

WHAT WE BELIEVE



COMPLEMENTARIANISM



Christ Church
Endcliffe

Series Introduction

There are certain things which every church should believe. Not to do so would call into question whether they were a church at all. For instance the Trinity, the Lordship of Christ, the saving work of the cross, the resurrection and the coming return of Jesus.

But there are also a number of issues of secondary importance, which every church will need to have thought about, and have an understanding of what they believe, and how they put that belief into practice.

Because these issues are secondary, we do not insist or expect that every member of the church family will agree with everything that our church understands or practices. However, we do want to be open about what we believe, so that people joining our church know where we stand, and so that we ourselves are continuing to seek the light of Scripture and to be shaped by it.

So far, as well as this booklet on the issue of complementarianism, we also have one on infant baptism.



Introduction

Complementarianism is the belief that God made men and women equal and distinctive: equal in value and dignity, and distinctive in certain responsibilities and roles.

Complementarianism sees that God deliberately created humanity as male and female, and so it is as men and women come together that we are able to fulfil God's call on our lives, in family life and in the life of the church.

As men and women come together in life and ministry, the result is something richer than they could achieve on their own. And so complementarianism, when worked out in practice, will be a source of blessing to the church.

It is true that discussions about complementarianism have often focused on specific roles around church eldership that Bible passages say should be done by men. But the wider vision of complementarianism is much more about how men and women are created by God to be co-workers together.

This booklet will not try to go into depth on the biblical passages which are relevant to the issue. But if you would like to look into these things in more detail, then we can point you to some resources that will help.



Why Complementarianism?

“Complementarianism” is not a word you will find in the Bible - but it is trying to capture what the Bible teaches. In the same way that the term “Trinity” captures the unity of God in three persons Father, Son and Holy Spirit, even though the term itself is not a Bible word.

In particular, we see aspects of complementarianism in the Bible’s account of the creation of humanity, and then in the Bible’s teaching on salvation, on marriage, in Jesus’s attitudes to men and women, in the ministry patterns of the early disciples, and in the instructions about church life in the epistles.

The aim of this booklet is not to go into detail on these passages, but the bullet points below provide a brief summary.

- **Creation of humanity** - the whole of humanity is created equally in God’s image, and is created different as male and female (Gen 1:27). Eve’s creation as a ‘helper suitable’ for Adam comes because it is not good for him to be alone (Gen 2:18).
- **Salvation** - all are saved by grace and through no merit of our own. As a result we all have equal status in God’s kingdom, as children of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17). This transcends human social barriers like race, class or gender (Gal 3:28).
- **Marriage** - Adam and Eve’s relationship is held up as a blueprint for marriage (Gen 2:24). Furthermore, the relationship between husband and wife is to be modelled on that between Christ and the church (Eph 5). This means that husbands are called to love and to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their wives, while wives are called to respect and submit to their husbands (Eph 5 and 1 Pet 3).



- **Jesus's attitudes** - Jesus drew alongside both men and women, with both being among his close disciples. The Gospel writers each testify to Jesus' treating women with respect, frequently responding in ways that rejected cultural norms (John 4 is a good example). He saw their dignity, their desires and their gifts. Yet whilst having both men and women among his disciples, Jesus appoints twelve men to be his apostles.
- **The early ministry of the disciples** - The gospels, Acts, and the NT letters are full of examples of men and women being co-workers in ministry. Romans 16 is a good example, with its listing of men and women known to Paul.
- **Church life in the epistles** - the NT letters speak about the local church (especially 1 Corinthians, Titus and 1&2 Timothy).
Men and women are together to be involved in ministering as parts of the body (1 Cor 12, Rom 12).
There are also times when older men/women have a role in teaching younger men/women (Tit 2).
And we also see instructions that the role and function of elders in churches is to be filled by qualified men. The rationale given for this instruction is rooted in creation, rather than anything cultural or specific only to the churches being written to (1 Tim 2), and so it has ongoing application for us today.

Although this last point shows that complementarian churches think that overall leadership of the church should be done by men, it is important always to keep in mind the subversive way Jesus taught about leadership. Leadership, in the model of Jesus himself, is about service and sacrifice. Far from lording it over others, it is to put yourself last for the sake of others (Mark 10:42-45).

The reformers described ministers in the church as "servants of priests". Every believer is a part of the royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9), and those God has appointed as pastors and teachers are there to serve and equip them (Eph 4:12). Church leadership should never be about power and status.



From Principle to Practice

What follows are a few short statements of principles, followed by some bullet points of how we put these into practice - this isn't trying to be exhaustive but hopefully will show some of the ways we try to organise our church family life in line with what we think the Bible teaches.

Principle - Men and women are equal in dignity and value

- We do not value people according to the roles that they have in church or society, but because of their creation in the image of God.
- As Christians, we all enjoy equal status as God's children through the blood of Christ which he shed for our salvation. There is no hierarchy based on gifting or role.

Principle - Men and women are created different

- Although most of our ministry is "unisex" is relating to all believers, we have some ministries specifically for single-sex groups, because we value the ministry that men can have together, and women can have together:
 - We have a men's discipleship team and women's discipleship team, who organise termly evenings for men/women.
 - Growth Groups, whilst mixed, will sometimes split into male/female groups for prayer.
 - One-to-one ministry will normally be done with people of the same sex.

Principle - Men and women should serve together, complementing each other

- We seek to ensure that we have men and women serving together on the church staff team, and on our church council. For our two churchwardens, we look to appoint



one man and one woman.

- We try to have a both men and women on all of our ministry teams (with the exception of those ministries specifically for men or women).
- Growth Groups are always led by two or three people, with at least one man and one woman. Bible studies and prayer within the group can be led by any of the leaders (and this is often shared out more widely among the group too).
- In every Sunday service, we aim to have both men and women involved from the front, doing the service leading, Bible reading, prayers, children's talk, music.

Principle - the role and function ascribed to elders in the New Testament is to be exercised by men who fit the required character descriptions in the New Testament.

- The role of senior and associate minister at Christ Church Endcliffe is filled by men (as these we see as 'elder' roles within the church).
- Given our belief that the role of bishop should also be filled by men, we have passed a resolution to come under the episcopal care of the Bishop of Ebbsfleet - which is the Church of England's way of allowing complementarian churches to have oversight from male bishops who are sympathetic to their theology and understanding.
- We believe preaching at our church services is a "teaching with authority" that is part of the role of elder. So it is our senior and associate ministers who preach regularly. Other people who we would ask to preach on occasion are those who are discerning a call to ministry as church ministers, ministers from other churches (current or retired), mission partners who have an elder-like role, and other men recognised to meet the character description for elders in the New Testament.



Principle - this is a secondary, not primary, issue

- Agreement with the understanding laid out in this document is not a prerequisite for someone to join the church family and to become a formal member.
- We work together with other churches with whom we are united in the gospel, but who have a different understanding on this issue, or who agree on the principles but would put things into practice in a different way.
- A secondary issue is still an issue - and so we seek to be consistent and biblical in the way we work out our teaching and practice throughout our church life and ministries.

If you have any further questions, then please speak with one of our ministers.

