**Men and Women in Ministry**

*A biblical guide for teaching and practice at Whittier Hills Baptist Church*

**Parts 1 & 2**

Position Paper in Brief

&

Extended Position Paper

Approved by the Overseers of WHBC

June 2012

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**Introduction**

Central to our identity as individuals is that God created us “in his image” – as male and female. We celebrate how men and women – walking together in the Spirit – relationally complement one another. Like a God-glorifying marriage displays Christ’s character, a local church similarly reveals God’s gracious glory when men and women minister together in harmony according to God’s intentions.

Ironically, God’s unifying intent for men and women to serve together has become one of the most contested issues in the church today. The issue of contention centers on how we should interpret Scripture’s teaching regarding ministry roles for men and women in the church. We recognize that our subjective experiences affect our interpretations. If the track record of church history revealed a consistent pattern of men demonstrating leadership humbly, wisely, sacrificially, and lovingly, the problems related to this question might be greatly reduced. Our desire is to see men valiantly embrace God’s calling for Christ-like leadership in the home and in the church. Similarly, we desire to see women eagerly embrace their distinctive roles as partners in the home and the church, fully engaged in God’s callings.

Our focus for this study is to clarify the relationship between women and men in ministry in the context of the church, and particularly to explore whatever distinctions Scripture affirms. This topic raises some challenging questions: If role distinctions are confirmed, does God still value men and women equally? What is God’s intent for men and women in ministry partnership? What guidelines has God established for local church leadership related to gender? Do the Scriptures affirm any limitations for women regarding their ministry roles?

The overseers of Whittier Hills Baptist Church have engaged in extensive, prayerful study and discussion to develop a teaching position on this subject. Our goal is to promote respectful harmony on this issue. This paper is intended to provide our official guide for the doctrine and practice of our church. We recognize there are a variety of approaches taken by Bible believing churches. As we have studied these issues in Scripture, we have come to a unified conviction on major themes that help us determine our practice in our local church context. Part 1 of this paper is intended for broad readership. Here we offer a synopsis of our conclusions from our study (p. 5), present a summary of our official church position (p. 6), and then address answers to expected questions on areas of practical application (p. 7).

For those who wish to understand better the study and reasoning behind these conclusions, we encourage you to continue reading. Part 2 provides a fuller overview of the topic, followed by an extensive development of Old and New Testament Scriptures pertinent to these issues. Our prayer is that the study of this significant issue will serve a unifying purpose in our church as we affirm what God has established for our benefit and for his glory.

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**Synopsis of the Biblical Conclusions**

In Genesis 1-2, we are told that men and women image God *together,* as male and female. This initial reality establishes an equality of worth and value among men and women. Additionally, Genesis 2 lays down a pattern for complementary roles where the husband is given responsibilities and the wife is to assist as God’s appointed “helper.” It is significant that these honorable roles are established prior to the entrance of sin in Genesis 3, which inevitably brings God’s original designs into new tension. The rest of the Old Testament presents a variety of men and women engaged in strategic, wide-ranging, honorable ministry. Yet the regular pattern of headship in the home is never undermined. Meanwhile the primary, spiritual worship leadership throughout Israel’s history is consistently assigned to men.

Similarly in the New Testament, all women and men “in Christ” share equality in value to God and now also in direct spiritual access to God and his blessings. In the church, women are led by the Holy Spirit to participate fully in crucial ministry among the body, alongside men. The New Testament reveals both an expansion of the visibility of women in ministry, and also the reaffirmation of the underlying context of male headship. Affirming the appropriateness of complementary role relationships, God has tasked men to lead their families and their churches; and has called wives to ably assist their husbands (at home) and women to be active partners (in the church). Male leadership is to be exercised with sacrificial love and care, modeled after Christ. Women are seen to respectfully participate in prayer and prophecy and other visible ministries, under willing submission to their husbands at home and church leaders in the assembly. They are to be active learners of God’s truth and vibrant in ministry leadership and influence among other women, widows, and children. The repeated limitation for women is in the realm of teaching men in a way that could be viewed as exercising authority, and thereby undermining headship and God’s intention for complementary relationships.

We find in the New Testament one ministry position reserved exclusively for men:

**The role of overseer is the only official ministry in the church that separates men from women, the sole position which is open only to men, and only to those particular men who meet the biblical qualifications. This distinguishing spiritual leadership position centers on two interrelated roles for which overseers are accountable to God:**

1. **Being responsible to provide spiritual oversight and direction as the official leaders of the congregation; including**
2. **Exercising authority through teaching that establishes and protects the doctrine of the church.**

We are convinced that this synopsis represents the heart of consistent biblical teaching based on both the broad sweep of Scripture and the careful examination of critical passages particularly germane to the issue. The biblical issues are developed much more fully in the larger section of this paper, which follows in Part 2. This synopsis of the biblical teachings leads us to establish our official church position for teaching and practice which follows here.

**Summary of WHBC’s Position for Teaching and Practice**

* We affirm that God created men and women in true equality, but with particular role distinctions in the home and later in the leadership of the church. This position is commonly referred to as “complementarian.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The essence of this is that men and women are recognized to have differing roles which are mutually beneficial.
* We affirm that the roles God has established follow a pattern of male “headship” in the home and the church, modeled after Christ’s loving sacrificial leadership; and that God has called women to honor this role by being willing and respectful partners in the home and in ministry in the church.
* We affirm that God established the church under the loving, sacrificial leadership of a group of leaders referred to in Scripture primarily by the synonymous terms “overseers” and “elders.”[[2]](#footnote-2) This leadership office is open to males who satisfy certain requirements laid down in God’s Word (notably in Epistles of 1Timothy and Titus).
* We affirm that the primary role of these overseers is to function as the leaders responsible to provide spiritual oversight[[3]](#footnote-3) for the entire church. This includes exercising authority[[4]](#footnote-4) through teaching that confirms doctrinal positions. A memorable way to consider the interplay of the key roles is that overseers “Guide Direction” and “Guard Doctrine.” In other words, the overseers determine where the church is going and what the church believes.
* We affirm the full participation of women with men in every ministry area in the church, except overseer leadership and authoritative teaching of men. These roles are reserved for men. The reason women are restricted from teaching in the gathered assembly is not because they are unable or unqualified to accurately communicate scriptural truth, but because teaching doctrine necessarily includes an oversight component. In relation to men, this runs the risk of violating the principle of headship.
* We affirm that the office of deacon is shared equally among men and women, as it is one of special service, not authoritative teaching or leadership oversight.
* We affirm that we must hold unswervingly to the truth of God’s Word, humbly and graciously, both firmly and respectful towards those with differing views.

The above affirmations will guide all teaching and practice at Whittier Hills Baptist Church. While we recognize that there may be some who hold to more egalitarian or more hierarchical positions,[[5]](#footnote-5) we ask all members of WHBC to respect these affirmations, to work toward unity, and not to promote teachings in our church setting that are contrary to this position established by the overseers.

**Key Application Questions**

 Below are key questions we expect some people may ask. This Q&A can offer a view of how this policy is to be applied at WHBC:

* **May a woman serve as a deacon at WHBC?**

Yes. This office of ministry service is open to qualified men and women.

* **May a woman serve as an overseer (“pastor” or “elder”) at WHBC?**

No. This office of official oversight is limited by the Scriptures to qualified men.

* **May a woman have “up front” roles that involve speaking in church gatherings?**

Yes. A woman may pray, read Scripture, offer testimony, give exhortation, offer spiritual insight, proclaim the gospel, lead in worship, minister through music, receive offerings, greet people, promote ministries, share praises, participate in and chair commissions, etc. just like men for the building up of the body and under the authority of the overseers of WHBC.

* **May women be involved in serving communion and in baptizing?**

Yes and no. We see no scriptural injunction against women being involved in the distribution of the elements of the bread and cup representing Christ’s broken body and shed blood or in partnering with the baptizing of believers. However, the person presiding over communion and leading baptisms is to be a male – as leading the church in our primary ordinances implies overseer-like authority. Assisting roles may be viewed as deacon functions.

* **Are women encouraged to actively learn Bible doctrine and to develop skills in exegesis and Bible interpretation?**

Yes. First, this is of enormous personal benefit for growth and worship. Second, this learning and skill development is essential for effective teaching and personal ministry to others.

* **Are women encouraged to exercise teaching ministries at WHBC?**

Yes. Women are heartily encouraged to exegete well and teach effectively in ministry to other women and to children within the WHBC body, and to their own children at home. These spheres of ministry are crucial and should not be minimized. Additionally, husbands and wives are encouraged to partner in a variety of counseling and discipleship ministries to both men and women.

* **Is there a circumstance where a woman would be allowed to teach Scripture to men?**

Yes. There may be occasions where there is a compelling reason to have a woman teach and where she will not encroach on the overseer role or violate the headship of her husband. There may be particular topics or scriptural passages that are especially fruitful when presented from a woman’s perspective or a particular woman might have special expertise.[[6]](#footnote-6) When an ABC has questions about the appropriateness of a given situation, they should consult an overseer.

* **May a woman serve as a regular, primary teacher of mixed-gender adult bible communities at WHBC?**

No. Certainly, women are fully capable of effectively interpreting scripture, proclaiming correct doctrine, and communicating engagingly. However, in our context, the purpose of our ABCs is to establish biblical literacy among men and women together. Primary teachers in such a setting are functioning in a way that overlaps significantly with the spiritual authority of overseers. For this reason we have determined that official class teachers must be qualified men. As a rule, a woman may not serve as the primary teacher in a worship service (i.e. the sermon), or teach in an Adult Bible Community as the lead teacher or on a regular basis in a teaching rotation.

* **May women be active participants in mixed-gender small groups?**

Yes. Women may speak freely and engage fully in mixed group discussions in Small Group ministries, as long as a wife is sensitive to her husband’s leadership role. This is a great opportunity to partner in ministry.

* **May a woman offer correction or counsel to a man?**

Yes. A woman may offer counsel or correction to a man as a fellow member of Christ’s body. If she is married, it is generally preferable for her to do so in partnership with her husband being an active participant.[[7]](#footnote-7) To confront an overseer requires multiple witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19). Whenever correction or counsel are given to a person of the opposite gender (either a woman speaking to a man, or a man to a woman) particular wisdom must be exercised and it is often best to partner with someone of the same gender in the interaction.

* **Are women free to pursue *every other ministry?***

Yes. We heartily encourage women to freely and fully engage in all forms of ministry at WHBC other than what is specifically restricted above. Women have every bit as much to offer as men do and may offer some things men cannot. WHBC needs full and wide participation in ministry by both women and men. We want an environment that is affirming and freeing for everyone – including unleashing women to do everything God calls them to do within the structure he has established.

* **Is submission only an issue for women?**

No. Every member of WHBC is under spiritual authority, submitting to Christ by submitting to the leadership he has established over his church. Individual overseers (including the Senior Pastor) serve under the authority of the Board of Overseers and submit to the counsel and decisions of the whole group. The collective group of overseers are servant leaders whose primary focus is submitting to Christ and his word, and helping the whole body do the same.

* **What does male “headship” in the home look like?**

We encourage each couple to prayerfully and lovingly work this out together in a way distinctive to their partnership. But the following is a starting point: The husband should winsomely take primary responsibility for guiding the family in a way that it thrives spiritually and relationally and brings glory to God. He will be held accountable to God for this. Meanwhile, the wife should honor the husband’s efforts here and offer helpful support in implementation. How this partnership plays out will vary from family to family according to the backgrounds, personalities, abilities, and spiritual maturity of each spouse, among other factors. The husband should not domineer over his wife, but model and lead with humility and sensitivity. And the wife should not usurp God’s calling for her husband.

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**Preliminary Considerations**

God gave his highest praise to his creation of humanity as being “very good.” However, since our fall into sin, most of human history has evidenced unbiblical views of men and women in their relationship toward each other. In one severe direction, a chauvinistic, authoritarian patriarchy has been particularly influential in places where women are considered to be less valuable than men. Among present-day cultures, abusive hierarchical structures are exceedingly damaging to women physically and emotionally. Even America has its own history of treating women unequally in many areas of society.[[8]](#footnote-8) Meanwhile, the opposite pole includes occasions where a dominant feminism has taken root. First century Ephesus appears to be such a time where feminine traits were perhaps more highly valued than masculine traits, giving rise to goddess worship cults.[[9]](#footnote-9) Closer to home, we will sometimes hear of efforts within contemporary feminism to neutralize masculinity or to minimize acknowledging gender distinctions, or even to restore earth goddess worship.[[10]](#footnote-10) Inevitably, both unbiblical feminism and unbiblical patriarchy end up distorting the biblical view of God and bring contention to the church.

In contrast to this goddess worship, historic, biblical Christianity has been based on a worship of one God in three persons, two of whom, the Father and the Son, are consistently referred to with masculine pronouns. This has had a variety of effects on how relationships between men and women are viewed in Christian circles. Often, it has resulted in a hierarchical patriarchy which not only expects male authority in the home and the church but generalizes it to every arena of life. Abuse of power has never been sanctioned, nor has any form of official subjugation of women. Yet male leadership in the church has sometimes been used to justify a view that men are intrinsically superior and that their headship extends beyond the scripturally-sanctioned arenas of leadership responsibility in the home and the local church. Sometimes it has seemed that women were not actually valued equally with men. We are concerned that, in some circles, “traditional” Christianity has over-read the distinctions between men and women and has stumbled in applying biblical truth in practical daily life. At the same time we are concerned with a trend to minimize or even abandon distinctions that are clearly biblical.

***The Current Evangelical Debate***

Over the past thirty years, a tremendous amount of scholarly study and publishing has been pursued by evangelicals (those who affirm the Bible to be the authoritative Word of God and who affirm the need for salvation through Christ alone) in an attempt to determine what the Bible consistently teaches regarding humanity as “male and female” under Christ. Much discussion has centered on several of Paul's controversial writings in light of current scholarship. Unfortunately, instead of reaching consensus, evangelicalism has become divided into essentially two contrasting schools of interpretation. Both groups appeal to Scripture as the essential basis for their viewpoint and have first-rate biblical scholars in their corner. Both affirm the equal value of men and women and the broad participation of women in ministry. Both acknowledge wondrous distinctions of men and women and the divine intent of them living in complementary relationship to each other.[[11]](#footnote-11) The line of demarcation is over the issue of role or function in church ministry and the home.

The question dividing the groups is this: *Are there distinctive roles for qualified men from which women are restricted, solely based on gender?* Egalitarians firmly answer “no.” Complementarians insist on concluding “yes.” The common answer throughout church history is “yes,” although today’s complementarians distinguish themselves somewhat from the authoritarian, hierarchical aspects of the traditional heritage.

***Overview of the Two Primary Evangelical Positions***

***Egalitarian***

The egalitarian*[[12]](#footnote-12)*position asserts that there is full equality between men and women in being *and in roles.[[13]](#footnote-13)* It is argued that women should have equal access to all ministries, the exercising of all gifts, and the serving in all leadership positions including full ordination to pastoral and overseer posts. It denies that Scripture authorizes any God-ordained hierarchy or distinction of roles based on gender. Rather, in Christ all distinctions have been removed, leaving leadership roles to be determined solely on ability, not gender.[[14]](#footnote-14) This view considers Paul’s teachings – which appear to restrict women – to be cultural, temporary and not applicable for us today.[[15]](#footnote-15) One contributing stream among egalitarians sees a “trajectory” arising out of the Bible and moving beyond it through a “redemptive-movement hermeneutic,” which asserts that the Bible ends by pointing us toward an “ultimate” ethic, rather than by actually establishing an ongoing ethic. This provides a path for the church to move beyond specific teachings of Scripture.[[16]](#footnote-16)

***Complementarian***

The complementarian*[[17]](#footnote-17)* position maintains full equality of persons yet sees differences *in some roles.[[18]](#footnote-18)* Men and women share full equality in value – in their shared role in bearing God's image, and particularly in spiritual access to God through Christ. Men are not superior to women, nor are women as a class subordinate or inferior to men. Yet God made men and women different from each other. His design included biblically ordained differentiation of some roles that work together in a complementary fashion – being mutually beneficial for both men and women, and bringing glory to God. These role distinctions reflect aspects of God the Father toward Christ and of Christ toward us wherein humble loving headship and willing submissive partnership are affirmed in the family and within the church. This leader-helper structure concerns only roles, not personal value. In our church's embrace of the complementarian view, **all areas of ministry are fully open for women to serve according to their interests and abilities. The only exception is the role of primary spiritual leadership (overseer) and the ministry of authoritative teaching, which expresses this leadership in a local church.** This view seeks both to fully honor women and to remain true to clear New Testament teachings that restrict women at these particular points. Our convictions fall within the boundaries of the complementarian view, and this is the perspective presented in the remainder of this paper.

