

Gender Roles in a Biblical Perspective for the Orthodox Christians in the [North] American Context, Indian Orthodox Herald (June 12, 2010) – Fr. Dr. Jacob Mathew (accessed on May 13, 2016 with minor editing)

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Introduction

Cultural Disparities: This is a difficult issue to put into a nutshell. Each culture in the history of the world has had difficult issues particular to their culture and their time. The present Western culture is therefore that belongs to us now. For example, in Africa today, nobody is talking about gender roles. Asians do not struggle over what the Bible says about gender roles at all. In North America, our cultural biases give us blinders when it comes to these culturally defined difficulties with Holy Scripture. In other words, the problems we have with the scriptures are not universal. Everyone has problems with the scriptures, but your particular set of problems is almost certainly defined by your cultural situation. As we discuss this issue, we should be aware that our cultural situation will make it difficult for us to be objective, for the North American society has assigned some specific roles to men and women, not to be mistaken, a new role that has been intermingled with each other, as far as traditional roles for genders have been concerned. What many are demanding is to translate this new gender paradigm into the Church and thereby they want to ‘modernize’ the Church. This is an issue that we have to look into as well.

Contextual Difficulties: The Bible was written a long time ago, and understanding it is difficult at times, especially when we wear cultural blinders. Further, there are many kinds of genres which require different interpretive guidelines too. Just because King David or Solomon enjoyed polygamy does not necessarily mean it is a good thing to be applied today. In narrative sections, the Bible reports things that it does not approve of just like any good newspaper or biography might. Third, there is no one section of the Bible that lays out the entirety of its teaching on gender roles. In other words, we’ll need to put several passages together. We cannot look at some of the passages and ignore others. When the Biblical authors seem to disagree with themselves, we do not pick the passage we like – rather, we struggle to understand how they fit together. Finally, the Bible has little to say about gender roles. There just isn’t much written in an Orthodox Christian perspective. We’re going to ask a whole lot of questions for which there are no good answers in the text. However, let’s look at what is there to be deduced in a total harmony with the Orthodox precepts.

Linguistic Difficulties: At the outset, one should note that when we speak of gender roles, our language and expressions are highly charged. I want to try to diffuse the terms as much as possible. For example, the word “submission” can be a horrible thing. I understand some of the baggage that comes with the word, but it doesn’t need to carry this baggage. For example, when dancing, normally women “submit” to the leadership of their partners. Players on a basketball team “submit” to their coach or team captain. Of course, we use the same word when describing heinous crimes, but the word doesn’t necessitate such horrors. When speaking of

“submission” with gender roles, it can go either way. We can freely admit the incredible injustice inflicted upon women especially who have been told to “submit” to their abusive husbands. The same things can be said for these words too: authority, dominion and ruler (to name just a few). At the same time, one shall not forget those women of today, who demand that their husbands shall submit themselves to their wives for history had been doing it otherwise. It needs to be discussed, whether the present practice is in both ways, namely women submitting themselves to men and vice-versa are what Paul and New Testament writers wanted to express through their writings.

Genesis 1

The first two chapters of Genesis each tell the creation story from different perspectives. The first is a big, grand, beautiful, symmetrical story, and the second is intimate, close, emotional and detailed. And each tells us something different about men and women. Genesis 1 tells us about the equality, Genesis 2 tells us about the distinction. Every time that the New Testament has any sort of extended commentary on gender roles, it always refers back to these two passages, so it would make sense to start here so that when we get to the New Testament, we'll be ready. In the first version of the creation of mankind, we see that men and women are created ontologically equal. That is, their essence, or being, or basic quality is the same.

26-28. Then God said “Let us make human kind in our image according to our likeness and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth.” So God created humankind in His image. In the image of God He created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth”.

Notice that when God wants to create a creature in his image, he does so in two irreducible parts. That is, by themselves, men do not reflect the image of God, nor do women. You need a man and a woman to reflect the image of God. Of course, we can say that all people individually are created in the image of God, but there is something reflected in the community of these two different people (men and women) that is uniquely reflective of God. God has always existed as a community of 3, and so to reflect him truly, we need to be more than one. Second, note that God gives dominion (or authority) to both men and women to rule over all the earth. He gives it to them equally. The command is for them to rule together.

