

Five Biblical Commands for Men and Women Partnering in the Gospel

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Godly benefits and demonic devastations

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One tired leg

Crack! The left pedal broke off a rented bicycle in Kunming, China, halfway through our prayer-biking tour. Our frustrated teammate slowly and painfully rode back to the hotel. All the way, his left leg dangled uselessly, while his exhausted right leg pedaled like crazy.

The humorous scene reminded us of an Indian church planter friend who stated, 'You can ride a bicycle with one pedal, but it sure is easier with two.'

God created and commissioned both male and female to join him in his effort to proclaim his kingdom to all nations (Matt. 24:14). God calls his creation and commission of male and female ‘very good’. In the current cosmic battle, men and women can either reflect God’s strong design of righteous rule together or the enemy’s perversion that increases pride and rebellion.

In this paper through the lens of God’s first five commands, we examine key trends of male-female partnership—some eternally beneficial, and some devastating. Along the way, we offer practical suggestions to honor Christ and benefit society. In the end, we see how Jesus repeats the Genesis 1:28 commands in Matthew 28.



The first five commands in Genesis 1

God honored and blessed the first man and woman and gave them both five key commands. Here we find God’s heart to bless humanity and recognize God’s far-reaching mandate.

*God blessed them and said to them, ‘**Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over. . . every living creature**’ (Genesis 1:28).*

Clearly God intended both male and female to share these commands/blessings because God used five, plural, imperative Hebrew verbs. Also, notice that God used plural pronouns blessing ‘them’ and instructing ‘them’. God designed partnership between male and female from the beginning.

The Hebrew verbs and their meanings in this verse include: **Parah** (פָּרָה) **Be fruitful**, **Rabah** (רָבָה) **Multiply**, **Male** (מָלֵא) **Fill full**, **Kabash** (כָּבַשׁ) **Subdue**, **Radah** (רָדָה) **Have dominion**



Command #1: *parah* פָּרָה (be fruitful)

God’s first command to humankind is *parah*! God instructed the first couple to ‘enjoy one another!’ and procreate people who reflect God’s image. No one is foolish enough to think only one gender can accomplish the task alone.

Likewise, in the church, God intends both men and women to be fruit-producing, image-bearing disciples.

Godly benefits

Women comprise around 60 percent of the global church, and all believers are needed to make disciples. Previously the fastest growing, the Chinese church bore amazing fruit as brothers and sisters labored, sacrificed, and suffered. Female evangelistic teams fanned out, and the Holy Spirit emboldened both men and women to preach.^[1] Currently the Iranian church, now growing the fastest, has flourished in a persecuted context. Women are multiplying disciples alongside men.^[2] In India, a movement has taken off with thousands of women equipped as church planters alongside men, producing tens of thousands of new disciples.^[3]

Demonic devastations

The enemy works to stop male and female from producing fruit by aborting life, corrupting marriage, and discouraging disciple-making. Abortion is the largest genocide ever to affect humanity. Annually more than 40 million babies die.^[4] The world records 125,000 abortions daily.^[5] Divorce brings division. With the recent COVID-19 pandemic, the divorce rate spiked 34 percent in the US.^[6] Killing pre-born children and ripping apart families reduces physical fruit, but the enemy especially wants to limit spiritual fruit. Barna research points out that less than half of the Christians in the U.S. feel obligated to share their faith, and fewer actually make disciples.^[7]

To be fruitful against the enemy's schemes, both men and women can:

- Promote life and truth—defend the pre-born, help at-risk children, adopt, or foster. Refuse to believe the lie that abortion is a 'woman's right' or that children burden the planet.
- Become disciple-makers—grow in skills and abilities. Train men and women to share and defend their faith.



Command #2: *rabah* רָבָה (to multiply)

God's second command is *rabah*! This imperative means that men and women should spread God's abundant life quickly (multiply rather than add)! While bearing fruit replicates life, *rabah* increases the speed and abundance.



Godly benefits

When men and women exponentially extend God's life to the whole world, many are blessed. In the corporate world, increased male-female partnership leads to significantly higher performance and follows God's design.^[8] Unengaged, Unreached People Groups (UUPGs) gain access to the gospel because bold men and women go out to tell them.^[9] Developing methods to multiply disciples, leaders, churches, and movements require Jesus' strategy of unity which will 'let the world know' (John 17:23).^[10]

✘ *Demonic devastations*

The enemy wants men and women to pervert God's command through disunity and division (not multiplication)! In *Why Not Women?*, Loren Cunningham, David Hamilton, and Janice Rogers list the following evil impacts of disunity between male and female:^[11]

- Attack against the gospel workforce
- Attack against men and their ministries
- Attack against women
- Attack against the character of God
- Attack against the image of God

Both radical feminism and masculism can lead to entitlement, skewed ideas of 'justice',^[12] and arguments about 'rights'. These sinful social divisions set up men and women as opponents rather than partners.