***What is at Stake and Why it Matters***

There are a number of important implications that result when one adopts either a complementarian or egalitarian perspective. Perhaps the two most critical issues at stake for our consideration are unity and scriptural authority. God has designed the local church to operate in the unity of the Spirit, speaking the truth in love, building up one another in love, and attaining to the unity of faith, with the goal of growing up into our Head, who is Christ (see Ephesians 4:1-16). Biblical unity is not something we arrive at by avoiding hard teachings, by deciding that doctrine is unimportant or divisive, by being quiet in controversial areas, or by affirming whatever seems to be “working” even if it contradicts seemingly plain teachings of Scripture. Biblical unity is attained as we submit our hearts and minds to Christ, our “head,” and follow even those teachings which conflict with the current of our culture. It is important for our church unity for our leadership to be both unified and settled on this issue.

While both complementarians and egalitarians can affirm this (above), we have our concerns about the egalitarian position on the second issue of scriptural authority. We do not question the heart or spirituality of egalitarian scholars – many of whom are godly, brilliant, and clearly insightful. But we do question the overall thrust of the position that seems to overturn historic understandings of both broad themes and particular verses. Our greatest concern relates to interpretations that may unintentionally lead to an erosion of biblical authority.

***The Challenge of Being Biblical***

We are not suggesting that being biblical is simple. Sometimes truth requires complex thought processes to be fully and accurately grasped. Nor do we believe Scripture can be properly articulated without engaging in dialogue with opposing views[[19]](#footnote-19) and with the larger culture. Being biblical has a number of inherent challenges.

***The Cultural Challenge***

We have a privilege and a responsibility to uphold the truth of God and to display it in the world. Our culture routinely pressures us to compromise or even deny truth. Often, God’s truth does not make sense to the world around us, and it can seem offensive. We must strive to stand firm for God’s truth and do so in a gracious, engaging way. Few questions provide a bigger challenge for doing this than the question of gender-based role distinctions. Additionally, we recognize that we Christians come to a topic and to particular texts already pre-conditioned by our prior experiences. Regardless of how we may initially *feel* about a particular topic or text, our responsibility is to determine what God’s Word is actually teaching.

***The Interpretive Challenge***

As we examine the Scriptures we need to keep in mind an important principle: God’s Word is without error; our understandingof it is not. For this reason – in addition to the myriad commands to love one another – we must be gracious toward those with different views and maintain modesty, even when soundly convinced, about our own. It takes hard work to be sure that we are listening to the voice of God and not merely to our own thoughts. To do this, there are actually several questions we must pursue distinctly. The first and foundational question is, What does the Bible *say* about the roles of men and women? We then have to ask, What does the Bible *mean* by what it says? This is important because language is always to be understood in context, which raises further sub-questions: What is going on in the society around the writers? How are arguments presented in a particular context? What do other passages tell us about the context? And how do we integrate other passages while treating each one with integrity unto itself? There are many questions we must examine to get at the author’s/Author’s[[20]](#footnote-20) original intended meaning. The intended meaning must be the anchor for our understanding of the text. Finally, we must ask, How does this apply to our lives today? On this issue, we are also pursuing how this applies to our church.

Careful interpretation is essential because many Scriptures speak to the question of gender roles, and some of them, at least on the surface, seem difficult to reconcile. For example, Ephesians 5:22-23 says, “Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church....” 1 Timothy 2 says, “I do not allow a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man.” These seem fairly straightforward until we read other passages that could be understood a different way. Galatians 3 tells us, “In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female.” 1 Corinthians 11 gives instructions for how women are to behave *as* they “prophesy” and “pray.” 1 Corinthians 14 says “When you come together *everyone* has a teaching to offer,” using the same word for teaching that 1 Timothy 2 forbids to women. Are we to understand Paul to say “everyone” in such a way that half of the people are excluded? Does Paul necessarily use the same word the same way in both 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians? And there are examples of specific women who played significant spiritual roles, such as Priscilla. By what process do we resolve these tensions?

We must give careful and prayerful thought to this question. The answer is not easy, and pressures from opposing directions make it hard for us to clearly hear God’s Word without bias.

***Foundational Questions***

At a foundational level we must ask, Why are there two kinds of people? Why did God make us male and female? There were no rules when he began creation. God worked from a “blank slate” and did everything for a purpose. Certainly our gender differences allow us to procreate, but are there other purposes in making us of two kinds? Is procreation a sufficient purpose for creating us this way? Or, for that matter, God could have designed us in any number of kinds. Why not require three or five or forty-two different “kinds” in order to propagate humanity? Was this choice simply arbitrary or is there something more embedded in the design? If so, whatever that is must be very important because it is part of our foundational structure. We would certainly want to be faithful to whatever might be embedded in our design because it is crucial to fulfilling our purpose in this world.

At a practical level we must deal with such questions as, Can women teach men in a church setting? If so, are there parameters? If not, what other ministries are permissible for women? And how might we draw lines that have biblical basis rather than being merely arbitrary “traditions of men”? Certainly we want to come up with a useful understanding of how life in the family of Whittier Hills Baptist Church is to work out. We are hopeful that this extensive study will provide an adequate understanding of key Scriptures to guide both our teaching and practice.

With this in mind, the best place to start is at the beginning. God created us with a specific purpose in mind and the forms he used are tied to this purpose. We need to explore God’s original intent for gender and how sin affected that. We will look at various examples of how God used women in the Old Testament. Meanwhile, we must also ask, What are the implications of Christ’s work regarding this issue? And, What do the Epistles offer or amend regarding New Covenant realities breaking in during this present age of the Spirit? Along the way, we will engage the most relevant Scriptures on this topic.

**Men and Women in Ministry in the Old Testament**

***Genesis 1-2: Intent of Creation***

In Genesis 1 and 2 we are given a portrait of what life was like before sin entered and damaged our world and our lives. The picture here is God’s ideal. Since it predates human sin, whatever we can discern from this section of Scripture is likely to be enduringly true and not subject to questions of changing historical situations. If it was true of Adam and Eve before the fall, it ought to be true of every man and woman regardless of their era in history or personal life circumstance.

 Genesis tells of the creation of humanity:

God said, “Let us make man in our image according to our likeness and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” And God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (1:26-28).[[21]](#footnote-21)

Verse 31 concludes, “God saw all that he had made and behold it was very good and there was evening and there was morning the sixth day.”

This passage gives us the answer to why we were created, and more specifically why we were created male and female. God’s purpose was so that we would “image” him to the world,[[22]](#footnote-22) and the way that it is written clearly implies that this image bearing is connected in some way to our gender differences. Immediately after announcing his intention to create “man” (used in a generic sense) in his image, he switches from the singular pronoun (him) to the plural pronoun (them). Why does God use both the plural and the singular to speak of humanity in this context? We would expect Him either to maintain the singular that makes sense of the generic title “man” or stick to the plural that makes sense of the “male and female” aspect of humanity. In using both plural and singular, it would seem that God is highlighting something important about his image. We know that God is a tri-unity: three persons yet one God. The Father, Son and Spirit exist in eternal community, yet they are one God. This truth is a difficult mystery to understand, but it is clear in Scripture. In creating humans, God wants this central dimension of his image displayed, so he creates male and female, distinct persons, who nevertheless are designed to live as one flesh (Gen. 2:23-24). The makeup of humanity *as* male and female is analogous to God’s make-up as a trinity.[[23]](#footnote-23)

God intends for most of us to “pair up” into a particularly intimate relationship as husband and wife, and to have children in order to display his own glory in the world. The family is not just a gift that God has given to us for our blessing, or the means to propagate humanity: it is central to his very purpose of displaying his glory in the world.[[24]](#footnote-24) We should look at the nature of the family through reverent eyes and make sure that whatever we are displaying in our relationships is telling the truth about God.[[25]](#footnote-25) If we truly love God, we will want to live in these relationships in such a way that we tell the truth about God. If there are distinctions or roles assigned to us, we will, as much as we are able, want to fulfill them “as unto him.”

While Genesis 1 makes it clear that our masculinity/femininity are important for us to “image” God, no role distinctions are given there. To answer the question about whether God intends different roles for men and women, we must turn our attention to Genesis 2. It is important to note that this chapter serves as an expansion of chapter one, which gives a summary of the entire creation process. Chapter 2 essentially says, “Now let’s go back to the creation of humanity and look at the details of how this came about.” It is important that this is still prior to the fall and, therefore, presents people as God originally intended them to be, in their ideal state. Whatever we find about roles and relationships in this chapter should be viewed as normative and is not altered by our falling into sin.

In 2:7 God forms Adam, and then in verses 15 and following he puts him in the Garden to cultivate and keep it. He also gives the man his “rules” and the consequences of disobeying them. God lays out the means of rightly relating to him and gives a kingdom stewardship to Adam, saying, in essence, “Keep doing what I have been doing. Expand my rule in the world by taking this garden and cultivating it” (the initial phase of carrying out the larger command of “subduing” the whole earth from chapter 1). This “ruling” on God’s behalf, or being “vice-regent” to the rightful King is what drives all of human history forward, and this agenda is given to Adam *before* Eve is created. This is very significant.

Ruling is a central part of how we image God in the world and howwe rule is purposefully designed to show God in some significant way. If there are role distinctions in the ruling they are essential elements of our existence. To follow them is somehow to portray God. Conversely, not to follow them is to fundamentally alter our picturing of God.

In verse 18, God says that it is not good for man to be alone and decides to make a “suitable-helper.” His word choice is significant. Eve is intended as a “completer” or “complement,” but with the specific role of partner or “helper.”[[26]](#footnote-26)

The implications of these words are clear. God created Adam and made him responsible to God as the leader. God then created Eve and made her responsible to help Adam in a critical partnership. This relationship is further demonstrated in the following verses. God forms the animals and brings them to Adam to be named. In chapter 1 God names what he has created. This is his prerogative as creator and ruler. In chapter 2 the naming prerogative is passed to Adam who, although not creator, is given headship over all that God has made in order to rule it on God’s behalf.

In this context Adam also begins to see that he is lacking a counterpart and comes to know his own need.[[27]](#footnote-27) With Adam’s headship and his need both firmly established, God now creates Eve. He takes her from Adam,[[28]](#footnote-28) so that there is a profound unity between them, and then presents her to him in what amounts to the first marriage ceremony. Adam responds with joy and then he namesher “woman.” This scene helps us understand our intended roles. God designates Eve as “helper” to Adam, indicating a headship-helpership relationship within marriage. He makes Adam first and gives the agenda to Adam, then creates Eve and gives her to Adam to help him fulfill the agenda. And finally Adam carries out this role when *he* names her “woman,” demonstrating his own headship over her, with God’s approval, since God lets the name stand. In naming her “woman” in parallel to his own name as “man,” Adam highlights both their similarity and their distinction, and even indicates the nature of their relationship to one another as a complementary pair.[[29]](#footnote-29)

These observations are not easily interpreted in another manner.[[30]](#footnote-30) God created humans as male and female with distinct roles to fill. Our portraying God’s image is tied to these roles. This distinction seems to be particularly attached to our “ruling” on God’s behalf and, therefore, God has created a *functionally* “lead” role and a *functionally* “support” role.[[31]](#footnote-31) All of this is true of Adam and Eve in their pristine state, untainted by their personal sin and unaffected by the pragmatic influences of a fallen world. Because this is true, it would seem that these distinctions are not “temporary,” nor are they something to be “redeemed.” The effects of redemption in reversing the curse do not remove these distinctions, they simply make it possible to live out these roles more fully without the warping effects of our sinfulness perverting the picture God intends to portray and damaging us as we relate to one another.

At the end of Genesis 2 we find humanity, male and female, living in harmony under the rule of God, fulfilling their dominion mandate as a couple who perfectly complement one another. Adam is in the headship role and Eve is in the helper role. There is absolutely no difference in their worth or significance, it is only in their functional roles that they differ. And these are not things they chose or somehow merited. They were sovereignly assigned by God.

We chafe under the headship-helpership arrangement, but they did not. Our struggle is for good reason: we live in a fallen world. What God originally designed has been deeply damaged and twisted by our sin. The roles did not arise from our sin. They were always God’s plan. The difficulty of living within those roles, however, has arisen because of sin. In a fallen world headship is often perverted into license for oppression and those in support roles are sometimes viewed as second-class. What has sometimes been transported into headship has little in common with what God designed. There is no warrant in Scripture for much of the treatment of women that has taken place historically. Women have all the dignity, significance and value of men. They are co-equal in their essential nature, just as the Son and the Spirit are co-equal to the Father in their essential nature. The functional distinctions are just that: functional. It is important that we maintain these distinctions in how we live, because this is one of the key ways we show God’s glory. But if we are to show God’s glory in the husband-wife relationship, we must fill these roles as God fills them. Husbands should never “lead” wives in any way that the Father would not “lead” the Son. Wives should never respond to their husband’s leadership in any way other than how Christ would respond to his Father

***Genesis 3: The Effects of the Fall***

This relationship would be natural, fulfilling and fully satisfying if the story ended in Genesis 2. Unfortunately, Genesis 3 happened. Here we find Satan tempting Eve to sin. As both she and Adam take the bait, they cause staggering damage to themselves, their relationship to each other, the rest of creation and their relationship to God himself. Interestingly enough, their sin centers in rejecting another headship aspect of God’s world: they don’t want to submit to God’s rule. They believe Satan when he suggests they are missing out on important things and that God is repressing them.[[32]](#footnote-32) He raises questions that stir envy and pride.

As the scene unfolds we can see the devastation to God’s created order. Adam and Eve are cut off from God, their source of life and health and peace. They are alienated from each other, and Adam continues to violate his role by blaming Eve instead of taking responsibility for his actions. Sin has now damaged the functional relationships God established, but it has not eliminated them.

When God calls them to account he speaks with Adam. In some sense, we might expect Him to start with Eve, because she was the first to take the fruit, but God approaches Adam anyway. In Genesis 3:9, God specifically calls Adam to account, rather than Eve. Nor does he even call them to account together. This exclusive focus on Adam surely reflects Adam’s headship, or else it is very difficult to understand. He was supposed to be the spiritual leader in the home and he utterly failed.

As a result of their sin, the judgment of God must fall. They die as promised. Immediately they are spiritually dead. They will now wrestle with sin and struggle to see things from God’s perspective and walk in his ways. Immediately they begin dying physically as well, in the sense that they become mortal and the decay process begins instantly. The life they live is really a protracted dying process. Their final breath is inevitable and in a sense secondary.

Their sin also has huge ramifications for their roles. The original structure is still in place, but now it will not work as it was designed to. In fact it becomes a major point of discontent and struggle. God’s words to Eve are admittedly difficult to interpret with certainty, but the best understanding seems to be that there will be a battle between husbands and wives specifically over the issue of headship in the home. Eve is told, “Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you” (Genesis 3:16b). Eve will struggle with her role, wanting to usurp Adam’s position, and Adam will struggle with the sin of being domineering.[[33]](#footnote-33) God’s words to Eve explain a lot about the challenge we face in the world with role distinctions. The context makes it clear that these role distinctions are not the result of sin, but sin has made it difficult to live comfortably within them. God’s pattern is now particularly challenging, but sin does not change the expectation.

