

RE, Philosophy and Ethics (RPE) –

Closure work for Year 9

Continuing with this topic on the Philosophy and Ethics of Relationships, you are going to understand the traditional and changing roles of men and women in the family, what gender equality means and the Christian response to gender equality.

Tasks

1. Read the knowledge
2. Summarise the knowledge in your notes
3. Respond to these questions:
 - a. What is meant by gender equality?
 - b. What do Christians believe about the roles of men and women?
 - c. How are the literal and liberal views on gender equality different?

Roles of men and women

The roles of men and women have seen a lot of changes in modern society. The term **gender equality** means that all people of all genders are able to enjoy the same rights and opportunities in all aspects of their lives.

UK laws now mean that men and women should have equal rights in all areas such as pay, the right to vote and the job they do. However, this is not always the case, and certainly not always in religion, as men and women have traditionally had different roles to play in religious customs.

The roles of men and women can differ between Christian denominations.

Jesus and early Christians lived in a male-dominated society and the Bible reflects this. The belief that men and women should have different roles is still common in some Christian communities today. This is because they believe that God made men and women differently.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. **St Paul's letter to the Ephesians 5:21-22**

Other Christians believe that men and women were both made in the image of God and should be treated equally – they should share responsibilities and privileges.

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. **St Paul's letter to the Galatians 3:28**

Many Catholics believe husbands and wives should respect each other's roles within a marriage and value both equally. These roles include those of care within the home, and that of earning money to provide for the family.

Men should truly esteem and love women with total respect for their personal dignity, and society should create and develop conditions favouring work in the home. **Pope John Paul II**

The book of Genesis gives accounts of the order of creation of men and women which have been interpreted differently.

The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.' **Genesis 2:18**

Interpreting teachings on gender

The different attitudes to the roles of men and women come from the way the believer interprets certain texts in the Bible.

Literal view

Denominations who take a more literal view of the Bible tend to stick to the original teachings from the Bible, believing they should not be changed.

Liberal view

Denominations who take a more liberal approach often believe that the teachings in the Bible need updating in today's society, so they are willing to make some changes.

Catholics may get their views on the roles of men and women from passages such as this:

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.**1 Timothy 2:11-12**

Other denominations, such as the Church in Wales, may take other teachings into account about the roles of men and women.

For all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**Galatians 3:27-29**

There are also many examples of equality in the New Testament, such as the Golden Rule and the way that Jesus respected women and had many women followers. An example of one of these women is Mary Magdalene, who played a role in one of the most important scenes in the Gospels. When Jesus was crucified by the Romans, Mary Magdalene was there supporting him in his final moments mourning his death. It was Mary Magdalene who discovered Jesus' empty tomb, and she was the first person to witness Jesus' resurrection.

In the early Christian Church all of the original disciples were men. However, there are examples of women disciples, such as in Luke's gospel, which tells of a group of women who were also Jesus' followers:

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.**Luke 8:1-3**