passage teach about the equality of men and women regarding salvation?

Man is the head of the woman

Clearly, men and women have equal opportunity for salvation and equal "spiritual status". However, Paul also writes about a leadership hierarchy that God has established.

Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:3)

For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. (Ephesians 5:23)

God
Christ
Man
Woman

The leadership role of the man applies in the family as well as amongst groups of believers.

See "The husband's role" in Chapter 60.

Men in the church

Peter's instructions about the leadership roles in the church require that these positions be filled by men. He emphasises

1 Timothy 3:2–7;
1 Peter 5:1–3

Characteristics of godly men

1 Timothy 3:1–7	be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, manage his own family well, have a good reputation with outsiders.
1 Timothy 4:12	an example in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.
Titus 1:6–9	blameless, the husband of one wife, a man whose children believe, not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain, hospitable, one who loves what is good, self-controlled, upright, holy, disciplined, holding firmly to what has been taught, encouraging others by sound doctrine, refuting false teachers.
Titus 2:2,6–8	temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, sound in faith, love and endurance, a good example, showing integrity, serious, sound in speech.

The spiritual qualifications for an elder or leader are appropriate goals for every man who is a follower of Christ.

Characteristics of godly women

Proverbs 31:10–31	of noble character, trustworthy, reliable, creative, practical, hard working, enterprising, charitable, organised, of strong character, dignified, speaks with wisdom, industrious, fears the LORD.
1 Peter 3:1–6	submissive to husbands, an example in purity, reverent, having a gentle and quiet spirit, respectful to husbands.
Titus 2:3–5	reverent, not a slanderer, not addicted to much wine, teaches what is good, loves husband and children, self-controlled, pure, busy at home, kind, subject to husbands.
1 Timothy 3:11	worthy of respect, not malicious talkers, temperate, trustworthy.

that a leader in the church must also be a good leader of his own family.

This requirement that men hold the spiritual leadership positions continues on from the pattern in the Old Testament where the leader at home was the husband, and the leaders of the nation of Israel were male priests and kings. Similarly, Jesus chose twelve male disciples.

Women in the church

Paul instructs women to be silent in church, because it is men that have been designated by God to take on the spiritual leadership roles.

For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.

(1 Corinthians 14:33–34)

Paul further explains that it is not appropriate for a woman to teach a man in church, because of the hierarchy that God put in place when Eve was formed and when Eve sinned. God determined that the consequence of Eve's sin would be passed on to all women.

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

(1 Timothy 2:11–14)

Does this mean women should be completely silent in meetings of the church? If not, what does it mean?

Priscilla taught Apollos the gospel (Acts 18:26). Why was this allowed?

The role of work for men and women

God expects both men and women to work to the best of their ability. This applies to work in a business environment, work in the home, or work done on a voluntary basis.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

(Colossians 3:23–24)

God told Adam that as a result of his sin, he would have to work to eat for the rest of his life. This consequence for Adam was passed on to all men. As head of the family, the husband is responsible for labouring to provide for his family. Paul writes about the responsibility that men have to provide for their families:

Genesis 3:17–19

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

(1 Timothy 5:8)

Men are also responsible for the spiritual leadership of their families. As God said to Abraham

See Ephesians 6:4;
1 Timothy 3:4–5.

For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just.

(Genesis 18:19)

A faithful woman can take on many different types of work. For example, the highly esteemed woman in Proverbs 31 was involved in raising children, domestic duties, household management, managing business interests and charity work.

Paul encouraged women to be involved with good deeds, such as

... bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kind of good deeds. (1 Timothy 5:10)

The scriptures continually emphasise motherhood and the raising of children as the primary working role for women.

But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. (1 Timothy 2:15)

A woman who is a mother should work at this with all her heart, because it is rewarding work for the Lord. For those mothers who are involved in work or other activities outside the home, they must ensure that the spiritual, physical, and emotional development of their children is given a higher priority than these activities.

The role of men and women in God's kingdom

There does not appear to be a different role for men and women in God's kingdom. Faithful men and women will all become like the angels.

At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. (Matthew 22:30)

Summary

- In terms of salvation, men and women are equal before God.
- God designed that men would have the leadership role in the home and in the church.
- Men and women should work to the best of their abilities.
- Men and women should ensure that they have the right priorities in their work.
- In all aspects of their lives they should seek to show godly characteristics.
- Men and women should support each other's efforts to fulfill their God-given roles.

Thought provokers

1. Review the list of characteristics for godly men and women. Most of these characteristics are mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament as being applicable to all

believers. Why are they singled out as being particularly relevant to either men or women?

2. God has designed that men should be the leaders in the church. Is it therefore appropriate for women to take on any of the following roles?

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| • Elder | of believers |
| • Sunday school superintendent | • Exhorter or teacher at a meeting of believers |
| • Sunday school teacher | • Reader at a meeting of believers |
| • Treasurer | • Interviewer at a baptism |
| • Leading the music in worship | • Singing hymns |
| • Librarian | • Writing books about the Bible |
| • Chairman at a meeting | |

3. Do men have an obligation to perform leadership roles at home and in the church, even if they do not feel cut out to be a leader?

Further investigation

1. Can you find any examples in the scriptures where women took on leadership roles? If so, why did they do this? Is this relevant to the discussion on the roles that women should take on today?
2. Some argue that Paul's instructions about women in the church should be disregarded, because they are out of touch with today's society. What do you think about this? Give scriptural reasons for your answer.

Want to know more?

- *Man and woman: a study of biblical roles* by Michael Lewis, (published by the Testimony, 1992).
- *Acts and epistles* by A.D. Norris (published by Aletheia Books, 1989).
- *Women of the Bible* (published by The Christadelphian, 1982).

▶ **See also:** 60. Marriage
62. Careers and employment
64. Leisure time