It is at precisely this point that the redemptive work of Jesus comes in. His salvation has done more than assure us of eternity in heaven. It actually reverses the effects of the fall and removes the curse of God.[[34]](#footnote-34) Living as we do in the already/not yet phase of God’s historic plan, we do not yet fully enjoy this state, but in the power of the Spirit we can significantly access this reality and in large part reflect God’s intent in our day-to-day lives. In other words, the work of Christ makes it possible to live out our roles in a way that truly reflects the nature of God. We can be fully satisfied in the role assigned to us. We can respect and value the role assigned to our spouse without the sinful wrestling match, the shameful abuse or the struggle for respect that characterizes so many relationships. That is not to say that we never struggle – we live in a mixed world that is partly defined by our perfect future and partly by our sinful past – but “in Christ” as we submit to the Spirit, we are empowered to live this reality.[[35]](#footnote-35) Even though this continues to be difficult, if we fulfill our roles taking our cues from Christ and submitting to him, it is possible.[[36]](#footnote-36)

***Other Old Testament Passages***

It is generally accepted that male headship is the order shown throughout the Old Testament. Because of the sinfulness of the characters this sometimes manifests in the domineering repression we are warned of in Genesis 3. However, this headship does not mean women are not significant. It does not mean that they cannot or should not exercise significant leadership and influence in their own right. Clearly they are very capable and are expected to offer their strengths within the family and community. They are free to do this – under the proper headship in their home.

***Key Examples of Women in Ministry***

Throughout the ancient Old Testament world, women are portrayed with great strength, dignity and beauty. Abigail and Ruth are examples of such women. Some are also specifically shown as formidable leaders, and not just in contexts where male leadership is lacking – as if their strengths are only to be manifest if men abdicate their role. Miriam, the sister of Moses, is an ideal case in point. She is noted for her influence and leadership and is portrayed as a prophet of the Lord.[[37]](#footnote-37) Yet her brother, Moses, is arguably the ablest leader in the entire Old Testament, and there are also many other notable male leaders in her day. Deborah is another female prophet.[[38]](#footnote-38) She is noted for her wisdom and leadership. Not only does she give good counsel and render good decisions, but she actually leads the army into battle! Huldah is a prophet whom Josiah consults regarding issues of great national importance and spiritual significance.[[39]](#footnote-39) During her day there were several male prophets (including Jeremiah and Zephaniah), so the fact that Josiah turns to her for answers shows that he is not hesitant to give a major role to women in his administration. Joel prophesies that when the Spirit of God is poured out, sons and daughters, male and femaleservants, will prophesy.[[40]](#footnote-40) After Pentecost, when Joel’s prophecy has its initial fulfillment, we see women prophesying.[[41]](#footnote-41)

 These women are capable, quality leaders; but it is important to note that they are never portrayed as violating the household headship picture and, at times, it seems that Scripture intentionally introduces the picture, if only by implication. Deborah and Huldah are important in this respect. On the whole, the men who are mentioned in relation to these women do not appear to attract the interest of the writer. They only seem to be mentioned because of who their wives were (Judges 4:4; 2 Chronicles 34:22). A reasonable inference from this is that the husbands are mentioned specifically because of their headship in the home. By contrast, great male leaders are mentioned routinely without reference to their wives.

***The Ideal Woman of Proverbs 31***

A unique and striking acrostic poem is found in Proverbs 31:10-31. This epilogue functions as somewhat of a summary of the entire book of Proverbs and, in some sense, presents God’s idea of the ideal woman.[[42]](#footnote-42) As proverbial wisdom literature, this is specifically focused on how things *ought* to be in God’s world. This passage gives a formidable picture of womanhood. The ideal woman is not mousy or timid or weak. In fact the Hebrew word that is sometimes translated “excellent,” “noble,” or “virtuous,” carries the idea of valor. She could legitimately be described as a “valiant woman” much like King David would be described as a “valiant warrior.” This woman is formidable. She is equally capable of running her household and running a business – and she does both. She makes wise and difficult decisions and works hard. This is a strong presentation of a versatile woman who both cares for the needs of her household and is also involved in business affairs.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Yet, for all the freedom she has and all the capabilities that are ascribed to her, there is still a clear context of her husband being the head and she, the wife, being the helper. For all of her business and community activities her center of gravity is still clearly in the home. She may engage in all kinds of activities and exercise her gifts and freedoms widely as long as she is properly fulfilling her roles at home.[[44]](#footnote-44) Her helper role to her husband is visible in the phrase, “Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.” This line should attract particular attention because it is the only one in the entire passage that does not directly focus attention on the valiant woman, and actually points her valor toward him.[[45]](#footnote-45)

***Spiritual Leadership in Worship***

Another significant arena that we will only briefly touch on is the sphere of spiritual leadership among the assembly in worship, as this sets up the New Testament realm of corporate gatherings. The complementarian pattern is again unmistakably visible. Women were permitted to actively participate alongside men (attending the tabernacle meetings, contributing to the tabernacle construction, participating in annual feasts and weddings, offering sacrifices, hearing the Word of God, engaging in music, celebrating the Lord with song and dance, etc.). At the same time, God’s appointments to spiritual leadership of the nation and particularly the worship leadership for the gathered assembly throughout Israel’s history exclusively were men. This would include the three kings over the unified nation (Saul, David, and Solomon), whom God placed in spiritual authority over the nation during their reigns. This would include all of the Levites and Priests who oversaw the tabernacle and temple worship practices from Aaron (approx. 1500 B.C.) to the time of Christ. This would also include the primary prophets whose books and narratives are included in the Hebrew Scriptures, and whose essential task was to seek to restore the proper worship of Yahweh and, as spiritual leaders, call the people back to repentance. This would additionally include the various chief priests, the high priests, and the named principle musicians such as Jubal, Asaph, sons of Korah, etc. Two exceptions are Miriam and Deborah.[[46]](#footnote-46) Lastly, the 39 Old Testament books were originally written by men. Putting this all together, there can be no easy dismissing of the reality that under the Old Covenant, while women participated meaningfully , the primary spiritual leadership appointments and related tasks were given to particular men.

***Summary of Old Testament Teaching on Gender Roles***

Genesis lays down a pattern of equal worth and complementary roles within the family. The husband is to be the head and the wife is to be the helper. This is a functional distinction, which in no way distinguishes their ultimate value before God. However, this complementary role relationship effectively displays his image in the world as somewhat analogous to the Godhead. We know from a variety of other Scriptures that the persons of the triune God play distinct roles, wherein the Son subordinates himself to the Father and the Spirit subordinates himself to both the Father and the Son. This pattern is laid down as part of the initial creation and is not the result of human sin. Sin subverts this pattern by making it very difficult to live in harmony with each other. Sin causes us to chafe under our roles as we try to live them out, but it has not removed the responsibility we bear to live obediently.

A number of exemplary women reinforce the distinction of roles. Indeed, a number of very powerful female leaders are presented, and their skill and prowess are held up as virtues. However, they are pictured as exercising their great gifts within the context of male headship in their homes. Similarly, women are active and faithful participants in worship. Yet the record is consistent of all the appointed leadership positions of spiritual authority being given to men.

**Men and Women in Ministry in the New Testament**

When we consider men and women in ministry, we have seen that the Old Testament Scriptures affirm both equality of value between genders – each created to image God together – and also distinctions in roles. We see women as highly honored and utilized strategically by God, and yet also are affirmed under the headship of men in the spheres of spiritual leadership in the home and in the worship assembly.

As we turn to the New Testament, we recognize we are living in a new era marked by the pinnacle of God revealing himself in Jesus, and by the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of Truth” given by God to believers.[[47]](#footnote-47) Looking through the new lens as Christ's New Covenant people, we need to consider what, if anything, has changed on this topic in the Church Age. Here are some relevant questions to pursue:

* Is the essential equality in value to God of men and women still affirmed?
* Does being “in Christ” redeem something that was wrong or expand something that was previously limited?
* Are women’s roles in ministry basically the same, or expanded, or radically transformed?
* Is there any clarifying of the role relationship between men and women at home as husband and wife or of role distinctions at church between genders?
* And particularly, is there any significant and new instruction regarding leadership roles, or any limitation on women in any area of ministry in the church?
* Simply put: are gender role distinctions maintained and on what basis?

We believe the New Testament largely does maintain continuity with the Old Testament in its confirming of ongoing gender role distinctions. These distinctions are limited to aspects of church leadership and to headship in the home, and continue to reflect God’s original creation intent. However, “in Christ,” and through the indwelling Holy Spirit, we now have the spiritual resources available to successfully live out our callings, redemptively overcoming the curse from the Genesis 3 “fall.”[[48]](#footnote-48)

Three exceptions to the continuity between testaments are:

1. Women appear to be more highly valued in the New Testament and are given expanded areas of ministry influence and heightened partnership with men.

2. The access of women to God through the gospel and to the fruit and ministries[[49]](#footnote-49) of the Holy Spirit seems clearly equal now to men.

3. God is no longer dealing with the “nation of Israel” in the same way, but is now dealing with the “church” of all believers from all nations. So the sphere of role distinctions at the national leadership level has been superseded by God’s primary working through headship structures in the church.

Exceptions 1 and 2 continue to affirm both the high honor and dignity of women as fully equal to men in terms of access to God, and also a general role distinction maintaining the headship-helper relationship. Exception 3 simply refocuses the emphasis of gender role distinctions to the realm of Christ’s church.

The following aspects of our complementarian perspective will be developed as key affirmations from the New Testament’s teaching, particularly related to the church context:

* Women and men have equal access to God through Christ.
* Women are crucial participants in ministry in the church.
* Gender distinctions establish mutually beneficial, complementary relationships.
* Headship and submission are modeled by Christ and applied to relationships.
* Headship and submission are revealed in church worship through examples of leadership, participation, and limits.
* Primary spiritual leadership oversight is open to qualified men (overseers).
* Primary spiritual service is open to both qualified men and women (deacons).
* Authoritative teaching is the distinguishing assignment of overseers.
* The sole restriction for women is the exercising of authority over men, which can be displayed through overseer-like teaching of men in mixed-gender settings.

***Equal Access to God through Christ***

When Adam and Eve sinned, their relationship and the subsequent relationships of men and women were severely damaged. Profoundly, the New Testament presents women and men as having access to restoration in relationship and as having expanded access to God through the redemptive work and ongoing mediation of Jesus Christ.

***Galatians 3***

Galatians 3 is a critical text for us, wherein Paul establishes the sphere of equality of men and women as now being “in Christ.” Galatians 3:25-27, 29, affirms that all who have been “justified by faith” and have “put on Christ” are “sons of God” and are truly “Abraham’s offspring.” The capstone is that faith in Christ removes perceived barriers of spiritual privilege among groups of people. Verse 28 reads:

*“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

It is always critical when interpreting Scripture to pursue understanding the context in which any particular verse is placed, in order to be assured of accurately discerning the author’s intent. The overarching context of the book of Galatians centers on the gospel. The immediate line of argument developed throughout chapter 3 explicitly focuses on the salvation of God’s people – confirming the true children of Abraham – through the true “offspring” of Abraham, who is Christ (3:16). The promise of righteousness is given not to men who follow the Law, but now universally to “those who believe” in Christ (3:21-22, 26). This access to God is not only for the Jew, the powerful, or the male, as was commonly thought in the old order, but now crosses all known boundaries through Christ’s redemptive work. So, the elimination of distinctions in 3:28 has to do primarily with confirming equality of personhood[[50]](#footnote-50) and establishing the availability of access to the gospel of Christ. We now are all unified as one people in Christ.

This verse has frequently been used by egalitarians as a broad interpretive foundation to affirm a generalized equality, which is deemed to then eliminate all distinctive roles of biblical leadership. However, the contribution of Galatians 3:28 is revealed in its context to assert that everyone now has equal access to faith in God through Christ in a redemptive sense. This side of the cross, we can be prone to underestimate the significance of this teaching. Under the Old Covenant, access to God was mediated through the priesthood and temple system with its sacrifices – centered in Jerusalem for the nation of Israel. Outsiders had to effectively become Israelites. Men sacrificed on behalf of their families and their servants. Only priests and Levites had a sense of regular immediacy with God. And only the High Priest was able to enter the Most Holy place, and only once a year under threat of his life.

With the inauguration of the New Covenant, Israel is no longer the exclusive “people of God.” Greeks (Gentiles) are no longer outsiders. As the veil was torn (at Jesus’ death) the door has been opened broadly for all to come to God through Christ, apart from race or national origin. Similarly, access to the gospel is not restricted to those of economic means or those in power over others. Even those who find themselves enslaved have free access to the gospel of God through Jesus. All who are “in Christ” are honored and considered to be “sons of God, through faith” (v.26), including slaves and women. Spiritually, they are now united as equals before God. And all have access to the full riches of the throne of God through Jesus as their High Priest and sole Mediator.[[51]](#footnote-51) The lack of maleness or femaleness here does not mean there are no longer any actual gender distinctions, but rather that gender plays no advantageous role in gaining access to God. Christ is freely received by anyone among the three primary divisions in first-century society: Jew and Gentile, slave and freeman, male and female. All have equal value before God. All are now heirs of Abraham through faith in Christ.[[52]](#footnote-52)

We have additional evidence of equality of value and access to God between both genders in the New Testament. In Matthew 12:46-50 Jesus strikingly confirms that neither blood nor gender plays any role in one’s access to God’s favor. Whoever pursues God’s will through Jesus becomes part of his family, and thereby his “brother and sister and mother” (12:50). Formerly, only Jewish males studied Torah and were allowed to pray in Synagogues. Throughout Jesus’ ministry, however, he included women among those who were healed, who traveled with him, who learned from him, and who experienced his miracles. In each of these ways, Jesus included women among those who had access to himself and his blessings.

 Additionally, in Peter’s remarkable Pentecost sermon (in Acts 2), he announces the commencing of Joel’s prophecy of the last days, evidenced by the New Covenant blessing of the Holy Spirit being poured out “on all flesh,” thus over-riding all gender, status, and age distinctions. He speaks of “your sons and your daughters,” old and young, as well as “male servants and females servants” who will all prophesy (Acts 2:17-18). Here, not only is access to God’s Spirit in view, but also equal access to his empowerment for ministry. Repeatedly in the teachings and actions of Jesus and New Testament authors, we read the unmistakable message that the gospel of access to God through faith in Jesus is not reserved only for Jews, for men, for the rich, or for the powerful. Inherent in the gospel message is that it is available for *all* without any distinction, including gender. The consistent emphasis of the gospel call is not addressing (or changing) role relationships between women and men, but rather the universal availability of eternal life in Christ through faith. That said, the ministry of the indwelling Spirit is given to allow our continuing role relationships to be transformed by the fruit of the Spirit, so that our sinful inclinations toward abusing our differences are overcome by love and grace.

***Women are Crucial Participants in Ministry in the Church***

The New Testament does not merely offer women full access to the riches of the gospel for salvation. It also presents a striking and elevated inclusion into the full life and expanded ministry as part of the growing young Church. The contrast is dramatic between how women were treated in rabbinic Judaism (where they were largely excluded as inferior) and how Jesus and early church leaders actively include them as necessary participants. Before discussing potential restrictions on women in ministry, it is helpful to see the many places where women are positively involved in ministry and participating gloriously.

Multiple places in the gospel accounts tell of Jesus including women in his traveling ministry. Luke 8:1-3 specifies a variety of women who accompanied Jesus and his disciples throughout various cities, even providing for them as apparent benefactors. Perhaps their role here is serving in preview form as proto-deacon. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, along with Mary and Martha appear strategically with Jesus among his male disciples. Interestingly, in Acts 9:36, Tabitha (Dorcas) is called a “disciple” and described as “full of good works and acts of charity.” After dying, she is brought back to life by Peter, confirming that becoming the recipient of the power of God – even in the mightiest of miracles – is not reserved for males alone.

Not only do women follow and serve in the New Testament, they are allowed to *learn*. This is in contrast to the rabbinic pattern of Judaism where only men could study spiritual truth.[[53]](#footnote-53) 1 Timothy 2:11 (to be looked at later), begins with words that are easy to affirm, “Let a woman learn….” Meanwhile, Jesus modeled a new era of teaching women in two dramatic narratives. In John 4, Jesus offers his most significant teaching on the subject of the kind of worship the Father receives – to a woman, from Samaria. This is stunning on both counts, as noted by his aghast disciples (4:27). She then becomes his first evangelist to the then-despised Samaritans. In another setting, while Martha is busy with kitchen preparations, her sister Mary is found sitting at the feet of Jesus, learning (Luke 10:39). This physical description is the standard posture of a disciple who is learning from his rabbi. This is the same description Paul used when he was sitting at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). And it was the same posture of the healed demoniac as a newly converted disciple of Jesus (Luke 8:35), in addition to the 12 disciples who would routinely recline with Jesus as he taught them. While Martha thinks her sister’s place is rightfully to be in the kitchen with her doing “women’s work,” Jesus corrects her to affirm that Mary has chosen the best pursuit (Luke 10:42). Though Jesus only appointed 12 to his inner circle—and all of them were men—women are clearly welcome at his feet as well.

