

# GENDER ROLITIS

Redeem Unhealthy Gender Roles



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Kirk E. Farnsworth

REDEMPTION   
P R E S S

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Cover Design: “Redemption: From Dark to Light—From the Foot of the Cross to New Identity in Christ”

You will find, with a little imagination, the cover of this book is a good picture of what redeeming unhealthy gender roles looks like.

1. Being redeemed is being set free from darkness into the light.
2. The Holy Spirit shines supernatural life-giving light that shapes maleness and femaleness.
3. The cross is the vehicle for the establishment of the power of the Light over darkness.
4. Redemption begins at the foot of the cross and is completed in Spirit-formed identity in Him who has risen.

Compare this process with John 1:1–34 and Ephesians 2:13–22 (although addressed specifically to the unification of Jews and Gentiles, Paul’s words of reconciliation can easily and truthfully be applied to the dividing walls of hostility between men and women.)



# Dedication

*To our daughter, Kristi, and daughters-in-law, Jane and Molly:*

- Each one empowered by her Spirit-shaped personality (unencumbered by gender roles)
- Each one gifted and winsome (thoughtful, cheerful and honorable in character, attitude and manner)
- Each one flourishing in a marriage blessed by mutuality.

*And to our sons, Craig and Eric, and son-in-law, Paul:*

- Each one empowered by his Spirit-shaped personality (unencumbered by gender roles)
- Each one kind and considerate (respectful, resourceful and responsive to the needs and feelings of others)
- Each one flourishing in a marriage blessed by mutuality.





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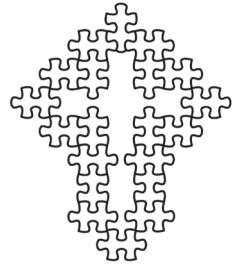
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# Foreword

I HAVE A PASSION FOR mutuality in husband-wife relationships and leadership in the family. I believe in a gifts-based partnership as opposed to a gender-based hierarchy. My wife Rosie and I have experienced, through fifty-five years of marriage, the Spirit-formed oneness in mutual submission to each other and mutual accountability to God that restores the heart, heals the hurt and renews the hope of every husband and wife who wants to be all that God is calling each of them to be.

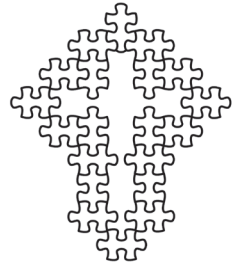
The issue is, who is doing the calling? Men or God? I am afraid far too many churches—just like society at large—have sold out to the age-old pattern of patriarchalism. Jesus himself made efforts to turn that upside-down, and the apostle Paul, and countless others since then, have engaged in the same never-ending struggle.

Sad to say, we're still practically where we started. But it depends on where we actually think it all started. I believe we must go all the way back to Genesis and the Creation and Fall. But even then, we find an argument of interpretation: God's presumed design vs. God's actual desire. Did He create us unequal or equal? Was male dominance

God's design, or was mutuality His real desire? I believe the sin of male dominance has been a major focus of redemptive history through Jesus ever since the Fall. My hope is that this book—fittingly published by Redemption Press—will make a small but significant contribution to the redemptive history of Christ the Redeemer, who redeems the genders by reestablishing His lordship over them.

So today, we have the same old choice to make: hierarchy or mutuality? And the resulting dilemma of who calls us—men or God? That need not be a problem, however. I like the idea of stepping back and taking some time to look at my life's history through spiritual eyes. That helps me recognize all the factors that shape my personhood. It involves prayerfully discovering and acknowledging my spiritual gifts, passion, natural abilities, personality traits, and life experiences. Then I am able to see how God has actually been working in my life, how He is calling me.

Rosie and I informally worked through this process early in our marriage. That made it easy for us to then take the next step: establishing complementary responsibilities within our marriage relationship. This freed us up to celebrate being two together as one, created by God, the same yet different, without being bound unequally to stereotyped, predetermined gender roles. That, in turn, freed us up to live contentedly in a Spirit-formed true partnership, seeking a common likeness of Christ, with a mission to further the Kingdom and give the glory to God.



# Introduction

IT HAPPENED OVER FIFTY YEARS ago, but it is burned into my memory. I was in a tough spot. A decision—a very personal decision with severe consequences—had to be made. I had two choices, and there was no way that I could get away with a Yogi Berra gem: When you come to a fork in the road, take it. No way. Not this time.

The problem concerned money. It was like two cars colliding in the middle of the road. Dead stop. Here we were, my wife and I, just married and getting settled in our little house in Zushi, Japan, several miles from the navy base in Yokosuka, where I as a newly-minted ensign was stationed.

We were discussing giving money to missionaries, which immediately brought to light major differences in our perspectives on the subject. Rosie had been raised in a Christian family and had been a follower of Christ for fifteen years. I, on the other hand, had been a Christian for less than a year. Also, Rosie was raised in a family of givers. I was raised in a family of savers—we did not give money to missionaries or anyone

else. The whole idea of giving money to missionaries was foreign and distasteful to me. I could not even imagine doing such a thing.

