

# **Manhood & Womanhood Affirmations and Denials**

*A Statement by the Council of Elders of Bethlehem Baptist Church  
February 6, 2021*

## **Preamble**

We live in an age with much confusion about what it means to be a man and a woman as God intended. The questions surrounding the nature of biblical manhood & womanhood, and how men and women ought to live in God's world, are more pressing than ever.

We hope to approach this subject with humility and love. We are all broken people, and we all stumble in many ways (James 3:2). We acknowledge the pain and struggle that can surround these issues. Our hope is to articulate our beliefs in a way that does not condemn but rather invites people to joy in Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this document is to clearly affirm and deny what we, the Bethlehem Baptist Church Elders, believe and do not believe about the complementarity of men and women, specifically in regard to the created order, marriage, and the church. The scope of these affirmations and denials is intended to be broad in theological vision. We recognize that we cannot answer every specific question, nor can we apply these truths to every situation. Rather, we hope to provide a clear picture of what we believe and do not believe in order to lay the groundwork for applications in specific contexts.

## **Articles**

### **Articles 1–4: Creation**

#### *Article 1: God's Good Design*

We affirm that God created mankind in his image as male and female with equal personhood and worth, and that he commissioned them to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and to rule and subdue it together. We also affirm that differences between men and women are part of God's good design and plan (Genesis 1:26–28, 31).

We deny that male and female are indistinct from or interchangeable with one another, or that the differences are inconsequential (Genesis 1:26–27, 2:21–24; Matthew 19:4–5).

#### *Article 2: Sexual Difference*

We affirm that when God created human beings, he established a male-female binary that is normatively displayed at the chromosomal level of human biology (Genesis 1:27, 2:18–25; Matthew 19:4; 1 Corinthians 11:8–12).

We deny that any so-called gender identity that contradicts the biological markers of male and female assigned by God can be legitimately chosen or changed based on personal preference, subjective feeling, or societal norm (Psalm 139:13–15). We also deny that any human condition resulting from the Fall removes or cancels the image of God in any individual or puts anyone beyond God's call to salvation and saving grace.

#### *Article 3: The Fall*

We affirm that because of the Fall, sin has marred the sexual experience of humankind, resulting in various disorders (such as intersex conditions and gender dysphoria), which display the brokenness of creation (Genesis 3, Romans 8:20–23).

We deny that the presence of various disorders is evidence that God intended other modes of existence outside the male-female binary and that such disorders or dysphoria ever legitimize behaviors contrary to this divine intention (Genesis 1:26–28, Matthew 19:4–5).

#### *Article 4: Masculinity and Femininity*

We affirm that men ought to display uniquely masculine ways of being and that women ought to display uniquely feminine ways of being in every sphere of life, which are fitting to God's good design in creation, even if the expressions of masculinity and femininity may vary in limited ways from culture to culture (1 Corinthians 11:13–16, 16:13; 1 Timothy 2:8–13; 1 Peter 3:3).

We deny that these masculine and feminine ways of being can be reduced to mere social constructs, while also denying that they should include unhelpful cultural stereotypes that are not in step with the Bible.

### **Articles 5–10: Marriage, Family, and Singleness**

#### *Article 5: Definition and Purpose of Marriage*

We affirm that God created and intended marriage to be the loving, lifelong union of a man and a woman, and that marriage is the only proper context for sexual intimacy. We affirm that one of the purposes of marriage is procreation; nevertheless, a husband and wife may still glorify God even if they are unable to have children (Genesis 1:28, 2:24; Song of Solomon 2:7; Matthew 19:4–6; Luke 20:34–36).

We deny that any union between two men, two women, more than two people, or any other unbiblical arrangement constitutes a legitimate marriage.

#### *Article 6: Marriage Roles*

We affirm that God, in his wisdom, appointed unique and complementary roles within marriage, according to creation, and as a type of the relationship between Christ and the church (Genesis 2:15, 18; Ephesians 5:22–33; 1 Peter 3:1–7).

We deny that the distinct, God-given roles of husbands and wives or of fathers and mothers are inconsequential, interchangeable, or indistinct from one another.

#### *Article 7: Husbands*

We affirm that, as Christ is the head of the church, a husband is the head of his wife and should display sacrificial and loving headship in marriage, bearing a particular accountability before God in the leadership of the home (Ephesians 5:22–33, 1 Peter 3:7).

We deny that a husband's headship is inherently oppressive to his wife. We deny that either spouse should ever domineer, manipulate, neglect, or abuse the other spouse, and we deny that these behaviors should ever be overlooked or permitted when brought to the attention of church leaders.

#### *Article 8: Wives*

We affirm that, as the church submits to Christ, a wife should submit to her husband and should display joyful respect and help in marriage (Ephesians 5:22–33, Colossians 3:18, 1 Peter 3:1–6).

We deny that a wife's submission is a result of sin's corruption of God's design. We also deny that either wives or husbands should follow their spouses into sin.

#### *Article 9: Singleness*

We affirm that just as marriage is a gift from God, singleness is also a gift from God to be enjoyed as an excellent path for faithful and fruitful service in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 7:6–8, Matthew 19:10–12).

We deny that singleness should be given less respect or honor as a way of life in service to Christ. We also deny that singleness should be used as an excuse for sinful behaviors.

#### *Article 10: The Telos of Marriage*

We affirm that the ultimate point of marriage is to picture the relationship between Christ and the church, which will be consummated when the church, Christ's bride, will be united to Jesus in glory, at which point marriage will cease to exist in its earthly form (Luke 20:34–36, Ephesians 5:31–32).

We deny that earthly marriage is the ultimate goal of the Christian or that one must pursue marriage to portray the gospel with one's life.

## **Articles 11–13: The Church**

### *Article 11: Unity in Christ and Calling*

We affirm that men and women share equally in the manifold blessings of salvation through Jesus Christ and that he commissioned them to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18–20, Acts 2:17–21, Galatians 3:28).

We deny that men and women's unity in Christ removes God-given distinctions between the sexes in the home, church, and society.

### *Article 12: The Office of Elder*

We affirm that the office of pastor/elder in Christ's church is to be occupied by faithful men, whose work includes shepherding the flock, guarding faithful doctrine, and teaching God's word in corporate worship gatherings and other contexts (1 Timothy 2:12, 3:1–7; Titus 1:6–9; 1 Peter 5:2–3). We affirm that the New Testament teaching on male pastors/elders is rooted in the order of creation (1 Corinthians 11:8–9; 1 Timothy 2:13–14). We also affirm that elders should seek the valuable perspectives and contributions of women in the church for the sake of the faithfulness and fruitfulness of both women and men (Romans 16:3, Philippians 4:2–3).

We deny that the prescription of male pastors/elders is intended for only one specific culture or time period and not universally binding.

### *Article 13: Spiritual Gifts*

We affirm that God has given men and women various spiritual gifts to glorify him, love and serve others, and build up the body of Christ. We affirm the apostle Paul's instruction that a woman should not teach or exercise authority over a man (1 Timothy 2:12) and also that there are biblically appropriate contexts for women to teach (Acts 18:26; 1 Corinthians 11:4–5, 12:27–31; Colossians 3:16; Titus 2:3–5). We affirm that the gifts and ministry of women are essential to the church.

We deny that women are less gifted than men, and we deny that giftedness is an entitlement to an office or certain responsibilities in the church.