Not only do women learn in the New Testament, they also are included in roles associated with teaching functions. This is a new advancement as the New Covenant is unfolding. Our first example of a woman offering words of teaching—teaching that became inscripturated in our Bibles!—is from Mary, Jesus’ mother. Luke 1:46-55 records her “song” that is commonly referred to as the “magnificat.” It is a doxological testimony of God’s blessing on her role as Jesus’ mother. Additionally, it speaks theologically about God’s attributes and fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.[[54]](#footnote-54) Sometimes in conservative circles it has been concluded not only that women may not “preach or teach” in public settings, but that any woman speaking in the assembly must confine her remarks to inspiring relational stories or expertise unrelated to Scripture. This theologically thoughtful song of deep worship expression refutes that limiting perspective and opens the door to women for engaging in musical worship ministry, songwriting, and sharing of deep insight. In this case, Mary’s expressed truth about God is part of our inspired, written record of God’s Word for us, including those of us who are men.

Yet, at the same time, there are several limiting factors that guard us from seeing this as a model for unrestricted teaching by women in church. The narrative context reveals that this was spoken in a personal conversation with Mary’s relative, Elizabeth. This setting is not easily construable to be a parallel to a recognized teaching ministry among a local congregation. It was not originally spoken with men present. And it was essentially an isolated, spontaneous testimony of praise, expressed poetically as a song, rather than as a prepared lesson or exposition of Scripture to a gender-mixed audience. This spontaneous utterance is more akin to prophecy (see section on 1 Cor. 11), than it is to authoritative teaching.

We do have an example of a woman involved in a form of teaching that *was* directed to a man. Acts 18:24-28 tells of the interaction between Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, who confronted and offered godly correction to Apollos. Apparently, Paul had dropped off the couple in Ephesus while he was ministering in other cities (vv.18-23). Later, they would host a church in their home (Rom. 16:5). They were obviously valued partners in ministry to Paul. In their interaction with Apollos, it is worth noting that Apollos was not just any man; he was a traveling preacher, known for being “eloquent,” and “competent in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24-25). He was saved, well-taught, accurate in what he spoke about Jesus, and spoke with effective boldness (v.25-26); yet he needed to know “the way of God more accurately” (v.26b). Helping him clarify his understanding was a task that Priscilla and Aquila jointly pursued in Paul's absence. Apparently they were effective! Concerning his next ministry in Achaia, Apollos is said to have both “greatly helped” believers and “powerfully refuted the Jews” in revealing from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. So, the correction offered by Priscilla and Aquila resulted in the fruit of pastoral ministry and apologetics-oriented evangelism.

Many have noted that Priscilla possibly had a lead role in this mentoring discussion, as she is uncharacteristically (in first-century culture) listed before her husband.[[55]](#footnote-55) Either way, it is significant that Priscilla exercised a doctrinally corrective teaching role toward a man. While this is true, the circumstances must be kept in view. We should not overlook that whatever role she had in teaching or correcting was done in partnership with her husband. It is significant that she did not teach anyone nor offer correction to Apollos in the public setting of the synagogue. He had been speaking there as a travelling guest. In order to offer Apollos helpful correction, they invited him away privately and talked with him together as a couple. Finally, this appears as a one-time event, not as an ongoing, recognized ministry. So, even as remarkable as this scenario is, we still do not have a singular example in the New Testament of a woman authorized to be a primary teacher in any gathering of a local church where men are present.

At Jesus' resurrection, the first to appear are women who have been among his larger entourage of disciples. According to Matthew 28, the angel at the tomb commissions both Marys to tell the disciples of Jesus' resurrection. They are functioning here as witnesses, perhaps even as evangelists[[56]](#footnote-56) – the first bearers of the news of the resurrection. And then Jesus further sends them as messengers to his brothers. What an honor! Interestingly, among the words used for teaching that may be under restriction for women, the word for evangelistic preaching – *kyrusso –* is not prohibited.[[57]](#footnote-57) It seems that declaring the gospel of a risen Savior is certainly one of the unrestricted ministries available to women.

Meanwhile, we find that Timothy – Paul’s protégé – was the prior beneficiary of godly teaching from two women: his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5). Timothy was further mentored by Paul, traveled with Paul, and is listed as co-author of several of Paul’s letters. Yet, his foundational teaching and shaping of his heart and path was influenced by two godly women in his life. We do not know how old Timothy was when his primary spiritual influence transferred away from his mother and grandmother, but it would be unlikely that these influential women ever had a formal leadership/teaching role over an adult Timothy in a local church structure. It was customary that women would have formative influence on their children, thus confirming both the importance of women being well-taught and the honorable role of women teaching children.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Concerning the early churches, women certainly did participate in meaningful roles and in highly influential ministries. It is likely that in addition to Priscilla, Mark’s mother, Lydia, Nympha, and Chloe are women who hosted house churches.[[59]](#footnote-59) In Philippians 4:2-3, Paul pleaded with Euodia and Syntyche to “agree in the Lord.” Apparently, their unity may have been strategic to Paul's ministry, as he describes them as “women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel.”[[60]](#footnote-60) Romans 16 is especially striking as one-third of the people commended by Paul are women. Women to whom Paul draws particular attention for their ministries of distinction include Phoebe, Prisca, Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, the “beloved Persis,” Rufus’s mother, Nereus’ sister and likely Junia(s). Junia may be an anomaly for the complementarian position, though there is significant contention about how to interpret Romans 16:7.[[61]](#footnote-61)

We put this all together and see that God’s design for his church is to have women thoroughly involved in learning, serving, and ministering among the body of Christ in a plethora of ways, even right alongside the primary male leaders. The New Testament confirms women’s essential equality with men in value to God and affirms that both genders share full accessibility to Christ and to the power of the Holy Spirit. Women are presented as having been involved in prophecy, prayer, hosting, doxology, teaching, correcting, evangelism, serving, providing needs – essentially the full range of ministries within a healthy, functioning church. Certainly, with all this affirmation of women in ministry, we see that a role of men in general and husbands in particular is to encourage our women to be actively engaged and to structure ministry so that our women will thrive.

 With all this expansion of women into new and varied ministries in mind, are there any remaining distinctions or restrictions? Are there areas of ongoing, regular ministry in local churches reserved only for some men, whereby women are generally excluded? Our conclusion is: yes, -- in one position with two related aspects. We arrive there by looking at particular Scriptures which confirm the headship-submission complementary relationship within marriage, seeing this headship relationship between genders modeled in church gatherings, and noting the qualifications for the highest realm of spiritual leadership in a local church.

***Mutually Beneficial Complementary Relationships***

We have asserted that the essence of the complementarian position is that men and women are equal in value and yet maintain at least some difference in roles. It may be that critics on either the hierarchical side or the egalitarian side have actual difficulty seeing the benefit.[[62]](#footnote-62) Are these roles unfair to women? Do we trust God that His design is actually for our good? Or do we believe at some core level that he has made a mistake? If we can see that God is the author of relationship – he himself exists in relationship – and teaches us about himself through relationship callings, then maybe we can more easily trust him and his purposes. John Coe has proposed that the most fundamental aspect of gender is “openness to relationship,” analogous to our triune God who exists eternally as a relational essence.[[63]](#footnote-63) Human gender is the way God has accommodated himself to us, as we bear God's image together in relationship with one another. In case someone might prematurely conclude by this that gender distinction is unnecessary, Coe confirms God’s purposes for gender differentiation:

“In Pauline terms, woman was made for man, and man was made to be withwoman forChrist to the end that they both, in this mutual interdependence, be made fully into the image of Christ by union with the Spirit in the church.”[[64]](#footnote-64)

Notice how, within this profound statement of a complementary relationship of mutual interdependence, there is the acknowledgment of differing essential purposes (which are expressed in functions or roles) toward one another. The woman is made *for* man, while the man was made to be *with* the woman, and interdependently they are to be together *for Christ!*

We are unfortunately too familiar with men who have a tendency either to be independent and aloof from their wives and/or become workaholics who pour their energy into their work or personal projects. Similarly, we are aware of wives who are tempted to usurp their husband’s leadership role in the home, or a wife who seeks to make herself (rather than God’s kingdom) her husband’s priority pursuit. In contrast to these destructive patterns, God has called each man to be “with” his wife, to commit in marriage to “cleave to” his wife, and Paul establishes in 1 Cor. 11:11 that neither man nor woman are independent from one another. God has designed men and women to operate in full interdependence with one another to accomplish Christ’s purposes in the church.[[65]](#footnote-65) So, the manner in which men and women view themselves in their marriage role has a great bearing on what they bring to the context of the church and their consideration of ministry roles within the church.

Consistent with this, the entire narrative of the Bible is replete with examples of God calling particular men to missional leadership tasks to participate with Him in charting the next leg of God's kingdom expansion. To this end, the biblical record routinely calls women as valiant, supportive partners. In describing this relationship where the man pursues God’s missional call with the partnership of his wife, Paul asserts that the “woman was made *for* the sake of the man” (1 Cor. 11:8-9).[[66]](#footnote-66) This restores the pre-fall Genesis 2 ideal where she is the necessary “completer” and “helper” for the man, providing her invaluable and necessary assistance to him. Again, this does not mean she is less valued or does not have additional callings of her own, but that a primary understanding of *this* calling is to be a supportive assistant to her husband who needs her in this role.

Through this lens we see that God’s purposes for endowing men and women with differing traits and roles are actually beneficial for both. As the husband’s heart is drawn to his wife for partnership, her security needs are met. And as she partners with him, his significance needs are met. As they obey God’s design together, they are able to minister to others from a position of strength and grace. When a man is effective in faithfully leading his home, he meets a necessary qualification for leadership in the church. Meanwhile, when a woman expresses her nurturing skills in loving relationships, the man and any children are the beneficiaries and the family is strengthened. Both the Father and Jesus validate this feminine value by utilizing various nurturing feminine metaphors as expressing part of the image of God toward women.[[67]](#footnote-67) A New Testament expression of this nurturing nature being given primarily to women is seen in Titus 2:4-5, where Paul tasks older women with the significant ministry of training younger women to nurture their families:

*“…to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.”[[68]](#footnote-68)*

***Headship and Submission Pictured and Applied***

One of the pillars of the egalitarian view is that whatever hierarchical role distinctions exist occurred because of the fall in Genesis 3, and should, therefore, be overcome and replaced by full equality without distinction as part of redemption under the gospel of the New Covenant.[[69]](#footnote-69) But is this true? If so, it would remove or diffuse a major tenet of the complementarian understanding – that of “headship.” Yet, does the New Testament itself overturn headship? Or does it affirm God’s ordaining of gender and role distinction as part of his ongoing intention for people as male and female? And are not the “head” relationships developed by Paul toward Christ and toward men/husbands endowed with *positive* meaning? In our view, we see headship pictured by Christ and applied to marriage and the church.

In our view, the New Testament confirms, rather than abrogates, God’s plan for male headship, both in the home and in the church. We see consistently God’s design to have men marked by “a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women.”[[70]](#footnote-70) Similarly, we see God’s intent for women to “affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men.”[[71]](#footnote-71) And we understand the New Testament to confirm God’s purposes for headship not based on “the fall,” but rather as an expression of himself, who is the ultimate “head” of all. We see within “headship” inherent qualities of loving guidance, wisdom, care, and sacrificial service; but also a necessary role for leadership to take responsibility and express appropriateauthority.[[72]](#footnote-72) We insist that a proper understanding of male headship does not at all require inequality of persons nor insinuate any demeaning of females. Rather, humble, loving headship coupled with willing, respectful submission expresses both sides of the complementary relationship God intends. This combination appropriately reflects the equality of persons yet distinction of roles inherent within the Trinity.

***Ephesians 5:22-31 (5:1-6:9)***

Perhaps the New Testament's most beautiful expression of loving headship and willing submission is presented in a marital context in Ephesians 5:22-31. Again, it is important to consider that the interpretation of any given Scripture must be made in context. So, it is significant that – prior to Paul confirming a husband’s headship and commanding a wife’s submission to that headship – he reveals that this relationship is to be worked out in the supernatural arena. In 5:1, Paul calls all of us to be “imitators of God, as beloved children.” The next verse is a command to “walk in love.” In case we are unsure what that might look like relationally, he reveals the bar: “…as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” So, prior to any clarifying of role relationships, Paul establishes that all of us are to live as Christ – sacrificially loving one another – as part of our worship to God. He further establishes the need for the Holy Spirit’s active ministry in our life, commanding us to “be filled with the Spirit” as we interact with one another in church worship and edification pursuits, and then broadly commands us all to be “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:18-21).

As Paul now moves to particularly address specific role relationships, the broader context reveals three pairs of relationships that Paul has in view, somewhat similar to Galatians 3:28. Yet, here the topic is not access to salvation but relational responsibilities toward one another, where sin and power often corrupt and harm. He addresses first the interplay for wives and husbands, then children and parents, and finally bondservants and masters. In each case, the parallelism is maintained: Paul addresses the functionally subordinate role prior to the functionally leading role. In the second grouping, children are called to obey and honor; while fathers are called to not provoke their children to anger, but rather to train them in the Lord. These callings confirm distinction in roles. Similarly, in the third grouping, bondservants are to obey their masters as they would render service to Christ, and masters are also to rule their servants in the same way, as if they were serving Christ and in recognition of being under their own Master in heaven. Similarly, the functional role distinction is apparent. Seeing these other couplets gives us insight as to how to appropriately interpret both the intent of 5:21 “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ,” and also how to understand the headship-submission relationship among husbands and wives.[[73]](#footnote-73) To emphasize “mutual submission” in a way that requires equality of roles (as is commonly done) would result in the untenable view that parents are equally to submit to their children and masters were equally to submit to their servants. Paul’s actual words simply do not lend themselves to that kind of interpretation.[[74]](#footnote-74)

So how do we interpret the particular verses regarding the wife’s and husband’s roles toward each other? Paul begins the section with the verse that so many have passionately resisted: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22). He follows up two verses later with, “... so let the wives be in submission to their husbands in everything” (Ephesians 5:24b). This passage will be instructive in giving us our most extensive view of biblical submission – as something beautiful and beneficial, not as something abusive or unfair. Here, Paul is teaching ultimately about the spiritual relationship between Christ (as the honorable husband) and his Church (as his beloved bride).[[75]](#footnote-75) But practically, on a second level (vv. 23-33), he is using this opportunity to teach about roles and relationships within marriage. The emphasis is on godly leadership and willing followership. As Paul commands wives, he appeals once again to the concept of headship within the family in making this parallel :

“For the husband is the head of the wife *even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ,* so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands” (vv. 23-24). *(emphasis added.)*

 So before anyone expresses umbrage at the command for women to submit to their husbands, as if this is to be a bad thing, two things are emphasized that are critical for interpreting Paul’s intent: 1) the husband is to be the “head” in the same way that Christ is the head of the church and is himself its “Savior”! This indicates that men’s headship should have a demonstrably caring, loving, sacrificial, saving nature. 2) the character of the woman’s submission is to mirror the church’s submission to Christ – that is, responding willingly to the love, care and grace that has been expressed.

To confirm that this headship-submission structure has no intention of demeaning or devaluing wives (and certainly does not advocate any kind of power abuse), Paul commands the husbands to follow Christ’s perfect model of sacrificial love! This is to be for her glory – specifically by nourishing and cherishing her, and ultimately uniting himself to her (vv. 29-31). In complementary beneficial fashion, the headship-submission roles are revealed climactically in verse 33 to be “love” (by the husband toward his wife) and “respect” (by the wife toward her husband).[[76]](#footnote-76) Paul’s clear intention here is for a mutually beneficial relationship – where the man’s leadership is primarily directed toward the well-being of his wife; and the woman’s respectful submission to her husband results in her benefitting from his sacrificial leadership, while honoring him for his endeavors. Just as Christ’s love leads in a way that causes the church to be presented as a beautiful bride, husbands have the opportunity to lead and encourage their wives in ways that they will genuinely flourish – in the home and in ministry. What Paul has established so carefully in Ephesians 5 in the realm of husband-wife relationship then becomes a bit of a template for how men-women relationships are to play out in the context of church ministry.