To multiply against the enemy's schemes:

- Model and share—display values with actions that honor both men and women. This means sharing the stage, board room, and decision-making arenas.
- Teach God's heart—preach sermons making clear the same Holy Spirit resides in both, and that God does not look at outward appearance to determine spiritual gifting.



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Command #3: *male* מלא (to fill full)

God's third command from Genesis 1 is *male*! It means to overflow, satisfy, and replenish. God intends that men and women leave no area of society untouched with God's glory. Rather, impact culture everywhere based on giftedness, passion, and experience.

Godly benefits

The scope of God's world-filling mission requires full participation. In the harvest fields of healthcare, media, entertainment, education, business, or government both men and women can shine and thrive in gospel witness. God intends that his people spread to every corner and represent him as impactful ambassadors. Diaspora peoples such as laboring groups from Southeast Asia work as domestic and construction workers in the Arab Gulf States and powerfully live out their gospel mission.^[13]

Demonic devastations

Satan wants men and women to battle against each other, feel threatened, shrink back, and give up. Often idols of safety and pride or certain theology can reduce godly workers. East Asian sisters shared, 'We gave our sweat and blood in prison for Jesus. Then Bible teachers from foreign countries came. They told us leadership is for men only, and we must sit down and not preach any more. What do we do? We don't want to dishonor Jesus!'

To fill full the earth and fight against the enemy's schemes:

- Maximize the task—see the magnitude of the mission before us and how each plays a part. Laborers who understand their gospel significance in their respective fields can impact all of society.
- Take risks—Jesus seeks godly risk-takers. Be women and men willing to courageously live out faith.

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Command #4: *kabash* כָּבַשׁ (to subdue)

God's fourth command to his people is *kabash*! It means to subdue or bring into subjection. Jesus came to destroy the enemy's work (1 John 3:8). *Kabash* does not mean simply clearing farmland or taming animals; God wants victory over the darkness.

✓ *Godly benefits*

God instructs men and women to join in his overcoming mission of crushing the enemy. This impacts society directly as evil is obliterated, and the gospel meets needs. In the Middle East, professional counselors (male and female) help addicts overcome many issues.^[14] In other nations, in Jesus' name, creative male and female lawyers and brave undercover officers use professional skills to infiltrate, catch, and prosecute human trafficking rings.^{[15],[16]}

✗ *Demonic devastations*

The enemy wants men and women to use, exploit, and conquer each other. Drugs, pornography, and sexual addictions keep millions in bondage.^[17] Entertainment, pleasure, distraction, and apathy keep millions of Christians from posing a threat to the enemy.

To overcome the enemy's schemes:

- Wake up and fight—throw off the vices that entangle. Battle numbing entertainment or traditions which maintain the enemy's control.
- Shift worldview—promote a wartime mentality which recognizes the enemy's schemes. Equip those you influence in deliverance from demonic bondages.^[18]

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Command #5: *radah* רָדָה (to rule)

God's fifth command to men and women is *radah*! God wants his people to rule and care for all creation. Ruling over the earth is not a task given to only one gender. In Genesis 1, God tells 'them' to rule. God blesses humanity with leadership.

Godly benefits

Both male and female were given the beautiful and weighty command to exercise dominion. In South Asia in 2020, a growing house church network began to have husband-wife teams 'co-baptize' new believers. Their model honored the women, protected men from any accusation, and built trust in the community. In India and Singapore, corporate board rooms have proven effective when there is gender diversity.^[19] Sharing power well reveals godly unity; an attractive force of the gospel.

Demonic devastations

The enemy works to stop believers from ruling. He prefers that Christians disengage from powerful positions, leaving world-ruling responsibility to others. When Christians rule, the enemy wants them to follow culture—promoting folly and ease, apathy and abdication, and dishonorable ruling over each other.

To rule over the enemy's schemes:

- Aim for God's character—in the Trinity, each person mutually loves, serves, and yields to the other persons; ruling without eternal hierarchy.
- Fight the fall—battle domineering tendencies, lying manipulation, shameful slavery, human trafficking, and pornography.
- Do not fear responsibility—wield God's authority with grace and truth.

Jesus repeats Genesis 1:28

Jesus echoed all five commands in Matthew 28:18-20!

1 Make disciples = Be fruitful

2 Go. . . .to all nations = Multiply

③ Teach them. . . .everything = Fill full

④ To obey. . . .my commands = Subdue

⑤ All authority in heaven and earth + I am with you = Rule

In his final commission, Jesus repeated God's first commands. The entire body of Christ is to multiply disciple-makers, equipping others to also go, teach, and baptize. God's original intent in Genesis 1 was redeemed and restored by Jesus in Matthew 28 and should still be in effect today.



Conclusion

Reflecting God's heart remains imperative, and God wants both men and women involved. God equips them for these purposes, while the enemy seeks to disqualify and destroy the powerful team of male and female that God designed.

So, if your right leg feels exhausted and your left leg just dangles, perhaps it is time to repair your bicycle. Release your women and your men to pedal together in God's five commands and for the Great Commission. Together, we can accomplish God's global mission.

Endnotes

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