Genesis 2

In this account of creation, we look more closely at the events and in so doing we see that there are distinctions between man and woman. They are not the same.

2:7 Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

2: 18 Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” 19. So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field

and every bird of the air and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20. The man gave names to all cattle and to the birds of the air and to every animal of the field. But for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. 21. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept. Then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of man this one was taken." 24. Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. 25. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

First, notice that the man was created first, and that it was clear from the very beginning that by himself things were "not good." In verse 18 God announces he will make a "helper" for him. This is a good translation, but there is a strong connotation (in my mind) of something very unhelpful with the word "helper." If you want to occupy a 4 year old child, you might say, "Would you like to be my helper today?" Or, you might compliment the same child by saying, "You're such a good helper!" That is not the meaning of this word in Hebrew. This is the idea that we discussed at the beginning about the language difficulties. This word is used most often of God himself. As in, "the LORD is my helper I will not be afraid, what can anyone do to me?" (Heb 13:6). Similar ideas can be seen in Ps 30:10, 54:4 etc. This is a kind of help coming to alleviate some sort of deficiency. In other words, God created a woman because the man needed her. In God's sight, man needed help even before the fall . . . before sin entered into the world. We all need community, not because we are sinners, but because we are human beings.

In Verse 23, the man names the woman. We understand a little bit today what this means. In the time when this was written (and for most of human history), it would be clearly understood that this act of naming signaled that the man had authority over and responsibility for the woman. She does not name him in return. He was not taken out of her body, but she was taken out of his. There are some clear distinctions, even if we don't know exactly what they are quite yet. Finally, notice that there is great intimacy, harmony and peace between them.

Genesis 3

This is where the gender roles get all mixed up and we begin with the problems. Sin enters the world. We should note that the man and woman sinned together for the first time. When God comes to them, he calls for Adam, not for Eve. The curses given to them are certainly for all of mankind, but there is a difference in emphasis between the curses given to the man and those given to the woman. For the man, God talks about the difficulty of his work. 17-19. 'And to the man he said, because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'you shall not eat of it', cursed is the ground because of you. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall bring forth for you and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground. For out of it you were taken. You are dust and to dust you shall return'.

For the woman, he talks about the difficulty of her relationships, especially with her family (husband and children). 16. 'To the woman he said, I will greatly increase your pangs in child

bearing. In pain you shall bring forth children. Yet your desire shall be for your husband. And he shall rule over you'.

It is this very commandment that prevailed until the death and resurrection of our Lord. The arrival of the Lord changed it drastically and man and woman started to be equals in the basic sense as much as it was possible to be seen in the beginning, but with a different notion towards gender roles.

Jesus' Understandings on Gender Roles

Jesus understood man and woman as equals to receive the grace of God in the sojourn towards the Kingdom of God. He taught men and women together and at times separately. Jesus taught in the synagogues all men and women. He gave private tuitions to Martha and Maria and the Samaritan woman. The Canaanite woman, who pleaded for her daughter was tested by the Lord to the maximum that she could earn the desire of her heart. He let the sinner woman to anoint his feet with alabaster and dry it off with her hair. He had narrated parables where two men were building their houses, one on the rock and the other on the sand. There is the parable of the Kingdom of God which is like a woman mixing 3 units of flour to make bread, namely house hold duties. Martha was worried about the house hold chores and she complained to the Lord about her sister Maria not bothered about the same. The Lord is not pressing Maria on this issue too. Jesus went to fish with other men into the sea and you do not see another woman there in the sea. It is Mary the mother of God is the one who takes care of the Baby Jesus and not Joseph. Joseph is keen in giving care to Mary. Also Joseph is depicted as a carpenter, a profession to win bread for the family. In short, during Jesus' time any work that demanded hard physical labor was that of man and that works were winning matter to make bread. It was the woman, who baked bread at home out of what the man had brought from his work. It seems that the Lord did not overturn this division of labor at all. At the same time, Jesus allowed women to grow from simply being the exploited lot to be serious partners in the active striving towards salvation.

1 Corinthians 11.3-16

This letter was written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Corinth. They were a messed-up church! Anyway, he addresses their questions one by one throughout the letter. Here is his take on the behavior of women in church in this letter.