***1 Corinthians 11***

1 Corinthians 11, a challenging passage, makes a strong contribution to our understanding of headship by men toward women/wives[[77]](#footnote-77) in a practical discussion of head coverings for women in worship. A significant side point for the moment, which we will pick up in the 1 Cor. 14 discussion, is that women are revealed praying and prophesying in the midst of a chapter on gathered worship.[[78]](#footnote-78) In making his practical point that women (or wives) are not to pray or prophesy without their heads covered (verses 5, 10, 13), note what Paul does *not* do. He does not argue his position from silence, from recent historical pattern, from personal bias, nor from a particular cultural phenomenon local to Corinth that he desires to counteract.[[79]](#footnote-79) Rather, Paul repeatedly bases his argument on what he considers to be an established truth about the nature of things.[[80]](#footnote-80) Paul’s basis for his point comes from creation itself, from an intended order established by God from the beginning. There exists an ordered relationship between men and women that brings honor to the relationship (whether married or unmarried), and a disruption of this relational picture that brings shame. In this case in Corinth, it appears that a woman who pursued prayer and prophecy with her head “uncovered” was perhaps distorting the symbol of being in submission to her husband, who was her metaphorical head, thus dishonoring him (verse 5). In an honor-shame culture, this was apparently a sign of disrespect, i.e. a “shameful” act (verse 6).[[81]](#footnote-81) Meanwhile, a woman who prayed and prophesied with her head covered is visually placing herself under her husband's honorable authority. While symbols of this may change in different societies (such as ours), the woman's covering displays her submission to “headship.”[[82]](#footnote-82) Thus, headship, to Paul, is not a problem to be fixed, but is rather the foundation for the traditions to be maintained just as he originally delivered them (1 Cor. 11:2b).

The logic of Paul's argument is based on three pairs in which he draws comparisons. The first rung in his argument is to confirm that “the head of every man is Christ” (v.3a). This presents the relationship of being in submission to one’s “head” as not merely positive, but actually a glorious position! As every man has for his own “head” the Lord Jesus Christ, the submission into which men are placed is one of striking honor! Clearly, this headship modeled by Christ has no overtones of “lording it over” or domineering or taking advantage of others in abuses of power. Just as the head of man is Christ, Paul continues, “the head of a wife is her husband” (v. 3b). God has charged men with godly authority and responsibility to take a sacrificial leader’s role in modeling the leadership of Christ. Paul does not demean men who are under Christ’s headship and responsible to God for their families; nor does he demean women who are under their husbands’ headship.[[83]](#footnote-83)

To fully establish this hierarchy of role with neither a display of inappropriate power nor any hint of devaluation of the one in submission, Paul continues with his capstone: “and the head of Christ is God.”[[84]](#footnote-84) Surely, Paul has not lessened the value of Christ by placing him under the headship of God the Father! Rather, we see another significant reality here: within the Triune Godhead itself is a holy headship – a hierarchy of role distinction – while still fully maintaining equality of essence. It is worth noting that however we understand the three pairings, they are not reversible or reciprocal. In other words, we don't have any New Testament teaching on Christ being the head of God, man of Christ, or woman of man. There is no “mutual headship.”[[85]](#footnote-85) Headship flows in one direction.

We know from another context that Jesus, “being in the form of God” and “equal with God,” did not lose any value of person for taking on “the role of a servant” (Philippians 2:6-7), as he willingly submitted to God’s headship. In the same way, a wife is no less valuable for being in a role of respectful submission to her husband and viewing her husband as her head (under Christ). Yet Jesus serves as a bridge in both directions. His “taking the form of a servant” also models his loving headship toward us, for whom he humbled himself, even to death on a cross for our sake (v.8).

Having established the validity of headship in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul then appeals to creation as the foundation for role distinctions. Paul alludes to what we previously discussed concerning Genesis 1-2 to state that man “is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man” (1 Corinthians 11:7). He establishes this based on the order of creation, the initial ruling responsibility of naming the animals given to Adam, the process of making the first woman, and the purpose for which God made her. Verses 8-9 explain: “For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.”

So, the man was made first,[[86]](#footnote-86) given responsibilities by God, and then the woman was made to assist him in his divine calling. Again, the pattern we see is this: the man is given the head role in responsible leadership, while the woman assists as a fully valued equal. The first part of this (i.e. differentiation) is affirmed again in the following verses, “That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head” (v.10a); and the second part (i.e. interactive partnership) is also reaffirmed, “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman” (v.12). So, the wife is under the divinely intended authority of her husband, yet is also in full interdependence with him. Yet again, Paul asserts this two-fold, interactive reality in a final framing: “For as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman” (v.12a). Different roles. Interdependence. Coexisting without conflict. As if anticipating an objection with this structure, Paul implies that one must recognize the Divine source here, concluding, “And all things are from God” (v.12b). So, Paul has confirmed God’s intention for a complementarian relationship, which includes both male headship and female partnership.

***Headship, Participation, and Limits in Church Worship***

Having seen that God has established a principle of headship in the home, whereby the husband assumes the role of loving leadership (modeling after Christ) while the wife assumes the different but equally valuable role of honoring submission (modeling after the church in relationship to Christ), then it is not a difficult bridge to see a parallel to headship in the church*.* In the context of the gathered church we will see that headship principles do play a role even within a vigorously participative worship climate. Here we will look at two passages of Scripture that have been central to the current debate, and which are among the New Testament's most challenging words on our topic:

“As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission. ... For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church” (1 Corinthians 14:33b-34, 35b).

“I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather she is to remain quiet” (1 Timothy 2:12).

There are a few things we can note about both verses. Both concern roles of teaching and of authority in the public, gathered worship of the church. Both seem to be expressions of principles of headship and submission developed elsewhere. Historically, these have been the crux verses utilized to limit women's involvement in exercising authority in church leadership and in teaching (and in hierarchical circles – any speaking roles). Applying these verses is challenging for us in at least three ways: in light of other Scriptures that seem to disagree or contradict; in following the unusual grammar and structural connections in their context; and in our proneness to react to the direct words of limitation. It is not uncommon for people to wonder, “Did Paul really write that?” We may be inclined to wonder if there are cultural or contextual clues that can allow us to dismiss or alter these verses. It can be tempting to join egalitarians in looking for a way out from the message of these verses, to somehow neutralize their force. While both passages are heavily contested as to what they mean, we believe they are important for our understanding and practice, and we need to consider what they contribute to our topic of men and women in ministry.

***1 Corinthians 14***

Our difficult words at the end of 1 Corinthians 14 finish a four chapter section where Paul is speaking to issues in Corinth concerning head coverings and the Lord’s Supper in worship (ch. 11), the distribution of spiritual gifts and ministries (ch. 12), the way spiritual ministry is to be pursued (via love, ch. 13), and the activities of prophecy and tongues in gathered worship (ch. 14). This final segment in 14:26-40 concerns order in worship, as if the church in Corinth needed boundaries for God-honoring gatherings where a degree of chaos may have been prevailing. So far in chapter 14, Paul has been establishing the primacy of prophecy over tongues in public worship on the basis that prophecy edifies others, which is the primary reason for their gathering. Starting in 14:26, Paul begins giving specific additional directives for the community gatherings. Paul's instructions include involving all the people (“each one”) in bringing various teaching contributions (“hymn,” “lesson”/”teaching,” “revelation,” “tongue,” “interpretation”) for edification purposes. This is actually a remarkable invitation to each person to engage in full active participation in various ministries to others. Paul then offers rules regarding taking turns and honoring one another, emphasizing the value of remaining orderly (verse 27, 31, 40) so that people are genuinely edified. There is no evidence within these particular verses for thinking that any of these contributions are restricted to men alone or prohibited to women.

However, once Paul has mentioned prophecy specifically, he takes additional time giving more instructive boundaries (14:29-33). Two or three may speak prophetically, speakers should be willing to give way to others, and they should talk one at a time so as to not cause confusion. Meanwhile, there are three significant statements that offer instruction to those who are not presently speaking. The middle one is general, apparently for everyone: “so that you all may learn and all be encouraged” (v.31b). This is the goal of the fellowship gathering, and again women would be presumed as fully included. But prior and following are two bookend statements that are apparently directed to a smaller group of listeners: “let others weigh what is said” (v.29b), and the follow-up, “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets” (v.32). So, while everyone in the gathered community is encouraged to participate with a ministry contribution, there is a subset who are invested with the responsibility to evaluate the truthfulness of what is presented. Who is this smaller group? Is it all of those with a prophetic gift or ministry? Or, is this perhaps referring to a smaller group of male prophets who are functioning as the “heads” of the gathering or as early overseers? It is at this point that the difficult words appear, excluding women from some particular speech:

As in all the churches of the saints, *the women should keep silent in the churches.* *For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission*, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For *it is shameful for a woman to speak in church* (1 Cor. 14:33b-35).

In these four brief sentences, we have at least three seeming prohibitions from women speaking: 1) “the women should keep silent in the churches,” 2) “they are not permitted to speak,” and 3) “it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.”

We are aware that these verses have often been interpreted throughout the history of the church to generally exclude female speaking ministries in the assembly. This would be the hierarchical interpretation. However, we are persuaded that these verses actually do not mean this.

We can easily affirm two aspects of these verses before we move on to the controversial parts. One is that the reference to women being “in submission” connects us to the headship-submission territory we have already established in Ephesians 5-6 and in the related 1 Corinthians 11 passage. So, we cannot conclude that headship-submission relationships at home have no bearing on the gathered church. Or, said positively: the headship-submission conclusions we reached earlier of men leading lovingly and women participating respectfully remain in place in gathered worship. The second is related and contains two parts. God desires that women learn, and that their husbands are a primary source of spiritual guidance. So, any question a wife might have about a teaching at church presents a discipling opportunity in the home. This is as much a message to men as to women – to lead one’s wife both in biblical study and knowledge, and also in helping her to grow. Again, God will hold the husband responsible for spiritual leadership in the home, and questions at church can be a catalyst.

Concerning the multiple prohibitions against women speaking in church, there are a plethora of difficulties with these verses. Difficulties include: 1) the word for keeping silent goes beyond the 1 Timothy emphasis on being peaceable and uncontentious, so perhaps this is a particular kind of disruption that Paul is intending to limit, distinctive to Corinth. 2) the word for the speech that is not permitted is a broad general word indicating most any kind of speech. This seems to be a direct contradiction to verses 26-29 that encourage all kinds of speaking ministries. 3) We don’t know what particular reference to the Law Paul is making, as this is not a direct quote. It is unusual for Paul to appeal to the Law for support of New Covenant practices. 4) The multiple prohibitions against speaking, and particularly in the context of discussing prophecy, seem to be in direct contradiction to 1 Corinthians 11, where women were allowed to both pray and prophesy – as long as they did so in light of headship-submission considerations. Interpreting this passage has great challenges![[87]](#footnote-87) We enter this territory cautiously.

Paul's major concern here appears to be with the relational dynamics between the genders. Whatever the particular speaking that he forbids, it was of such a nature that its practice violated God's created design for woman and man.[[88]](#footnote-88) Beyond this, however, it becomes difficult to arrive at a conclusive interpretation, as a wide variety of approaches can attest.[[89]](#footnote-89) Presently there seem to be four dominant viewpoints within evangelicalism, each with strengths and weaknesses. Here is a brief summary:

1) Women are not to speak in public worship.[[90]](#footnote-90) This would be a full exclusion of women in any speaking ministry in the church where men are present. This would then require interpreting “brothers” (in 14:6, 20, 26, etc.) to literally mean “men” (rather than “brothers and sisters”), so that all the speaking ministries in the chapter are fully limited to men. It would also require a reinterpretation of 1 Cor. 11:1-16 to place the praying and prophesying of women somewhere other than the gathered church. In this case, “when you come together” (11:18, 20) would refer to a change of setting. We reject this view because we do not believe 1 Corinthians 14 requires this reading, and it imposes an understanding on 1 Corinthians 11 we do not believe is appropriate.

2) Circumstantial prohibition distinctive to Corinth.[[91]](#footnote-91) This view tries to discern from the specifics of the prohibition what might have caused Paul to react so strongly to the women in this particular church. Perhaps the unruliness was particularly acute among the women here. The disorder is not related to male-female relationships in the home, but centered on disruptive questions by women during prophetic speech in worship. Perhaps these disruptions that upended headship and submission principles were distinctive to Corinth to such a degree that Paul was speaking uniquely to the Corinthians; in which case the limited motive of his restriction may not apply universally, or to us today. To make this view be textually viable, verse 33b (“as in all the churches of the saints”) is read to belong to verse 33a (“for God is not an author of confusion but of peace,” rather than as the launch of the next paragraph (verse 34) (“the women should keep silent…”). In other words, what is universal is God not desiring confusion, while the limiting of women’s particular speech might remain a local prohibition.

3) These words are not original to Paul. In addition to interpretive problems mentioned above, some scholars see so many other concerns that they have concluded these words must be inauthentic to the original text.[[92]](#footnote-92) There is speculation that an early scribe may have added these words and these words were included prior to the established text traditions available to us. In this case, these words would not carry biblical authority for us. However, this is a perilous road to travel. We do not have a single manuscript that omits these words.[[93]](#footnote-93) So, our conviction is that we must consider them as Scripture and interpret them as best we can.

4) Understand the restriction to be a limited form of speech, specifically the judging of prophets’ messages.[[94]](#footnote-94) Verses 29-32 are about rules for prophets speaking; prior to the prohibition of women speaking is v. 32 which states “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.” As 1 Corinthians is one of our earlier Epistles (estimated 55 AD), the church was still transitioning from primary leadership by the foundation of apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20) to overseers and deacons (1 Timothy and Titus – probably sometime in the 60s). So, in line with headship principles, those evaluating the prophecies were the male prophets as the acting spiritual leaders. This evaluation of prophecies, then, is the specific and narrow territory of the speech that is prohibited to women.

One expression of view #4 which has gained much traction in recent years is advocated by Wayne Grudem.[[95]](#footnote-95) He asserts that once speaking of regulating prophets, Paul makes an important aside to clarify that only men are permitted to perform this regulatory function. Grudem raises the question of “what kind of silence” is required here of the women. His answer is that it is not general, but quite specific, related only to topic at hand; namely the authority role of judging prophets. Grudem understands Paul to assert that judging prophecies is a “governing” or “ruling” function, and is an opposite mark of being submissive to male leadership. Perhaps Paul’s general reference to “the Law” refers to the creation order in Genesis 2.[[96]](#footnote-96) He further suggests that Paul may be anticipating women who might interrupt during prophetic judgments by asking questions which could disrupt the “order” he has been appealing to. So, by placing women back under the headship of their husbands, Paul preemptively intervenes and asks women to take their questions home and allow their husbands to fulfill their leadership role in their lives. So, this restriction on women of evaluating prophecies is consistent with the goal of guarding the transmission of the faith, by leaving doctrinal authority to male leaders. The opportunity for women to question is redirected toward their husbands. It re-affirms the two spheres of headship: church and home.

In interpreting this passage, we want to remain particularly humble. If we didn't have these verses in Scripture, we believe the foundation of headship and submission would still stand unaltered. Whether these verses prohibit the selective speech of women in 1st century Corinth only, or the evaluation of prophecy only, or were originally inauthentic and do not apply – we believe our practical application of these verses remains the same. Women are still able to fully participate in our gathered times of worship and edification – with the limitation only of roles or activities that would upend headship principles.

***1 Timothy 2***

The difficult passage from 1 Timothy 2, which also is central to discussions about any potential limitations of women in worship or ministry is also fraught with challenges. Yet the main idea is more easily discernible than the prior (1 Cor. 14) passage. The paragraph from 1 Timothy 2:8-15 reads as follows:

8I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; 9likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, 10but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. *11Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness**. 12I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.* 13For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 14and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 15Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. *(emphasis added.)*

Fortunately, verses 8-10 allow us a running start. Paul is calling for men to lead spiritually by praying with lifted hands in a spirit of unity – and to do this everywhere – church gatherings and public places. Similarly, there are spiritual pursuits that women should model in order to reveal Christ in their lives, namely modesty of clothing and accessories, and self-control of temperament. Mostly, they should be noticed for their godliness – their beautiful works done in faith for Christ's church. We do not want to miss that good works (i.e. active serving, influential ministry, Spirit-empowered engagement) are a godly women's dress. Similarly, the paragraph ends with a description of women who are marked by the fruit of the Spirit. Surely, the thrust of the paragraph is not to exclude women from ministry or impact. Rather, we can note a consistency with what we've established earlier: Paul is calling men and women to participate together, in partnership – yet in ways that are not identical, but distinctive. Their value and engagement level is to be the same; however, their roles are different. Men are noted for leading spiritually with their voices and in unity. Women are noted for consistently modeling their spirituality with inner beauty and practical godliness. So, we are clearly in complementary relationship territory.