But Rosie had a different story to tell. She had begun giving her own money to missionaries as a student at Wheaton College. She looked at me with tears in her eyes and said, “You say we can’t afford to give. I say we cannot afford not to give. Are you saying that I must stop obeying God just because I got married?”

The line had been drawn. We had come to a fork in the road all right, but this was one mighty strong roadblock.

As I look back on this now, I can see that God prevented me from grieving Rosie’s spirit and stifling the Holy Spirit’s work through her obedience. I can also see that God prepared me for that foundational, future-defining moment, although I didn’t have a clue. I am so grateful I was not personally exposed to male dominance/abuse in my family life that would have distorted and obstructed the Holy Spirit’s work in developing me into a godly husband and father. The choice to be made was not for me as a so-called “spiritual leader” to make the final decision so proper order would be restored. Nor was it for me to just give in to my wife’s desires so everything would turn out rosy (pun intended). No, the only real choice to be made was for iron sharpening iron so joint decision-making could become our *modus operandi*.

We decided we would together give to missionaries. From that solid beginning, we have learned through the years that God does in fact provide for our needs. He has truly blessed us in countless ways as we have been faithful to put Him first. Our legacy from our life together, growing old together, has been “a long obedience in the same direction.”<sup>1</sup>

Moving forward in time, another event sticks out in my mind. This time the problem was gender. Specifically, it concerned the issue of what women cannot do. I had just received my Ph.D. degree and begun work at the University of New Hampshire. The church we were attending needed a Sunday school superintendent, and the nominating committee

asked me to fill the position. I said no, but my wife was both interested and qualified. They came back with, “Why not do it together?” I said, “No, she’s a graduate of Wheaton, has a ton of experience, and her spiritual gifts include teaching and administration. She’s outstanding at both.”

There seemed to be a hidden agenda, which became clearer with their next suggestion: “What about if she serves with the former superintendent and his wife?”

“Why?” I asked.

“Well, your wife can do the work, he can make the announcements from the pulpit, and his wife can be a chaperone.” What a bunch of demeaning messages, not the least of which was that Rosie could do the job alone only if she were a man, qualifications notwithstanding. Her tearful response was, “The only thing that would make the difference would be if I shaved in the morning!”

Out of their desperation, she got the job. And when we moved to Illinois and then the state of Washington, she got many more jobs: teaching Bible studies for all ages and both genders (which she had been doing since she was seventeen years old); serving on several church governing boards; and copastoring a church (with me) all in a long obedience to her calling of pastor/teacher. *Every step of the way* she continued to encounter the gravitational pull of male dominance and authority. *Every step of the way* she resolutely (“in earnest, seriously, heart and soul, at any risk, at any price, cost what it may, all or nothing, rain or shine, sink or swim”—*Roget’s Thesaurus*) fought back with the gravitational pull of biblical equality.

In this book I will be addressing issues concerning both genders. However, I must say I have been more deeply involved both emotionally and intellectually with male-female relationship issues than with strictly manhood-womanhood issues. It breaks my heart when I see a woman’s dignity being diminished and her spirit being numbed by male

dominance. Also, it makes me very angry when I see a man abusing a woman and breaking her spirit.

These issues have been predominant throughout my forty-year career as a counseling psychologist. I can say without hesitation that male dominance/abuse is the major issue I have had to deal with in working with troubled marriages. My approach has always been to reject hierarchical marriage/family structures and to replace them with the development of mutually-empowering relationships. This prevents fitting relationships into a gender-based hierarchical structure (patriarchalism)—as well as forcing both genders into a gender-neutrality-based androgynous structure (radical feminism). That being said, three basic concepts are the heartbeat of this book.

### **Mutuality: The Fundamental Organizing Principle**

I define mutuality as a deep sense of love and respect made visible by everyday expressions of affection and kind regard. Mutuality is also revealed by joint decision-making whenever possible, supplemented by mutually agreed-upon areas of personal responsibility based on interest, ability and trust. It incorporates both equality (giving and receiving in equal amounts) and complementarity (giving and receiving for the common good). One is individual; one is communal. Mutuality is both.

Mutuality defines our submission to each other and our personal accountability directly to God. Mutuality facilitates true freedom in Christ through a gifts-based partnership structure: oneness in spirit, in one accord; each one filled with the Holy Spirit, under the lordship of Jesus Christ. It is the process of marrying each other in an atmosphere of intimacy (“unpretended love”—1 Pet. 1:22 BERK) and unity. It is not unanimity, the appearance of oneness through unchallenged hierarchical order—elbows together but hearts apart.



I look back at the development of mutual empowerment in my own marriage, starting with the “foundational, future-defining moment” Rosie and I had in Japan and see the jump-starting process of developing our own domestic gender code. Then several years later when I wrote my doctoral dissertation on “The Vocational Interests of Women,” I began the process of developing my own academic gender code. It’s amazing to me that the two fit together so nicely. My dissertation was about the limiting of possibilities for women in the world of work—just like the limitations for ministry put upon women in the church, only for different reasons.