3. But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. 4. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, 5. but every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. 6. For if a woman will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a woman to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. 7. For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and reflection of God, but woman is the reflection of man. 8. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. 9. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. 10. That is why a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. 11. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor man of woman; 12. for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. 13. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God

with her head uncovered? 14. Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, 15. but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? But if anyone is disposed to be contentious- we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

First, in verse 3, there are several things to note. What does “head” mean? What is “headship?” Whatever it means, there seems to be some sort of hierarchy. In relationship to Christ, a man is a body and Christ is the head. In relationship to his wife, though, the man is the head and the wife is the body. Christ is a body, with God as the head. So it goes something like this . . . wife – husband – Christ – God. On that line, you are the head of the person to the left of you and the body of the person to the right of you. This analogy of gender roles and the Trinity came up in the Creation story a bit, and here it is clearer. In other passages it is clearer still. Let us try to synthesize a little more here.

Who is more powerful, Christ or God the Father? The same. They are both God. Who is more important? There is no more a silly question possible at all. However, they have different roles. The Father did not die for our sins, that was the responsibility of the Son. They are equal, but have different accomplishments. Jesus was submissive to the Father. In the gospel of John, Jesus is hard to figure out. On the one hand he keeps saying things like, “I and the Father are one” (John 10.30). On the other hand, he also keeps saying thing like, “I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me . . . I always do the things that are pleasing to him” (John 8.28-29). What does it mean that Jesus did not have the authority in himself to do what he was doing? He was/is in a submissive role to the Father. Not because he is inadequate, incompetent, or anything of the like, but because he completely trusted the Father to accomplish his task and together (with the Holy Spirit), they accomplished our redemption. This seems to be the way the Bible presents the gender differences. They are equal, but have different accomplishments. Women are in the submissive role (like Jesus in his relationship to the Father), and men are in the leadership role (like Jesus in his relationship to the Church). So, we each get to illustrate Jesus in his different relationships.

Verses 5-15 talk about a head covering for women which is inappropriate for men. First, we should notice that the women are doing the same thing as the men (vs.4-5). Paul has no problem with the women praying and prophesying in public. His instruction is about head coverings while the women do the same activities as men. These head coverings indicate some kind of submission, some kind of following. They were a cultural way of acknowledging the gender roles of creation, apparently. Today, head coverings would simply suggest that the person was Amish or really weird. How can women and men obey this teaching today? We might try an answer at the end of this deliberation though.

1 Corinthians 14.26-40

Here’s one of those passages that gets taken out of its context constantly! There are some potential landmines here, but let’s look at the context and that should help us understand things better. People in other cultures don’t seem to see the things we see here because of our cultural blinders.

26. What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. 27. If any speak in a

tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. 28. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. 29. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 30. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. 31. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, 32. and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. 33. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, 34. the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. 35. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. 36. Or was it from you that the word of God originate? Or are you the only ones it has reached? 37. If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. 38. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. 39. So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40. But all things should be done decently and in order.

On first glance, it seems like Paul is forbidding women to speak publicly in church, but just a few chapters earlier, he was mentioning that his big problem with women praying and prophesying in church had to do with head coverings. Then, if we look a little closer, we see that Paul is actually addressing the ordering of the public worship service. Things should be done decently and in order. In fact, in the beginning of this section he tells two other groups of people to be silent. What he means is . . . wait for your turn to talk. Also note. Or was it from you that the word of God originate means not women here, but the Corinthians.

Then, when mentioning women, he says they must be silent until they get home! What does that mean? Paul cannot mean to forbid women from speaking in general because he encourages them to prophesy (so long as their head is covered). Perhaps a little cultural background would be helpful. These early churches took their model for the order of worship from the Jewish synagogues. When it came time for the teaching, a man would stand up, read the scriptures and expound on them. Then, when he was finished, the (male) elders of the community would each take a turn to respond to the exposition. One might say, "Amen," meaning "I agree. That is true. Believe him." Or, one might say, "I like the beginning, but starting with his third point, things started going downhill. Let me correct some of what was said . . ." The elders could do this but not others. The Christians started using this form of worship, except they allowed women to prophesy, too. Many (most?) evangelical scholars would agree that in this passage, the assessment of the teaching is forbidden to women. This fits with the overall theme of orderliness of worship. After all, if there were no restrictions on who could respond to the teaching, the congregation would be there all day! Secondly, this fits with the Bible's teaching (especially in Paul) elsewhere that spiritual responsibility and authority rests with the (male) elders of church. On the basis of this understanding, Orthodoxy and our church have decided to allow only men to become elders and the elders or episcopoi sitting together, the Holy Synod, determines what good doctrine is.