Verse 11 raises many questions: Is this referring to a particular woman, or women in general? Women or wives? Learn to what end, if not to teach others? How quiet is “quietly”? Should we follow the NKJV which says twice to be “in silence”? And submissive to whom? Her husband? Men in general? Anyone in authority over her? Is there any particular cultural scenario in Ephesus prompting all this? Additional questions emerge similarly from the next several verses, including the key, verse 12. This is admittedly rugged terrain. We will not pursue answering every potential question. The following is a manageable attempt to help us take what we can from these verses for our purposes as a church.

Again, verse 11 reads, “Let a woman *learn* quietly with all submissiveness.” *(emphasis added.)* There are two points we want to make here.

 1) Women are to be active learners in the Christian community.

2) This learning is to be pursued and expressed within the headship-submission relationships previously discussed.

While we do not know what primary factor or group of factors local to Ephesus may have caused Paul to write these words, we do know a few things. In following a study by Clint Arnold and Robert Saucy, we find that learning among women in first century Ephesus was on the rise. They had access to education – notably some shared in leading the educational system – and they held high civic offices.[[97]](#footnote-97) We also know that Paul has a pattern of addressing local, ad hoc issues in his letters to churches, yet usually does so as an opportunity to teach more universal or binding truths.[[98]](#footnote-98) So, we can begin to discern here that Paul is likely calling for women to take scriptural learning seriously, yet to do so in a way that is not disruptive, domineering, or in any way that violates the headship-submission structure key to male-female relationships. This seems to parallel the principle that we discovered in 1 Corinthians 11. In this case, the submissive, quiet learning is to be peaceable and orderly.[[99]](#footnote-99)

Verse 12 is the most significant verse here, referred to by Arnold and Saucy as the “most explicit directive in Scripture” concerning women's activity in the church.[[100]](#footnote-100) Again it reads:

*12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.*

Continuing to follow Arnold and Saucy, we can draw some inferences and conclusions about this verse as they logically build a case as to its meaning and application for us:[[101]](#footnote-101)

* Based on women's ascent to leadership in the civic world in Ephesus, many may have assumed they could similarly pursue positions of leadership in the churches they were joining.
* Paul does not refer clearly to any specific situation in Ephesus that he may be addressing. However, he does appeal to creation order (Adam first) and the basis for the fall (Eve's being deceived), which directs us toward headship categories for the meaning of this larger paragraph.
* This prohibition of “teaching” cannot be referring to false teaching (as if women were prone to teaching falsehood), because Paul routinely warns everyone about false teachers – who are typically men.
* This prohibition cannot simply be generic teaching. The New Testament is replete with a variety of levels of teaching, from the official office of teacher (Eph. 4:11) to community worship involving Spirit-empowered speaking (1 Cor. 14:26), to the call to sing and teach and admonish one another – where everyone participates in a form of teaching (Col. 3:16).
* The Greek word for teaching, *didasko,* has two primary functions: the faithful passing on and the accurate interpretation of the established tradition of faith (i.e. doctrine). Significantly, the emphasis of this kind of teaching is not on the mere transmission of correct knowledge, but on instruction in how to live, resulting in life-change.
* The Greek word for authority here, *authentein,* is best understood simply as “authority.”[[102]](#footnote-102) It is used here positively (not implying any particular abuse of authority) as it is grammatically connected with “teaching.”
* “Teaching” and “exercise authority” may be a singular compound idea, representing the function of leaders who “teach with authority” or whose teaching establishes what is authoritative (i.e. official or regulatory – within the spiritual community). The goal transcends doctrinal purity and is vested with godly modeling.
* In the first century, especially due to the importance of the oral tradition, the primary responsibility for passing on “the faith” depended on the authoritative leaders of local congregations.
* What is chiefly at issue here is the prohibiting of women to perform that kind of teaching that would be done to represent the official leadership of the church, which God has determined to reserve for particular men.
* So, women are prohibited from participating in the kind of influential and regulatory teaching that would place them in authority over men in the church. At its end, this prohibition of combining “teaching” and “authority” disturbs the relational paradigm of responsible male headship and willing female submission.
* It is worth noting, additionally, that all believers (men and women including individual overseers) are under the umbrella authority of the overseers as a group.[[103]](#footnote-103)

Perhaps this statement ties it all together: **Women are not permitted to teach doctrine to men in a way that places them in spiritual authority over men.**

Significantly, immediately after raising this limitation on women in the arena of teaching and exercising authority over men, Paul begins chapter 3 (the next verse) with teaching about spiritual leadership and service offices in the church.

***Primary Spiritual Leadership Oversight is Open to Qualified Men***

Spiritual leadership involving doctrinal authority for the church is not open to women, and it is only open to men who meet particular qualifications, who are called by God and affirmed by their local congregation.[[104]](#footnote-104) While we find support for our conclusions in the New Testament as a whole, the primary specific teachings concerning church leadership are found in the Pastoral Epistles – those letters written by Paul late in his life to his protégé, Timothy, and to Titus. In these letters, we see Paul clarifying two ongoing “offices” for church government, for which he provides requirements, or qualifications. One office is open to men alone, and the other is open to both genders.

The first of these offices concerns the responsibility for primary spiritual leadership and oversightover a local church. A group, together called the “overseers,” fills this responsibility. Among the requirements that these spiritual leaders have high moral character and a solid track record, we want to emphasize that there are:

Four unique aspects of overseers:

1. They are responsible to God for the *spiritual oversight* of the congregation.
2. The defining ministry task is the *teaching and protection of doctrine.*
3. They are to serve as a *group.*
4. They are to be *male*.

The second of the offices concerns spiritualservice. This group is called “deacons.” They also must be spiritually qualified, and there are...

Three distinctives of deacons:

1. They are *leading servants* in the church who are particularly active in ministry.
2. They *assist the overseers* in shepherding and administration.
3. They are *both male and female.*

***The Office of Overseer***

The Apostle Paul gives us one official leadership position in the church, the “office of overseer,” for which qualifications are given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.[[105]](#footnote-105) The term “overseer”[[106]](#footnote-106) refers to one who rules responsibly, so the overseers are those charged with the formal leadership of a local church. This title is functionally interchangeable with the term “elder.”[[107]](#footnote-107) Besides the long list of character traits (which cumulatively evidence the reality of the Holy Spirit’s fruit) required of spiritual leaders, the primary taskof overseers that emerges from among the qualifications is that of teaching[[108]](#footnote-108) – specifically detailed in Titus 1:9:

“He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be *able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it*” (emph. added).

This protection of sound doctrine is functionally central to the qualifications of overseers. Meanwhile the broader and primary realm of responsibility[[109]](#footnote-109) of elders/overseers, according to 1 Peter 5:1-3 is to:

“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight… willingly … eagerly … being examples to the flock.”[[110]](#footnote-110)

It is from this function of “shepherding” the church as a flock that we get our term “pastor.”[[111]](#footnote-111) This is not so much a leadership title as it is the leading function of what overseers do. We also see that the responsibility of overseeing the church of God as a “shepherd” is a delegated responsibility – a microcosm of the reality that Christ himself is the true “Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Peter 2:25).

Regarding those elders who oversee the flock of God as shepherds (pastors) who attend to their souls, the usual presentation of these official spiritual leaders is plural – they function as a group of overseers.[[112]](#footnote-112) As leaders of the people they are responsible for accurately speaking the word of God and modeling a faith and manner of life that is worthy of being followed (Hebrews 13:7). Leaders are to watch over the souls of those in their church – who are to follow and be in submission to them– as they are accountable to God (Hebrews 13:17).[[113]](#footnote-113) If Acts 6 can be interpreted as a preview of formal church leadership to come, we already see the disciples taking an organizational administrative role in beginning to offload some of the ministry work to other faithful men (perhaps as “prototype-deacons”) so that they (perhaps as “prototype-elders”) may be freed up to be devoted to “prayer and to the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:3-4).[[114]](#footnote-114) So, as a group, the primary spiritual leaders pursue a full-orbed shepherding approach, which includes modeling godly living, teaching and protecting accurate doctrine, administrating and overseeing the broad congregation in their pursuits, and devoting themselves to prayer.

For our purposes here, what is particularly significant is that in every reference to primary spiritual leaders/overseers in the New Testament Church, they are male.[[115]](#footnote-115) The qualifications for elders/overseers in Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3 use male pronouns consistently, and additionally require one to be “the husband of one wife.”[[116]](#footnote-116) This emphasis is even more pronounced when we note instructions regarding deacons in the same context that specifically include women. Paul’s admonition to Timothy to “entrust to faithful *men* who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2) may support a view that Paul's intent was to maintain faithful men as primary teachers for the congregations. For those who might prefer to appeal to Jesus for a different answer, it is noteworthy that he included many women among his larger entourage. He could easily have settled the leadership discussion for us by choosing six women to include as primary disciples among his twelve. But Jesus appointed only men for his inner circle to whom he would give authority. He trained these men for over three years, preparing to appoint and send them out as the 12 apostles who would then launch and lead the early church. This is the model Paul likely drew from, confirming that ongoing shepherding and oversight of local congregations would be performed by particularly qualified men commissioned to this task.

***Primary Spiritual Service is Open to both Qualified Men and Women***

So, we have seen that the office of primary spiritual leadership is for male overseers who are responsible to God to oversee the church by shepherding the congregation – particularly through godly ruling and doctrinal teaching. Meanwhile, there is an additional arena of highly regarded spiritual service, which also includes an official office that appears to be shared by both men and women. This is the office of deacon.

***The Office of Deacon***

The word “deacon” comes from the Greek *diakonos*[[117]](#footnote-117) and is used prevalently in the New Testament for various acts of serving or ministering to others, or of being a servant in general. For example, Mark 10:43 quotes Jesus saying, “Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant *(diakonos)*.” In Jesus’ early miracle in Cana, it was the servants *(diakonoi)* who drew water for him. In John 12:26 Jesus calls those who will become his followers his “servants.” And Paul describes everyone who is “in Christ” as competent ministers *(diakonoi)* of the New Covenant (2 Cor. 3:6), and describes even himself as a “servant of the gospel” (Eph. 3:7, Col. 1:23, 25). Additionally, there are various commands for all believers to serve and minister to one another as opportunities arise.

As with many terms, there is a common generic usage with wide application for *diakonos*, which may be differentiated from a more formal and narrow usage. In various places in Paul’s letters, a technical usage for “diakonos” emerges in describing particular Christians who are especially noteworthy in ministry as leading servants among the churches. Of interest to us is that examples of notable deacons/servants, in marked contrast to elders/overseers, include both men and women.

 Men who are specifically named deacons in the New Testament include Tychicus (Eph. 6:21) and Epaphras (Col. 1:7). Meanwhile, Paul gives the highest of commendations to Phoebe as the first among over 30 people he greets by name or relation in Romans 16:1:[[118]](#footnote-118)

*I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant (diakonos) of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.*

So, Paul has put Phoebe at the head of the list of servants to honor, called her a “deacon” and a “patron,” and expressed the importance of treating her in a well deserved, worthy manner. “Prisca and Aquila” are then affirmed as “my fellow workers” (v. 2), as their service to Paul included risking their lives for him and hosting a church in their home (vv. 4-5) as they assisted him in ministry. A few verses later, Paul commends a trio of female “workers in the Lord,” including drawing particular attention to “my beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord” (verse 12). These may be descriptions of female deacons in action. Similarly, Urbanus is described as “our fellow worker in Christ” (v. 9), likely highlighting the work of a male deacon.

**For our purposes, the office of deacon comprises those men and women who are among a group of officially recognized church workers who are known for their ministry service within a local congregation and for their assistance to the overseers.**

The first picture we have of proto-typical deacons functioning this way is in Acts 6. In this case, a situation arose in which the disciples were distracted from their primary calling to teach the word and to pray. To remedy this, they had the larger group of disciples “choose from among them seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom,” whom the twelve (functioning as proto-elders) would appoint to the duty of waiting on tables. So, these early deacons with high, godly character were officially commissioned to serve the ministry in practical ways, under the authority of the early overseers, as a means of assisting them.[[119]](#footnote-119)

The formalization of the office of deacon appears in Paul’s letters. In the introduction of his letter to the Philippians (1:1), Paul mentions both offices of “overseers and deacons” together, demonstrating a two-tier approach to local church leadership and ministry.[[120]](#footnote-120) In 1 Timothy 3:8-13, Paul follows his qualifications for overseers with qualifications for deacons, confirming that a second office is in view.[[121]](#footnote-121) Many of the qualifications for deacons are in the same territory as for overseers, with the notable exception of “ability to teach” (and the corresponding extended responsibility in Titus 1 of correcting and rebuking those who misuse God’s word). In fact, this seems to be the crux of the distinction between the two offices. Overseers are those tasked with accurately proclaiming and protecting the authoritative doctrine of the church as a central feature of their leadership ministry. This, of course, requires time to study, discern, pray, and counter false teaching. Meanwhile, the deacons, not being burdened with establishing, teaching and guarding doctrine,[[122]](#footnote-122) are freed to serve in a variety of arenas of helps and people ministries.

In the midst of the qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3 is verse 11, a source of much discussion. The New American Standard Bible reads, “Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.”[[123]](#footnote-123)

Meanwhile, many other modern translations have “women” as an *alternate* reading, with “their wives” (i.e the wives of deacons) as the *standard* reading. The ambiguity is due to two factors. One, the word *gunaikas* is used both for “women” and for “wives.” Greek does not distinguish them. Two, the malleable Greek simply begins by saying, “*Gunaikas hosautos semnas.*” This is literally, “women (wives) likewise dignified,” with additional clarifying words added by translators.[[124]](#footnote-124) This leaves us with two leading interpretations available:

1. The verse is not referring to women deacons, but remains focused on male deacons. In this case it is referring to the requirement of deacons to have dignified *wives*.[[125]](#footnote-125)
2. The verse is, in fact, a momentary departure from male deacon requirements, to interject requirements for women serving as deacons, making *“women”* the preferred translation.[[126]](#footnote-126)

While there are good arguments for and against each view (see related footnotes), the second view (“women,” i.e. female deacons) seems the preferable one and is the position of WHBC. If this is the case, the requirements for female deacons do concur with those of the men, though in abbreviated form. Verse 11 actually parallels verses 8-9 quite closely:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Men Deacons** (vv. 8-9) | **Women Deacons** (v.11) |
| Be dignified | Be dignified |
| Not double-tongued | Not slanderers |
| Not addicted to much wine | But sober-minded |
| Not greedy for dishonest gain |  |
| Hold the mystery of the faith… | Faithful in all things |

 Meanwhile, verses 10 and 13 could be understood to apply to both male and female deacons. So, the only omissions for female deacons are the requirements not to be greedy (v. 8b) to be tested (v. 10) and to be the husband of one wife, managing the children and family well (v. 12); each of which has plausible reasons for omission.[[127]](#footnote-127)

There are a few other ministry callings that pertain to women, which are worth mentioning. Expectations for older women in Titus 2:2-5 actually sound much like qualifications for a leadership office. The calling for them to be teachers is actually quite significant. Are older women tasked with an overseer-like office that exceeds that of deacons? Actually, their calling to teach has a limited scope and a particular focus, as seen in vv. 2b-5:

*They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.*

Their audience is younger women, not the community at large. The focus of the mentoring is on how to be a successful wife and mother so as to honor God. This is consistent with male headship in the home and in the church, established earlier, and provides a context for women to thrive and fully utilize their abilities related to teaching.

There is another ministry that Paul develops for particular women, which also involves requirements. It is a ministry to and for widows, detailed in 1 Timothy 5:3-16. Here, we see that widows are to be particularly honored. A widow who was all alone had the opportunity to have her hope set on God and to pray and make intercession night and day (v.5). This is an honorable and important calling! A widow might be enrolled in the official ministry to (other) widows if she was at least 60 years old, was a faithful wife, and had a reputation for good works (vv. 9-10a). If she had no family, the church should care for her, so that she might pray and minister to other younger wives and widows.