My research revealed that the psychological tests used at the time to measure the vocational interests of women were biased by the narrow-minded imaginations of the men who constructed the tests. These men had strong preconceptions that women are interested in work outside the home only as a stopgap until marriage, in other words premarital, non-career filler, something to fall back on “just-in-case,” --etc. This naturally translated into severely limiting women’s vocational possibilities to the gender roles of homemaking and undifferentiated careers in general!

My research also verified the groundbreaking existential reality for women of meaningful work in and of itself. Women have career-related interests that are not simple (either-or) but complex: business, clerical, law, leadership, professional athletics, research, science, teaching—to name a few.<sup>2</sup>

Now it’s time to build a bridge between yesterday and today. The dissertation was done in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my degree. This book is a declaration in partial fulfillment of the requirements of my calling. Together they are a “long obedience in the same direction.” To God be the glory.

Looking to the future, I see sex-role identification/identity issues getting worse rather than better. I see an ever-widening gulf between

the sexes getting us further and further away from the foundational biblical truth that both men and women were created in the image of God and that we are joined together as human beings with His Son as joint-heirs in the Kingdom of God. It is unbiblical—antibiblical—to tear apart that which God Himself has joined together by letting our failed imaginations and cultural indoctrinations distort our God-given image into a ready-made, one-size-fits-all credential (ID) for entry into that Kingdom.

Of course, we know we enter into the Kingdom because of Jesus, not because of our credentials. He is our salvation. Our identification with certain positions all Christians supposedly must take on certain issues connected to working out our salvation is not our salvation.

### **Gender Rolitis: The Major Problem**

In this book, the issues are gender issues. For example, “true believers” will actually say, “You’re not a Christian because you believe this (or don’t believe that) about sex roles.” It’s gone from doctrine to dogma, from theory to law, from “It goes without saying” confidence to litmus test certainty. One thing is certain for sure. That is the unrelenting, ubiquitous existence of what I have come to call “Gender Rolitis”—an inflammatory disease of the mind that paralyzes the spiritual senses of imagination and reason and arouses an intense, feverish proclivity to biologically predetermined gender roles.<sup>3</sup> It reduces personhood to codified male and female roles that severely restrict the possibilities for developing one’s calling. Further, it creates a toxic culture in the family and the church and workplace.

Gender Rolitis also endangers two other *spiritual senses* in addition to the two just mentioned:

1. Intuition: preconsciously tending toward knowing something, without knowing that you know it
2. Conscience: knowing right from wrong, with a compulsion to do right
3. Imagination: finding meaning
4. Reason: discovering truth.

These are the places of divine interaction with the process of human being. The four spiritual senses are the human faculties that provide pathways for the *divine disruption* of our shortsighted humanness. They are the supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit that provide *personal connection* with God.

Gender Rolitis creates closed-mindedness and misdirection, along with evangelizing zeal of the like-minded, which in turn create a judgmental atmosphere that threatens the unity of the church by trying to make all Christians believe the same thing concerning nonessentials of the faith. This forces many faithful followers of Christ who disagree to silently and painfully endure assumed identification with the positions taken by the zealots. That's what I refer to as *fake IDs*. Make-me-believe (some would simply say make-believe) IDs are fake IDs that are not at all honoring to the Lord.

### **Calling: The Pathway to Peace**

It's time to quit playing games. It's time to stop suffering in silence. Now is the time to honor the Lord by knowing and accepting His calling in your life. Biblically speaking, calling is Spirit-formed. Calling is a divine compulsion, not a human inclination. It is God's summons to a special relationship with Him and an assignment to fill for Him. Your calling is to be whom Jesus wants you to be and to do what He wants you to do, as a Spirit-formed citizen of the Kingdom.

The meaning of Spirit-formed is beautifully articulated by renowned spiritual leader and author, Jack Hayford, in his book *Living the Spirit-Formed Life*.<sup>4</sup> It begins with a) being *Spirit-born* by receiving a pardon for our sins through faith in Jesus as our Savior and Lord, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (referring to Acts 2: 38–39), and b) being *Spirit-filled*. This is “receiving the promise Jesus gave that His followers shall receive [supernatural] power”<sup>5</sup> in being witnesses for Him (referring to Acts 1:8; 2:1–4).

But “the entry door of new birth and the birthright blessing of Holy Spirit fullness are only beginnings—both calling us as believers to *growth* in Christ’s likeness and *discipleship* under His lordship”<sup>6</sup> (referring to Rom. 12:1–2 and Acts 2:42, 46–47). This is c) being *Spirit-formed*, shaped by “the kind and quality of life in Christ that is characterized by all the passion and power of true Holy Spirit-fullness.”<sup>7</sup> And, “The call to the Spirit-formed life defines the normal Christian life as conceived by our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

So I ask you, *Who called you?* Was it close-minded men holding strictly to their misguided hierarchical/patriarchal views of divine order? Or is it possible it was demonic forces through sinful, institutionalized gender-based role restrictions of women—sexist oppression of women through attitudinal and structural evil?<sup>9</sup> Or did God call you through “the *dynamic, personal ministry of the Holy Spirit*”?<sup>10</sup>

That is what this book is all about.