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Is Your View of Women Aligned with Your Theology?

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Women as Image Bearers

You can barely open your computer, watch Netflix, go to a movie, or follow popular music without encountering our culture's objectification, negation, and sexual exploitation of women. Our society attaches a woman's worth to her beauty or views them only as objects for sexual pleasure; the degrading of female image bearers is all around us. Why are female pop stars pressured to dress provocatively? Why are fashions designed not to cover the woman's body but to expose it? Why do countless women find the workplace to be sexually threatening? Why are a woman's breasts often more esteemed than her brain?

Popular media oppresses women with norms of beauty that literally take surgery to obtain. How far away have we fallen from the dignity of women as image bearers of God himself? When it comes to the value, dignity, significance, and uniqueness of the imprint of the image of God, men and women are equals. Hear these words again: "So God created man in his own image, / in the image of God he created him, / male and female he created them" ([Gen. 1:27](#)). To reduce a woman down to the shape of her body, to dishonor, denigrate, or objectify her, or to negate the value of her gifts and her God-given contribution as one of his image-bearing resident managers, dishonors not only her but God himself.

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I wish I could say that the issue of devaluing the image-bearing giftedness of women is an issue only outside the church, but I cannot. Now, I do believe that God has designed different roles for men and women in his church. I think Scripture is quite clear that the role of pastor/ elder is, by God's design, for men. But I also am convinced that we have undervalued and underutilized the God-given and essential gifts of women. The Bible does not teach that the primary role for women is in the home. The Bible does not teach that a woman's spirituality comes through her husband. The Bible does not teach that a woman's life will only be complete if she is married. The Bible does not forbid a woman from being highly educated and having a successful career. The Bible does not prohibit women from leading men in political, education, and business situations.

Valuing Women's Gifts

Let me give you two examples of how these truths connect to the life and health of the body of Christ. One woman in the church where we are members is a professor of black history at a local college. She is not only a historian, but she is a theologian whom God has used to help our church think through and navigate issues of race. Because her gifts are valued, she has been an essential contributor to the health of our church in tumultuous times. Her combination of historical expertise and gospel literacy is a gift of God to our church, but it is important to note that giftedness had to be recognized by leadership and given a voice in order for our congregation to be helped and blessed by it.

Years ago I was one of the pastor/elders of a church in the Philadelphia suburbs. Once a year we would go away for an elders' retreat with our wives. We would eat together and do activities together. But when it came time to discuss the church, the men would go into one room for those talks while the women went to another room to share parenting stories and recipes. Luella, my dear wife, found it both strange and uncomfortable. She reminded me that each of these wise and godly ladies had a different experience of the church than the elders did, and it might be helpful to hear from them. She wasn't asking for women elders but for the gifts and experiences of women to be valued and given expression.

So one Saturday morning after breakfast the women joined the men in a discussion about church. It was one of the most important and eye-opening conversations the elders had ever had. We learned things about ourselves and the life, culture, and ministry of our church that we would have never known any other way. As the women lovingly shared with us, some of our weaknesses and failures were exposed. We began to see these women as not only wives and mothers but also as God's gifted image bearers, built by

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him to be essential contributors to the life and health of his church. We scheduled a time for our wives to be part of the conversation at every retreat after that.

A woman who comes to her pastor with a concern about issues in the church, questions about a sermon, or concerns about leadership attitudes or decisions should not be brushed off, wrongly criticized, dismissed, or silenced. A woman who has not gotten married or who has pursued a career should not be judged. Married women should not be viewed as attachments to their husbands but rather as God-called and God-gifted contributing members of the body of Christ who happen to be married. Women do not experience the body of Christ as men do. Women see things that men don't see. Women communicate truth differently than men. A body of Christ is healthiest when women are esteemed and their gifts highly valued, not just in the home but also in the church. The church needs highly trained women theologians. The church needs to give voices to gifted gospel-communicating women. We need to encourage gospel-wise women to write. To do anything less fails to treat women with the honor that was stamped on them at creation.

The theology of the image of God in all people should radically influence the way we view and respond to women, co-image bearers by God's design.

One of the ways to build a culture that values the essentiality of the gifts of women in the body of Christ is to highlight the robust role that women had in God's unfolding plan of redemption in Scripture. As you walk your way through biblical history, it becomes clear that the work of God is not solely a man's domain; it is the ambassadorial calling of men and women alike. Sarah, Rebekah, Miriam, Rahab, Deborah, Ruth, Hannah, Esther, Anna, Mary, Elizabeth, Mary Magdalene, and Phoebe are just a few of the women God used to move along his plan of redemption. Men and women are called to be Christ's disciples, his instruments, his representatives, and his messengers. We should teach this history to our boys and girls.

We want boys to grow into men who value the presence and gifts of women in the body of Christ, and we want girls to be clear about their calling and the need to hone the gifts God has given them.

The theology of the image of God in all people should radically influence the way we view and respond to women, co-image bearers by God's design. This theology calls us

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away from denigrating and objectifying women and calls us to honor them as those who bear the very likeness of God himself. It calls us to honor their gifts, to give their unique experience a voice, and to train them for work as God's agents in the world and as essential members of his church. Hear Spurgeon:

We cannot say to the women, "Go home, there is nothing for you to do in the service of the Lord." Far from it, we entreat Martha and Mary, Lydia and Dorcas and all the elect sisterhood, young and old, rich and poor, to instruct others as God instructs them. Young men and maidens, old men and matrons, yes—and boys and girls who love the Lord—should speak well of Jesus and make known His salvation from day to day.¹

This article is adapted from *Do You Believe?: 12 Historic Doctrines to Change Your Everyday Life* by Paul David Tripp.



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¹ Charles Spurgeon, "All At It," sermon 2044, September 16, 1888, *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, www.ccel.org/.