We may have an example of such a ministry to widows in Tabitha (Dorcas), who seems to fit the profile of a deacon. Her story is detailed when she dies and is resurrected by Peter, as recorded in Acts 9. She is described as a “disciple” in Joppa, who “was always doing good and helping the poor” (vv. 36). Apparently Tabitha had a ministry among the widows who mourned her death and who showed Peter all the robes and clothing that Tabitha had made them when she was alive.

To summarize, we see that the New Testament places a high value on various acts of ministry to others in the church. While all are called to serve others as a way of life, there are some who are called by God, and recognized by those around them, to fulfill the calling and requirements of the office of deacon. This ministry focuses on spiritual service and functions as a key support to the overseers who lead the congregation and are responsible for the primary teaching ministry. The office of deacon appears to be fully open to both men and women who meet their respective qualifications.

***The Defining Distinctive: Exercising Spiritual Authority***

**The role of overseer is the only official ministry in the church that separates men from women and is the sole position that is open only to men. It is open only to those men who meet the biblical qualifications.** So, what specifically distinguishes men from women in church ministry? The distinguishing spiritual leadership position centers on two overlapping roles:

1. **Being responsible to provide spiritual oversight and direction as the official leaders of the congregation; and**
2. **Being tasked with the authoritative teaching of Scripture for the purpose of establishing and protecting the doctrine of the church.**

In short, overseers are tasked as the primary leaders and official teachers. They are the ones who *guide and guard*.It is the exercising of spiritual authority. The crux of the matter is God-ordained *leadership*, based on the principle of male headship. As a group, the overseers exercise authority over the church, under Christ, and on his behalf. While each overseer should be humble, never “lording it over” others, and not prone to leading in an *authoritarian* manner, at root the ministry calling is an *authoritative* one. The responsibility before God for the leadership and teaching of every local church lies with the team of overseers.

This authority granted to overseers rests in two places: the chief responsibility before God for general oversight, and the particular ministry role of authoritative teaching. The first has already been detailed at length. Here, we will develop the second a bit more.

Authoritative teaching refers to teaching the truths of God, separating truth from error, and correcting those who are abusing God’s truth and who are, thereby, undermining God’s authority in a congregation. A good shepherd must not only know the sheep, but know how to spot the wolves and protect the sheep from the wolves.

 While God’s apparent intent for his church is that it includes active participation by various members of the church contributing as directed by the Holy Spirit, including women, there remains a difference – a distinction from what the overseers alone are tasked with. People who exercise these various speaking manifestations of the Spirit at one point or another are truly contributing to the body. However, they are not charged with the responsibility of teaching and protecting church doctrine. They are not given the ongoing responsibility to discern what is of the Spirit and what may be of flesh. They are not tasked by God with teaching the word “in and out of season” or given the responsibility of protecting the church from wolves who would seek to distract and devour the sheep. People can contribute as the Spirit leads, but Christ has commissioned overseers to shepherd the flock day in and day out, and has committed the doctrinal purity of the church to be under their charge. While these various speaking ministries – by men and by women – have a valuable place in the life of the church, they do not carry the same weight of authority as that responsibility given specifically to the overseers in their teaching charge. We acknowledge there are various speaking ministries that occur within a vibrant church ministry, yet are qualitatively different than the role of authoritative teaching reserved for the overseers.[[128]](#footnote-128)

 So, it seems that this is the line of demarcation that God has not permitted women to cross in the official ministry of a local church: Women may not exercise spiritual authority over men.

***Summary of New Testament Teaching on Gender Roles***

We understand that women were created by God as equal in value to men, and that gender distinctions help picture a biblical view of God. Women are wondrously different from men and, according to God's intention of design, are to be in complementary and mutually beneficial relationship with men. When men are humble, loving, sacrificial leaders in the home, thereby honoring their wives, they fulfill the headship role Christ has pictured for them. When women respond to their husbands in respectful submission, marked by willing partnership in life's callings and ministry, they become their husband's glory and fulfill Christ's picture for his church. This complementary relationship allows both male and female partners to thrive in ways God intended, which results in benefits for both. In this, God receives glory. When brought into the church, women are integral participants in the vibrant life and ministry of their local churches.

 According to God's intent as revealed in the New Testament, qualified male overseers are responsible to God for exercising spiritual authority in a local congregation. Specifically, they are tasked with the general ministry oversight and care of the congregation and with responsibility and authority for the teaching and protection of pure doctrine. This is the singular ministry to which women are restricted. Alongside the overseers are the deacons (men and women of equal status) who are noteworthy assistants to the overseers, supporting them by vibrant ministry service among the church community.

**CONCLUSION**

 Our purpose in this paper has been to provide clarity for the teaching and practice of Whittier Hills Baptist Church regarding the role distinctions between men and women. We have tried to provide a thorough (though not exhaustive) exegetical, theological, and practical treatment of the issue to help all who are interested in a deeper understanding of this important topic, and especially to establish clarity and unity for all who would teach in our spiritual community. For those who have ongoing questions or would like further interaction regarding these issues, we encourage you to speak to an overseer. We take our role of leading and teaching very seriously and would welcome thoughtful biblical interaction. We realize these issues are vitally important to the church and to the world. They are also issues about which good people may passionately disagree. Our prayer is for humble, prayerful, faithful unity as a church family as we seek to honor Christ.

We are privileged and humbled at the responsibility God has entrusted to us to lead this family well and, where necessary, to establish regulative interpretation of God’s Word to guide us in following our Lord. We have the utmost respect for both men and women, and all they individually and jointly bring to our family. We strongly encourage all men and women of WHBC to offer anything and everything they have for the building up of the church. We also believe the ministry of each man or woman is subject to him or her meeting the character qualifications and relevant role distinctions established in God’s Word. Within these parameters we encourage full freedom for each person to pursue God’s glory however he might lead them to do so within the ministry.

It is our desire to see a church family that is characterized by a vibrant diversity of ministry where people of both genders and all ages, life stages, socio-economic status, and ethnic background are living and loving and serving freely together for the mutual encouragement of each other and for the sake of Christ’s glory in this world. May we all strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit among our body as we pursue this goal. God is worthy of our pursuit of accurate biblical interpretation, gracious teaching, and unified ministry and relationships. To him we dedicate ourselves and this paper.

1. The complementarian position is developed later and is also distinguished from being either egalitarian or hierarchical. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. While these terms are interchangeable, in our Whittier Hills context we have chosen to use the term “overseer” to embrace both unpaid “elders” and full-time paid “pastors.” While “overseer,” “elder,” and “bishop” refer to the primary ministry leadership *office*, the term “pastor” emphasizes the teaching and shepherding *functions* pursued by all overseers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. By “spiritual oversight” we mean the broad responsibility to provide spiritual leadership and care for the entire congregation. The overseers take responsibility for ministry vision and mission and equipping the body for service. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. By ”exercising authority” we do not mean “authoritarian.” This speaks to what is official, not the tone in which it is offered. Rather, we mean under the authority of Jesus that God has granted to particular qualified men who exercise godly oversight of the local church through the establishing and protection of biblical doctrine. So, we are referring to that which is regulative, or which represents the church’s official teachings. Through this kind of teaching leadership their oversight is displayed. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Hierarchical” is a term which emphasizes an actual hierarchy of value – where men are considered intrinsically superior to women and are to be in authority over women in all arenas of society. Meanwhile, “egalitarians” view men and women without distinction in both value and also in roles and functions. So, in application, egalitarian churches will have male and female overseers, preachers, and pastors. This is pursued more fully in Part 2. WHBC holds to equal value and differing roles. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Both the general limitation on women functioning as overseers via authoritative teaching and the occasional permission for unique teaching opportunities are presented in a well-balanced way by Charles Powell, in *Paul’s Concept of Teaching and 1 Timothy 2:12*. Available online: [http://bible.org/article/paul%E2%80%99s-concept-teaching-and-1-timothy-212#P70\_21343](http://bible.org/article/paul%E2%80%99s-concept-teaching-and-1-timothy-212%22%20%5Cl%20%22P70_21343) . [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. As modeled by Priscilla and Aquila in Acts 18:26. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For example: long delays prior to voting rights, unequal pay for equal work, Mens-only clubs, and entire job markets almost completely devoid of female participation and welcome. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For example, In addition to Isis, the goddess Artemis (Diana in Latin) was worshiped, even via ecstatic self-castrations by male priests donning female clothing. See Clinton Arnold's chapter, “Ephesian Background of Paul's Teaching on Women's Ministry,” in Robert L. Saucy and Judith K. Ten Elshof, eds., *Women and Men in Ministry*, *(WMM)*, (Chicago, ILL: Moody Press, 2001), 284-285. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. An egregious pursuit of establishing a matriarchal alternative was the “Re-imagining 1993” conference, supported by several mainline denominations with 2000 in attendance, including a third who were clergy and denomination leaders. At this event, women chanted their worship to “Sophia” as an alternative goddess to replace the Trinity, sang pantheistic songs, and promoted lesbianism. One source of many for this event is found here: <http://www.watchman.org/reltop/reimagin.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. This issue of what complementarity means is disputed. Egalitarians Ronald Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, who serve as general editors and authors of various chapters, *Discovering Biblical Equality, (DBE),* use this word in their subtitle, *“Complementarity Without Hierarchy.”* In the Introduction and in Ch. 18, they argue that they also believe God designed men and women to be in complementary relationships with each other; yet *without an established hierarchy* which keeps men consistently in authority and women perpetually in submission. Meanwhile, complementarian Wayne Grudem, who shared in coining the label for the position (“complementarian”) expresses umbrage at their hijacking of the very term which best distinguished the two positions. See Wayne Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism (CCEF)* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Publishers, 2006), 9-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Often called “Biblical Equality” by proponents and “Evangelical Feminism” by opponents. We will refer to this as the “egalitarian” position, as it emphasizes an inherent equality of both gender relations and roles. A leading consortium of evangelical egalitarian proponents and articles can be found at The Center for Biblical Equality, founded in 1987 [www.cbeinternational.org](http://www.cbeinternational.org/). The viewpoint is particularly established and defended in the significant book, *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, *(DBE),* Gen. Editors Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca M. Groothuis (Downer’s Grove, ILL: Intervarsity Press, 2004, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This issue of “roles” is the crux of the division between the viewpoints. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. This is a synopsis of the clarifying tenets within the introduction of *DBE*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Among the support given within *DBE* includes: appealing to unique historical circumstances in Ephesus and Corinth which led Paul to assert temporary restraints; seeing women in the New Testament as participating in all levels of church leadership; offering a view of the Greek words translated as “authority” and “head” to not mean authoritative leadership and not imply hierarchy of role; to insist that being unequal in role is incompatible with true equality of personhood. Other controversial views will be discussed later in the paper. An additional seemingly non-evangelical viewpoint expressed in an article posted on the *Center for Biblical Equality's* “Staff Picks” webpage, includes author Kenneth Bailey asserting a possible motive for Paul's penchant of contradicting himself on such matters: “in this text Paul is angry,” and in another he is under “stress.” *Women in the New Testament: A Middle Eastern Cultural View*, 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The primary name associated with this new interpretive approach is William Webb. His two chapters in *DBE* summarize his book-length treatment, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals,* and detail his approach. In his book he concludes that the Bible’s teachings subjugated slaves and women, yet also revealed a dominant redemptive movement that pointed to a day beyond slavery and toward full gender equality. Meanwhile, he maintains that the prohibition of homosexual behavior is intended not to be overturned. He arrives at his conclusions through the development of an 18-point filter by which the student of Scripture may distinguish what is normative for all time and what is culturally conditioned with intention of further progression. He explains his hermeneutic via an “XYZ principle.” The X represents the sub-biblical perspective of the “original culture.” The Y presents Scripture’s direct teaching, which is an improvement. The Z then represents the “ultimate ethic” toward which Scripture points but does not specify. We have grave concerns over implications arising from a perspective that is based on asserting plain teachings in Scripture are *not* God’s final revelation for us. For a more thorough review and substantial critique of this methodology, our own Dr. Clinton Arnold has written a paper, *William J. Webb and the Redemptive Movement Hermeneutic*, available upon request. The gist of our critique is our conviction that the redemptive movement in Scripture has already taken place between the Old and New Covenants, and that the New Testament itself is already our “ultimate ethic” for this life. Our perfect ethic will be realized in eternity. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. An older variant of this view could be positively called “Male Headship” or “Male Leadership,” but would miss the interaction component and the mutually beneficial aspect inherent in “complementarian.” This word was coined by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) in 1988 to describe their position to balance two themes of “equal in value” but “different in roles.” See Grudem in *CCEF*, 13-14. It is also disparagingly called “hierarchical” or “patriarchal” or “subordinationist” by opponents who wish to highlight the exclusion of women from aspects of ministry. See R.M. Groothuis in *DBE,* Ch. 18. Here, Groothuis tries to persuade the reader that personhood and role may not be separated, and that her statement of the opposing view as “equal in person and unequal in role” is untenable. She asserts that the traditional view of women as inferior in both categories had more logical merit. Complementarians, meanwhile, appeal to the example of Jesus, who both shared equality with God in essence, and yet subordinated himself to God the Father for his redemptive mission. We are convinced that Scripture teaches both aspects in tension – equality of person and limited distinction of roles – and affirms both. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Our view embraces distinction of some roles in only the two spheres Scripture affirms: the family and the church. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. In particular places we have chosen to utilize footnotes in this paper to interact with significant positions by egalitarians, and to express why we are convinced the complementarian view offers a better solution. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. We see God as the ultimate Author behind every page of biblical Scripture. Meanwhile, each biblical author wrote in a particular context with specific issues in view that frequently vary from our own issues and questions. But each author still wrote in full concord with God’s intended revelation to us. So their writings – even when presented progressively – are still compatible with one another. It is the task of interpreters to determine how the progress of revelation maintains compatibility and continuity, particularly as the Old Testament gives way to the New Testament. So we become very suspicious of any view that seeks to pit one biblical author against another, as if God was not inspiring the full revelation of both. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. ESV. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from the ESV. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. There is much discussion about what exactly constitutes the image of God. Our view is that it is a rather broad analogy God is drawing to Himself in how he has made us. We are what God might look like if he were a creature rather than the eternal creator. As such, our relationships, actions, character, etc. are all patterned in some way after Him and in some way “tell his story” to the universe. Our calling is to “image” God or to reflect Him accurately to the world. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. When comparing the creation account with 1 Corinthians 11:1ff a reasonable inference would seem to be that role distinctions are somehow *constitutive* of the image of God. The Corinthian passage has many difficult exegetical questions, but the basic structure of the argument is that the relationship of husband/wife is parallel to the relationship of Father/Son. The New Testament passage shows a pattern of subordination of Father to Son and of wife to husband. When compared with Genesis, this would seem to imply that role distinctions are part of the *essential* image of God imprinted on humans. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. This does not mean that single people or childless couples are somehow less like God or less significant. God has a purpose for everyone in all life circumstances and that purpose is to image him in the world for his glory in some significant way. The most common pattern this takes in humanity is through marriage and childrearing, but he has other purposes that he can express more fully through other human relationships. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. This “image” aspect of the family adds extra importance to maintaining the traditional understanding of family in a culture that is bent on redefining it in its own image rather than preserving and protecting it in God’s image. Homosexual “marriage,” cohabitation, abortion, abuse, divorce, etc. are not just immoral acts that cause us harm, they tell lies about the nature and character of God. They are not simply harmful. They go against the very nature of God and deny the very purpose of our existence. He does not take these sins lightly and neither should we. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. It is noteworthy that “helper” (*ezar* in Hebrew) is not a demeaning word (such as a domestic servant). While being used of Eve twice, it is used of God Himself 16 times, being associated with “strength,” “shield,” “protection.” So, this is a valiant word! [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. While the text does not explicitly affirm this, it is clear in Adam’s response when Eve is presented. His words could legitimately be translated “at last…!” as if he had been looking for someone like himself, and now she is finally here. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Again, we see complementarity among the details. Eve is taken from Adam’s side, “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” denoting equality of essence. Yet, Adam was also created first and given ruling responsibilities first – denoting role distinction. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The Hebrew words for “man” and “woman” are just as close in sound as the English ones we are familiar with. Hebrew writers often used such “sound” wordplay to highlight relationship. That appears to be what is happening here. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. We realize there are some who would disagree with this statement. For example, Richard Hess, in *Discovering Biblical Equality,* would disagree with our interpretation on nearly every point, but we find his arguments unconvincing. We believe our interpretation makes the best sense of the language, of the context of the story, of the historical context, and of the overarching theology of Scripture. Hess’s arguments, in our view, do not deal adequately with the scriptural data. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. It is vitally important that we keep the word “functionally” front and center in our attention. The distinctions are strictly that. There is no priority of value or significance; just one of role. As we will see, that, too, is important to properly portray God. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. When Satan comes to Eve he slyly introduces envy and discontent by appealing to her sense of pride. Satan implies that God is not fair, that He is holding them back from who they should rightfully be. He suggests that God’s own headship is petty and that God doesn’t want them to eat the fruit because God doesn’t want them to be just like Him. This deception has a powerful effect on Adam and Eve, and in reaching for what is not theirs, they lose the beauty of what is. This deception has sunk deeply within our sinful nature, because we all struggle mightily with submitting to God. When we buy into the lie that headship necessarily means one person is “missing out” on something that is rightfully theirs and begin to envy another’s role, we have put our feet on the same treacherous path that led our first ancestors to their destruction. Only now the path is so well-worn that it feels like the true road of life, while the path that God has laid out for us feels strange, even somehow wrong. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. This understanding may be reinforced by a possible parallel in Genesis 4:7b, where God is again confronting a person (this time Cain) for his sin. God warns Cain that, “Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.” Here, sin is pictured as struggling for dominance in Cain’s life and he must forcefully take control of these urges. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See Galatians 3:13-14; 2 Corinthians 5:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See Romans 8:1-17; Galatians 5:16-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. See e.g., Exodus 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See Judges 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See 2 Kings 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Joel 2:28-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See for instance Acts 21: 9: 1 Cor. 11:5. Also, Anna is called a prophet in Luke 2:36. Although she is found in the New Testament, she predates the ministry of Christ and, therefore, more properly belongs with the Old Testament examples given. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Some have argued that this passage is not about a woman, but uses a woman to personify wisdom as is done elsewhere in Proverbs. However, the long-standing interpretation seems convincing to us: this passage speaks of a real woman, who embodies wisdom, and, therefore, presents the ideal for all women. For an excellent discussion of this point, see Bruce Waltke’s treatment of it in the *New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004.* [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Any view of women that disallows working outside the home clearly denies this Scripture. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. We should not shy away from affirming the unique feminine and maternal values that God has blessed women with in their ministry toward their husband and children. Also, it is relevant (but not in the present context) to also affirm that a man’s calling involves the home as well – in leading, loving, and providing for his family. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Most of the phrases in this passage directly describe some action or virtue of this woman. A small number speak of her family, but keep the focus on her. Verse 23 is the only verse that, at first glance, does not seem to focus on her. This “violation” of the pattern ought to cause us to examine it more carefully to see if something else might be going on. One plausible understanding of this passage treats the verse as the “pivot” of a chiasm. This is a literary device used for emphasis. It sets up a parallel pattern, and often has a single statement at the center. When such a structure exists, the center statement is, by definition, the key point of the passage. This section of Proverbs 31 flows like this:

