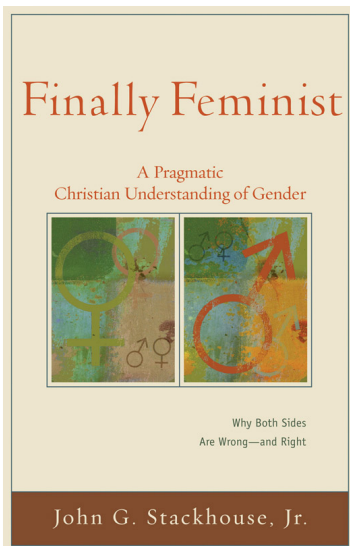


Finally Feminist

A Pragmatic Christian Understanding of Gender



by
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A Study Guide in Ten Sessions

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Session One

Chapter 1: Toward a New Paradigm

Definitions and Terminology

1. How do you understand the terms “feminist,” “patriarchalist,” “complementarian,” and “egalitarian”? What emotions are evoked or experiences come to mind when you encounter these terms?
2. How does Stackhouse define the terms “feminist/feminism” and “patriarchalist/traditionalist” (see pages 17–19)?
3. How does your understanding of the above terms coincide with or diverge from Stackhouse’s definition?
4. What are the limitations, if any, of the current terminology used to describe the positions held in the gender debate? Would you be comfortable with placing yourself under one of these labels? Why?
5. How important is it to the gender discussion that our terms are defined similarly?

Understanding the Sides

1. What does Stackhouse see as the main contention of traditionalists/patriarchalists/complementarians (see page 19)?
2. Stackhouse defines feminists as “those who resist what they judge to be *arbitrary, ungrounded* distinctions between men and women and the discrimination that attends such distinctions” (see page 18). What are some commonly held *arbitrary, ungrounded* distinctions between men and women? What makes these distinctions ungrounded? How do such distinctions lead to discrimination? What *legitimate* distinctions can be made between men and women?
3. Which side of the debate do you identify with? Considering your background (i.e., family, education, and professional, religious, and social networks), what has shaped your view of gender?
4. What do you have to gain or lose by settling on each of the positions in the gender debate?
5. How can you compensate for your own predispositions, limitations, and desires in order to hear the voice of God as clearly, searchingly, and transformationally as possible?

Session Two

The Importance of Theological Method

1. Stackhouse states a “principle of general theological method” that arose out of his own wrestling with the gender question (see page 23). How would you restate this principle in your own words?
2. What is the aim of Stackhouse’s “principle of general theological method” (see page 24)?
3. What principle, whether implicit or explicit, do you use to work through issues in general and the gender debate in particular? How does this coincide with or diverge from Stackhouse’s principle?
4. What are the strengths of Stackhouse’s principle of general theological method? What are your reservations about this principle?
5. Keeping in mind that theology is the study of God, why is it important to reflect on our theological method? What are the dangers if we ignore theological method?

Wesleyan Quadrilateral

1. Stackhouse suggests that Christians make decisions utilizing the four elements of the so-called Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Bible, tradition, reason, and experience (see page 27). List the common arguments for or against the two sides of the gender debate (see pages 24–27) and categorize each according to which element or elements of the Quadrilateral it employs. Do certain positions tend to emphasize a particular element or elements?
2. Which element do you tend to rely on the most as you work through the gender debate? Do you find yourself relying on other elements when you deal with other issues, such as deciding on a career, a treatment for illness, or whom to vote for in an election?
3. Why is it important to acknowledge that Christians do access the Wesleyan Quadrilateral in thinking through issues, and in particular, the gender debate?
4. Stackhouse suggests that to limit one’s investigation to just one of these zones—Bible, tradition, reason, or experience—is deficient theology (see page 28). “Proof-texting,” in particular, provides a vivid example of how deficient theology can be dangerous. Do you agree with Stackhouse’s conclusion?
5. Stackhouse also mentions the importance of “control texts” for interpreting other texts (see pages 28–30). How does Stackhouse define “control texts”? What “control texts” dominate your views on the role of women in church? In family? In society? How do you reconcile conflicting views arising from differences in control texts?

Session Three

Inductive vs. Deductive

1. What is the difference between the inductive and deductive methods of thinking (see pages 31–32)?
2. What are the strengths of the inductive method? What are its weaknesses?
3. What are the strengths of the deductive method? What are its weaknesses?
4. Which method (inductive or deductive) do you most often use? Why do you lean toward this particular method?
5. Why does Stackhouse elect to use the deductive method in investigating the gender issue? Do you agree with his choice?

Chapter 2: The Paradigm

A Theory for Understanding Gender

1. According to Stackhouse, should we think of Christian affirmations on gender as clear instruction or as complicated wisdom? What is the basis for Stackhouse's conclusion (see chapter two)? Do you agree or disagree?
2. The view on the role of women in the church and in the home has evolved to more than just the pure complementarian (women cannot lead) or pure egalitarian (women can lead) positions. What are some of the intermediate models on gender that have developed (see page 34)?
3. How satisfactory do you think these intermediate models are for women? For men? Evaluate these intermediate models. Do they make sense logically?
4. Stackhouse's paradigm/model of gender is "full-blown egalitarianism." How does he define this position (see page 35)?
5. What is appealing about Stackhouse's model? What, if any, are your reservations about this model?

