

Gender Equality

The model Jesus gave us was one of being equally submitted to one another.

Have you heard about the new football league? It's called the Chicago Force. Here's the kicker (no pun intended): The team is all women! I saw the amazing video footage on the Chicago news—women who decided they wanted to play football and form a league. Dressed in full tackle gear, they were taking one another to the dirt and having fun.

I have to admit my first reaction was: "That's not right. It looks painful." Of course that's my reaction to football in general, but when I saw women pounding the bodies of other women, I had to think about it.

Why? Because we all carry cultural messages about what is feminine and what isn't. My brain told me, "There is something wrong with this picture."

The truth is women continue to push the gender boundaries. The line is far more blurred than it once was. But there is a way to glean more about true femininity than what we are exposed to through pop culture and the media.

Femininity is described in the Bible. Genesis makes it clear that men and women together bear the divine image of God. When God created them, He created both in His image.

But talking about the feminine side of God makes people crazy. Some want to make God exclusively a woman. Others see only the father-heart of God. If we look closely at the Godhead, we see what we would characterize today as both masculine and

feminine attributes.

From the beginning, women were part of a divine plan for fellowship, continuing the generations and doing the work assigned by God (see Gen. 1:26-28). Eve was not an afterthought or inferior. The Hebrew word ezer or “helper” applied to her is found 21 times in the Old Testament and means “suitable for him” or “corresponding to him.”

Eve was not created to hold an inferior position. She is alike and equal but serves a different function from Adam.

Only after the fall did the relationship between man and woman become perverted. One consequence was the subordination of women and the dominance of men, which was not God’s original intention for the sexes.

In Old Testament times, procreation and the survival of God’s people were important in Israel. For this reason, motherhood was highly valued. However, in general, women were often oppressed.

But then Jesus came to live among us and correct the distortion of male-female relationships. He esteemed both men and women in His physical time on Earth. His life gives us a glimpse into the original plan for equality of the sexes.

Philip Yancey notes in his powerful book *The Jesus I Never Knew* that Jesus was intolerant of injustice, elevated the status of women, did not support the male structure of superiority and privilege in His day, did not fit the masculine stereotype of the culture because of both His masculine and feminine traits, had women traveling with His

band, appeared to Mary first after His resurrection, confronted sexual hypocrisy among religious leaders, and showed a wide-range of emotions that today would be considered feminine—joy, meekness, sadness, grief, compassion and love.

Jesus valued women and lived this out in His life on Earth. He resisted the oppression of women, the poor and those who were discriminated against by race, ethnicity and even geography.

The model He gave us was one of being submitted to God and equally submitted to one another in love and tenderheartedness. Jesus related to God and others with humility and mutual respect.

In the Old Testament, God's activities are described in both masculine and feminine terms. Maternal images are seen in phrases such as "carrying the suckling child," "a woman in travail" and "bringing Israel to birth."

But godly traits are not gender-specific. Paul directs us all to manifest the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (see Gal. 5:22-23). We are to be liberated from prescribed gender roles and to put on the mind of Christ. In Him, we transcend gender distinctions (see Gal. 3:28).