Galatians 3.25-29

One of the most stupidly misunderstood texts in all the Scripture is here for our perusal.

25. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26. for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Let's be reasonable here. Verse 28 is constantly used to say that the gospel has abolished all role distinctions. There is no male or female. There are tons of problems with this view. First, Paul also says there is no slave or free. However, in 1 Corinthians 7.21 he says that a slave should seek to be free if possible. Certainly we all still play the roles of male or female, slave or free. Looking at the context it is easy to see that he is saying that the gospel does not give preferential treatment to anyone based on economic or gender differences. God's grace does not come especially for men nor for the rich (nor especially for women nor the poor too).

Ephesians 5.18-33

Love it or hate it, this is the clearest passage in scripture regarding the roles of husband and wives in the Bible.

18. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19. Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20. Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21. Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23. 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. 24. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. 25. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26. That he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27. 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. 28. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does to the church, 30. Because we are members of his body. 31. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

First, notice that in verse 21, that everyone is called to submit to each other, recognizing that we all are brothers and sisters of Christ and have his Spirit living in us. Secondly, Paul makes a clear case for marriage being a representation of the relationship between Christ and the Church. There are a lot of interesting things here, but for the purpose of this paper, we see that wives are playing the role of the Church in this drama. Perhaps you did not audition for this role, but you have it. Men play the part of Christ. Here is the assignment of your role in the marriage.

It will be of use to get into the idea of submission in the New Testament understanding a little bit, I feel. The Greek-English Lexicon describes *hupotasso* in Ephesians 5:21 as, "Of submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love." It carries with it the concept "to line up under." Because it is a present participle it refers to an activity that must be continuous, and because it is in the middle voice it must be voluntary - "to submit oneself."

This word is an old military word for "lining up under." Paul uses the verb *hupotasso* to describe the relation of the church to Christ. The root meaning of *tasso* and its various forms is 'put in order,' 'arrange,' or 'put in place.' *Hupotasso*, the form Paul used, means 'put in order under,' or 'sub-ordinate' and is best translated by forms such as 'to make subject' or 'to subdue' in active uses and by forms such as 'to submit oneself' or 'to be obedient to' in passive or reflexive uses. Each of the more than forty New Testament uses of the verb carries an overtone of authority and subjection or submission to it. The use of the verb necessarily carries with it a concept of exercising or yielding to authority." We need to notice here that a line or chain of command and hierarchy is necessary for any institution to survive. Women are commanded by Paul to submit to their husbands. Is this a simply one sided action that women are always asked to be the sufferers? Paul exactly thought something else. Submission of women to their husbands is something that comes in return to the selfless love from the men. Jesus loved the church such that He was ready to die to redeem her with the price of his life. When the men are ready to die for their women, the women in return submit themselves to their husbands. It is in this context that one shall see the concept of submission of women here. Seeing it only in the context of a woman is utterly wrong like a car with wheels only on one side! In this very context one shall read St. Peter's commandments to the husbands and wives (I Pet 3:1-7).

Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing. Rather let your adornment be the inner self with the spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you. Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing may hinder your prayers.

Weaker sex here is to mean that Eve was weak from within to resist the evil. Modesty and meekness is assigned to women by the apostle and love, concern and protecting care are assigned to men. With the power of modesty, meekness and perseverance women win their immodest, violent and impatient men and through their love, concern and protecting care men shall pacify their women. This again is mutually inclusive like wheels on both sides of a car and not to be compared in a worldly way like what is assigned to men is like muscle power or money power and what is assigned to women is simple submission to the muscle and money power. If we want to compare what men have been assigned with, with muscle and money power, what women have been assigned with is mind power, which is much more powerful than the muscle and money power. In this very context let us take the parallel to what Paul has to say.