Session Four

Equality

1. The first principle of Stackhouse's paradigm is that "men and women are equal in every way" (see page 35). Where does Stackhouse ground this principle? Do you agree with his interpretation?
2. With this principle in mind, how does Stackhouse make sense of existing gender distinctions (see page 57)? What qualifications to this egalitarian vision does he give? Do you agree or disagree with his assessment?
3. How would gender relations in the church and in the home change if we took the principle of equality seriously? What hinders the full embrace of equality in our churches today? In our homes?
4. Consider how Stackhouse makes sense of the following passages (see pages 50–73): 1 Cor. 11:1–10; 14:34–35; Eph. 5:22–33; Col. 3:18–19; 1 Tim. 2:11–12; 1 Pet. 3:1–7; Lev. 12:1–5. Do you agree with Stackhouse's view that these passages, which are often taken to bolster the complementarian view, may also be interpreted in an egalitarian manner?
5. What "control texts" are guiding Stackhouse's vision? Do these coincide with or diverge from your own "control texts"?

Gospel Priorities and Holy Pragmatism

1. The second principle to Stackhouse's paradigm is that "some things matter more than others" (see page 38). For Stackhouse, what is the most important consideration? What principle arises out of this consideration? Define the principle in your own words.
2. How does the principle of accommodation help to make sense of the seemingly contradictory biblical passages concerning gender?
3. What are the strengths of the principle? What, if any, reservations do you have about this principle?
4. Do you agree with Stackhouse that there may be situations where patriarchy must be tolerated even when it is not the best option for women?
5. Can you think of current situations where this attitude of accommodation to patriarchy may be necessary?

Session Five

Eschatology

1. How does eschatology (i.e., the study of last things) add to or change our understanding of gender (see page 41ff.)?
2. “What would our understanding of gender look like if we took the ‘already but not yet’ principle [of eschatology] seriously” (see page 42)?
3. What evidence do we see that the kingdom of God is already being established in the area of gender relations?
4. What evidence do we see that the kingdom of God has not yet been fully established in the area of gender relations?
5. How can we help each other live in the tension of the “meanwhile,” particularly in the area of gender relations?

Liberty

1. How can gospel priorities limit Christian liberty?
2. Do you agree with Stackhouse that Christian liberty should be limited by gospel priorities? Why?
3. Have you had to constrain yourself for the sake of the gospel? What are the difficulties surrounding the decision? How did you feel? What allows you to freely limit your liberty?
4. Why must considerations about the advancement of the kingdom of God be foremost in our thinking on all issues, even of gender (see page 49)?
5. In what ways do we often lose sight of this kingdom perspective as we engage in the gender discussion?

Session Six

The Church

1. What is your experience of leadership in the church? In what ways can the leadership of women enhance your church's leadership?
2. What hinders the practice of egalitarianism in the church?
3. Why does Stackhouse suggest that in modern society the scandal is that the "church is *not* going along with society that is at least officially egalitarian" (see page 56)? In what way has the context of modern North American society changed such that egalitarianism now better aids in the furtherance of the gospel than complementarianism?
4. How do you think complementarianism aids or hinders the furtherance of the gospel in your own context?
5. How do you think egalitarianism aids or hinders the furtherance of the gospel in your own context?

The Home

1. What is your experience of leadership in the home? In what ways does it reflect or not reflect the equality of women? How can equality be improved in your home?
2. What hinders the practice of egalitarianism in the home?
3. Stackhouse also cites slavery, parent-child relationships, and patriarchy in the Torah as examples of the principle of accommodation (see pages 57–66). How do these help to illuminate the gender discussion, particularly in husband-wife relations?
4. What does it mean to you that wives are to "be subject" to their husbands as Paul commands in Eph. 5:21–33? How does Stackhouse interpret this passage (see pages 59–62)? Do you agree or disagree with this interpretation?
5. How does Stackhouse interpret the difficult passage of 1 Pet. 3:7, in which women are described as the weaker sex (see pages 62–63)? Must that passage necessarily teach patriarchy? Do you agree or disagree with Stackhouse's interpretation?

Session Seven

Suggestive Pattern of Doubleness

1. Stackhouse suggests that a pattern of doubleness in reading major biblical passages on gender is key to his paradigm (pages 63ff.). What does Stackhouse mean by this pattern of doubleness? Can you cite some examples Stackhouse gives? Why is this pattern key to Stackhouse's model?
2. How does Stackhouse make sense of this pattern of doubleness in his paradigm for gender?
3. How can the principle of accommodation help to illuminate the difficult passages of 1 Cor. 14:33–35 and 1 Tim. 2:1–4?
4. Stackhouse suggests that a pattern of doubleness is also evident in church history. Where in the history of the church is this pattern most evident (see page 54ff.)?
5. Stackhouse concedes that some of Paul's teaching seems to support patriarchy (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:7–10; 1 Tim. 2), yet he maintains that one does not have to read such passages that way since Paul also teaches egalitarianism elsewhere (Eph. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:1–7). In what ways do you agree or disagree with the above statement?
6. Does Stackhouse's theory of a suggestive pattern of doubleness in Scripture ring true for you? Why is there such scriptural ambiguity? What are the strengths of this approach to reading Scripture? What are the dangers?
7. Complementarians often argue that men and women are equal, but still they are called to play different roles with men being chosen to lead. How would a complementarian typically respond to the question, "Why would God call entirely equal sexes to deeply different roles?" (see page 70). How convincing is the complementarian's argument? How is it deficient?
8. Why does Stackhouse argue that the complementarian position above has become incoherent? What evidence does he offer to support his contention (see pages 70–73)? How strong or weak do you think his argument is?
9. How important is it to develop a coherent theology of gender?
10. How can we test our theology to determine if it is coherent?

Session Eight

Chapter 3: Responses to Arguments

1. Which arguments from theology do you resonate with the most? Which arguments from theology do you resonate with the least? Why? (see pages 76–81)
2. Which arguments from church history are the most persuasive for you? Which are the least persuasive? Why? (see pages 81–86)
3. Which arguments, if any, from contemporary experience and practice do you find most convincing? Which are the least convincing? Why? (see pages 86–97)
4. What is your assessment of Stackhouse’s treatment of these arguments? What are the strengths and weaknesses of Stackhouse’s approach?
5. How does realism help us to understand the resilience of patriarchy? (see pages 95, 98)
6. What additional principles does Stackhouse offer to balance the principle of accommodation he has developed (see pages 84, 96)? How important are these additional principles to Stackhouse’s paradigm?
7. In what critical ways can men use their “power” to advocate for Christian feminism? What are the limits to men’s advocacy?
8. In what practical ways can women advocate for Christian feminism? What are the limits to women’s advocacy?
9. What are some of the practical principles Stackhouse suggests in response to a social situation involving patriarchy, whether in the church or at home (see pages 97–101)? Which of these principles appeal to you the most? Which of these principles is most difficult for you to follow?
10. What are some of the different kinds of activism that one can engage in particularly in the gender debate? What is a realistic activism for you?

Session Nine

Appendix A: How Not to Decide about Gender

1. Why is it important for Stackhouse that the question of Christianity and gender be located within the broader context of hermeneutics (see page 105)? What are the dangers if we do not do so?
2. What is biblicism and why does Stackhouse suggest that this is a deficient approach in responding to issues and, in particular, gender issues? What are the dangers to a biblicist approach? What is the appeal to this approach?
3. The second interpretive shortcut Stackhouse warns against is trusting in the common wisdom of society. What is wrong with simply accepting what society values as right? How can we guard against this error?
4. The last interpretive shortcut Stackhouse talks about is personal intuition. What are the appeals of this approach? What are the dangers? How are we to overcome these dangers?
5. Which of the interpretive shortcuts Stackhouse mentions are you most prone to? How can you guard against falling into any of these interpretive shortcuts?

Appendix B: A Woman's Place Is in . . . Theology?

Bible Translations (pages 115–20)

1. Is there a particular Bible translation that you prefer? Why do you prefer it?
2. How do you feel about gender-inclusive translations? Why do you feel that way?
3. Stackhouse mentions some of the fears that have arisen with the advent of inclusive translations (see page 118). Do you believe these fears are well grounded? Why?
4. Why do you think translators have decided to make biblical language inclusive?
5. In what ways do you think the inclusive translations can edify the church and the world?

Session Ten

Appendix B

Inclusive Language for God (pages 120–23)

1. Recent scholarship has largely underscored that the dominant biblical portrait of God is drawn with masculine imagery. How has this predominantly masculine imagery served, and how does it still serve, to perpetuate unjust relations between men and women?
2. How can we maintain the pattern of doubleness (egalitarian and patriarchal images) in the Bible even as we speak of God?
3. What are the dangers of amending or adjusting our images of God in order to be more explicitly feminist (see page 123)?

The Pursuit of Feminine Theology (pages 123–29)

1. Stackhouse states that there is too little imaginative and scholarly exploration of new ways—feminist ways—of reading the Bible and constructing theology (see page 123). Why do you think women do not engage in this field of scholarship? Why do you think men do not take up distinctive feminist concerns in their biblical scholarship?
2. Stackhouse further observes that “what comes across again and again in such [feminist] scholarship is an absence of God as the Author of Scripture” (see page 126). What is the danger of such an absence? Do you agree with Stackhouse’s assessment of feminist scholarship such as that of Phyllis Trible?
3. What would a feminist approach to the Bible look like?
4. What insights has feminist scholarship added to biblical scholarship and theology?
5. What uniquely feminist concerns does Stackhouse identify as missing in current biblical and theological scholarship (see pages 127–29)? Are there others you can add?
6. How can the blossoming of feminist voices in biblical and theological scholarship be encouraged?