1 Timothy 2.8-15

Here, we have the most straightforward talk about the role of women and men in the church. That doesn't make it easy, though. In fact, they are some of the hardest words to understand in all of Scripture (at least for the American culture though).

8. I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; 9. Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, 10. but with what is proper for women who profess godliness – with good works. 11. Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. 12. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. 13. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 14. and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 15. Yet she will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

In this letter, Paul is instructing his apprentice, his disciple, Timothy on how to order the churches he is planting. So, this is perhaps the most universal (without a specific church context) letter we have from Paul. In the beginning of this passage, the instructions for men and women seem fine enough. Men should pray passionately, but not with anger. Women should dress modestly and be known for their fantastic good works, not for their fantastic bodies. Then, verses 11 and 12. Again we should note that Paul was happy for women to pray and prophesy publicly. He affirms the value of women over and against others in the culture of his day.

However, we see the authority role of men again here. Since Paul is clearly not prohibiting women to teach in general, what does he mean? Probably “exercise authority” is a qualifier of “teach.” That is to say, women are not to teach authoritatively over men. The “quietness” of women should be quietness and submission in relationship to the authoritative teaching and responsibility. And in the church, he is not suggesting that all men have this authority. In fact, this passage is followed immediately by a section on the qualifications for the office of bishop. That is to say . . . women cannot exercise authority over the church, but let me tell you who can. Not all men exercise authority over the church – only certain ones.

Part of Paul's argument here is that mankind was created before womankind. His appeal to creation rather than a sense of social protocol (“that's how everyone does it!”) tells us that the instruction is not specific to Paul's culture only.

Conclusion

I have hit the highlights of what the Bible says about gender roles, but certainly not all the places. I understand that God has ordained gender roles of leader and follower from creation. Men are to be leaders. Women are to be followers. A man is to take responsibility and a woman is to help because of his deficiencies. They are a team of separate, but necessary parts. They dance together. They are like two wings on an airplane. Not the same, but corresponding. Which is more important? We need them both. And we need them both to play their separate roles. Leading does not mean always to walk in front. When there is danger from the front, the leader walks at the front protecting the followers and when there is danger from the back, the

leader walks at the back protecting the entrusted folk from hind danger. The one goes at the back, when the leader is at front, has important duties to fulfill that the unity of the system remains intact and the leader is alarmed about the possible dangers that might come from the back or from sides that the leader can not see or expect. The same applies when the leader is at the back too.

When the Bible talks about gender roles, it only talks about them in the context of family and church and it is to be understood never outside. Therefore, I can think of no reason to apply them outside the family and church. In fact, these two institutions that were initiated and ordained by God are safe places in which to practice the creation plan of gender roles. Inevitably we will fail, and only in the covenant community of family and church can we have confidence in the forgiveness of others when we mess up. In the worlds of business, politics, healthcare, law enforcement, art and education, there is no safety net of repentance and forgiveness when we hurt each other. There is no covenant commitment outside the family and church, especially in the American context and playing our gender roles in a biblical sense is risky, adventurous and sometimes dangerous for both roles. If we were to apply them outside the covenant commitments, we will inevitably alienate all those around us . . . death of isolation by a thousand alienations.

The Church and Family provides a safety net which will free us to swing on this trapeze with confidence that if we fall, the men and women around us will catch us, and allow us to climb up and try it again.

In the church and family, women should learn to submit in a helpful way. There is a balance. A kind of submission that does not actively help is not really submission. She who does not actively help her elders to lead is not obedient to her God. They need her help. On the other hand, she who does not follow the lead of her elders, but tries to take the reins of the church away from them, is not obedient either.

In the church and family, men should learn to lead in a way that is gracious. There is a balance. A kind of leadership that ignores the thoughts, feelings and needs of the followers is not really leadership. He who does not actively seek the counsel, wisdom and understanding of his followers is not obedient to God. He cannot truly lead those he does not love. On the other hand, he who does not love enough to make decisions, but sits on his hands because he is afraid is not obedient either. One thing more: What women shall do in family and church towards men is the same role that men play towards Christ. Men are answerable to God and they shall not forget that real fact. This hierarchy is the gift from God not to be despised or to be taken lightly.