A “She is *not afraid*…”

 B “…*clothed* in scarlet”

 C “…clothing is fine *linen*…”

 D “Her husband is known…”

 C’ “She makes *linen* garments…”

 B’ “Strength and dignity are her *clothing*”

A’ “She *laughs at* the time to come”

If this is a bona fide chiasm then the effect would be to say the things the valiant woman does results in her husband’s stature being magnified. In other words, this valiant woman is doing the things described in order to *help* her husband. This is not dissimilar to the Church being revealed as a beautiful Bride – to show honor to Christ, her Groom (see Ephesians 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. A known excerpt is where Miriam leads the women (not the men) in singing and dancing. Her lyric is written in Exodus 15:21. However, while we know she “led worship” among the women, her lyric appears to be borrowed from Moses’ song in Ex. 15:1. Perhaps they were co-writers. A stronger exception is in Judges 5 where Deborah and Barak are said to have “sang this song”, which contains 30 verses of lyrics. Perhaps she was a composer and even a co-leader of musical worship with Barak. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. See, for example, John 14:26: 15:26: 16:7-15, where Jesus promises the coming of the Spirit of Truth – not to present new truth, but to fully manifest the truth already presented by the Father – to make existing truths known more fully to believers. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. The era of the Spirit’s internal presence, empowerment for ministry, and “fruit,” now enables New Covenant believers to successfully live out the callings that have always been, yet have been stifled by the power of sin. Again, we affirm that God’s original design prior to the intrusion of sin was the two-pronged *equal in being* and *distinct in role*. Sin makes this design of God become routinely problematic. Redemption in Jesus and empowerment by the Holy Spirit allows us to now fulfill our divinely appointed roles and relationships in God-honoring and mutually fulfilling partnership, overcoming our sinful tendencies. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Many of us were raised under the rubric of the two primary categories of the Holy Spirit’s workings in us: 1. his “fruit,” by which he remakes our character into that of Christ’s (see Galatians 5); and 2. his “gifts” (Greek “charismas”), whereby he gives to each person one or more Spirit-empowered skills for ministry. Our own Dr. Kenneth Berding has challenged this second aspect in his book, *What are Spiritual Gifts: Rethinking the Conventional View*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006). wherein he argues that we have misunderstood “gifts” to be *abilities* that the believer now possesses – and should, therefore, use. Rather, the “charismas” of the Spirit are better understood as *ministries* where the Holy Spirit uses us (sometimes in our weakness). This perspective also diffuses a common egalitarian argument that asserts: If God “gifts” men and women equally, why would he then not allow women to use their God-given gifts? Or, why do some men get to use all their gifts, while women are restricted from certain gifts in certain contexts? From this newer perspective, as we possess the Holy Spirit, he directs us into various ministries where he works through us for his purposes. These purposes are consistent with his intentions of headship. Then the questioning of God for not allowing the expression of particular leadership or teaching “gifts” dissolves. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. This first aspect is Robert Saucy's point in his chapter on this verse, *The 'Order' and 'Equality' of Galatians 3:28,* in *WMM*, especially pp. 140-146. He later concludes, against egalitarians, that “equality in Christ is not contrary to all functional distinctions between God's people,” 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See Hebrews 10:19-22; 4:15-16; 1 Tim. 2:5 [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Gordon Fee diffuses what appears to be Paul's clear point of Gal. 1-4: salvation is now available to everyone who comes to Christ in faith, apart from the Law. Rather, he argues that this passage is actually not chiefly about soteriology (salvation), but about ecclesiology,to answer the question: Who are now the people of God?. His point is that Gal. 3:26-29 is mainly about altered relationships among the believing community, particularly the undoing of social constructs. However, we see the primary thrust to clarify that the gospel concerns access to God through Christ; as vv .22-29, mentions both salvation “by faith” and the status of being “in Christ” 5 times each! See Fee's article, “Male and Female in the New Creation,” in *DBE, especially pp. 172-176.* By way of extended reasoning, Fee arrives at his egalitarian conclusion that the era of “new creation” (Gal. 6) brought in by the Spirit and his gifts (ch.6) “should precede (i.e. negate) roles and structures” (185). Yet, this is a reasoned view, not one asserted by any particular verses, and appears to counter authorial intent. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. However, the NT affirmation of women learning is in continuity with OT commands for all people (men, women, children, and foreigners) to hear and learn from the teaching of the Law. So, this was perhaps more restorative to the original divine intent. (See Deut. 31:12 & Joshua 8:35.) [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. It would seem that her role here is consistent with Old Testament Levites who had a ministry of musical prophecy. See 1 Chronicles 25. Since in OT Temple worship these roles were seemingly only fulfilled by men, this is a noteworthy advance. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Scholars have noted that Priscilla is mentioned before her husband in four of six NT references. We do not know if this is due to her being the more gifted teacher or skilled communicator of the two, or if there is some other explanation (e.g., perhaps she came from a notable lineage or had some prior standing in the community). Grudem concludes we just can't know why she's listed first; but also that her correction of Apollos in private, partnered with her husband, is consistent with the complementarian view. *CCEF, 104-106. ­*On many levels this example falls short of establishing a woman teaching men in the assembly. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Aida B. Spencer makes a similar point, but goes too far in asserting that they are functioning here as sent witnesses, i.e. “apostles,” in *“Jesus’ Treatment of Women in the Gospels”. DBE* (137-140). She views the original twelve disciples (Jewish men) as connecting to the Old Covenant of the past, and these women as part of the New Covenant “apostles” pointing to the future. She attempts to disallow viewing the twelve disciples/apostles as examples of authoritative church leadership because of their function, which she has determined to be rear-facing. p.140. Spencer desires to promote these women to “apostles” in place of the twelve whom Scripture explicitly refers to as “Apostles.” Alternatively, it is more likely that those whom Jesus had invested in for more than three years as his protégés were, in fact, the genuine Apostles of the beginnings of the New Covenant. They carried with them the authority that Jesus commissioned them with twice (as part of the seventy-two, and in Matthew 28:18-20); whereas the women here were functioning as messengers to the disciples, not as their replacements. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Aida B. Spencer. *DBE,* 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. It is a sadness today how common it is for people to devalue the training in godliness of children, as if that is a second class ministry or a consolation opportunity (i.e. “they will only let me teach the kids”). George Barna studies have shown that only 10% of Americans who are unsaved at age 14 will convert to Christ after that time. Most of the remaining conversions happen by age 18. See <http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_savy.htm>. Similarly, most people’s character, personality, and life direction are almost fully formed during childhood. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. See Acts 12:12; Acts 16:14-15, 40; Colossians 4:15; 1 Corinthians 1:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. What an enormous compliment to these women! Linda Belleville uses this as an example of Paul clearly including women in leadership roles, perhaps even as equal partners. See the chapter *“Women Leaders in the Bible” in DBE*, 120-121. But maybe she sees too much here. Paul's honoring of these women is significant. “Side by side” could be a reference to them partnering with him. “Laboring for the gospel” could indicate evangelistic ministry that went out from the Philippian church, not necessarily indicating that they were functioning as primary leaders (overseers) in the local church, which is what Belleville is looking for. The same verse lists “Clement and the rest of my fellow workers...” indicating a broad team of associates to Paul. Perhaps as a group, they functioned as deacons. This is not to minimize their place of honor in serving alongside Paul. But we simply do not have enough to go on to presume these women served as primary leaders (i.e. overseers) in a local congregation. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. If Junia is the wife of Andronicus, it appears they were a couple of significant influence (Romans 16:7). Of interest to egalitarians is the possible reading, “They are well known *among the apostles*” or even *“prominent (outstanding) among* the apostles,” indicating their inclusion as star apostles. If this indicates that Junia was a female apostle, we could have a startling claim to a woman serving at the highest level of foundational authority (Eph. 2:20). Many texts from the 13th century onward refer to Junias as a man, a tradition followed by about half of Bible translations. Most of the support for Junia is from earlier sources than for Junias, and is well attested as a Latin name in the ancient world. Chrysostom offered 4th century support for Junia as a female apostle – even while personally opposing female bishops. A preferred translation may be “well-known *to* the apostles,” or that it is their fame which was well known *among* the apostles. See Grudem in *CCEF,* 133-135,who appeals to grammatical research by M. Burer and D. Wallace to support this reading. But the ESV and NET Bible stand alone in this conviction. In either case Andronicus and Junia(s) were relatives or fellow Jews, and fellow prisoners with Paul, who preceded his conversion (v.7) and were highly regarded. For online support of the egalitarian position see this excellent article by D. Preato: <http://godswordtowomen.org/juniapreato.htm>. For a grammatical study by D. Wallace justifying “known *to* the apostles,” see <http://bible.org/article/junia-among-apostles-double-identification-problem-romans-167>. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Perhaps some men prone to maintain hierarchical footholds do not easily see the benefit of raising the value of women; and perhaps some women prone to egalitarian practices have some fear of relinquishing leadership control to men. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. John Coe, Professor of Philosophy and Spiritual Theology at Biola University, in his chapter of *WMM, “Being Faithful to Christ in One's Gender,”* 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Ibid., 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Ibid., 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. This means to assist him with his spiritual calling, so they might minister together, not to become inappropriately abused. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Ibid., 204. It should not be alarming to complementarians that God describes himself with both masculine and feminine traits to reflect his image, which males and females together bear. The preponderance of self-references by God are masculine – indicating something about the priority of how he wants us to relate to him – as “Father.” Coe alludes to Is. 49:5, where God's love is likened to a woman who breast-feeds her child; Is. 66:13 where God cares for His people like a mother comforts her son; and Matt. 23:37 where Jesus' love for Israel is like a mother hen who desires to gather her chicks – even against their will. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Again, these are not old-fashioned quaint values of another era, but high and noble callings for 1st class ministry. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Grudem asserts that every egalitarian writer claims that male headship came only after the fall and is a product of sin. He offers specific egalitarian quotes to this effect, and then proceeds to counter the argument. *CCIF, 71-73.* [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. John Piper, John Piper and Wayne Grudem editors, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* *(*Wheaton, ILL: Crossway Books/Good News Publishers, 2006), 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Ibid*.*, 49.These descriptions seem so aptly worded. Piper’s treatment pursues developing a view of biblical masculinity and femininity, seeing that the goal is to “complement not duplicate” one another. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. See Gilbert Bilezikian’s article, *I Believe in Male Headship*, published on the site, [www.cbeinternational.org](http://www.cbeinternational.org/), for an example of a Christian egalitarian embrace of “headship”; yet via a definition that does not include leadership or authority in any of its biblical usages, but rather as the source of servanthood to their wives. We affirm that *both* ideas coexist in the term. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. This is not to imply at all that the nature of the relationship of husbands to wives is parallel to that of fathers and children, or masters and slaves – putting wives in the same category as their children and their servants! The singular point is that there are functional differences between the couplets. The way in which they submit to each other and to Christ looks different. To remove headship by the husband or to deny submission by the wife, or to flatten them out to be essentially the same type of “mutual submission” is to completely miss the flow of the text and the relationships between the 3 couplet sets. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Ephesians 5:21 can be understood to be the end of the paragraph starting in v.15 as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s workings; or the beginning of the discussion of husbands and wives, which continues into other areas of submission (through 6:9); or as a bridge connecting both discussions (which is perhaps the best option). [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Ephesians 5:29-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. See Emerson Eggerichs's very helpful book, *Love and Respect* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004)*.* As Eggerichs has developed in his book, within a marriage a man’s deepest need for respect from his wife and a woman’s greatest desire for love from her husband confirm male and female differences and role distinctions. The satisfying of these deep needs within a relationship is mutually beneficial. This is another picture of the nature of complementarian relationships. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. We cannot always be certain whether women or wives are in view, as *gyne* is the same word for both. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Notice verse 5, “”every wife/woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered….” This section (verses 1-16) leads immediately into a section on the Lord’s Supper (verses 17-34). The transition states clearly, “when you come together… when you come together as a church…” (verses 17-18), so this is not easily dismissed as merely a home or private worship context. Why, for example, would it matter what a woman is wearing in the privacy of her home? And to whom would a woman prophesy, if others are not present? So, our context here for headship and submission of wives to husbands and/or women to men appears to be the gathered church. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. These are common assertions, particularly that Paul’s limitations of women and basis of headship are responses to particular local cultural phenomena. See Kenneth E. Bailey, *Theology Matters*, Vol. 6, No.1 Jan/Feb 2000. “Women in the New Testament: A Middle Eastern Cultural View,” 6-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. The question of the appropriateness of women wearing head coverings today in worship (in addition to long hair) is not a pursuit in the scope of this paper. Our point is that this discussion in Corinth reveals Paul’s underlying theological basis for making practical guidelines. Some have suggested that *whatever* symbolizes headship and submission patterns in a culture should be in view here. While our physical symbols of expression may change, the underlying basis of headship does not. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Egalitarian scholar Gordon Fee emphasizes the reality of the honor-shame culture, yet takes it a different direction. He interprets the local cultural issue as a movement toward androgyny, where women were seeing themselves as if resurrected and no longer bound to men or husbands. The shame, according to Fee, is not an improper response to her husband's rightful headship, but simply a failure to distinguish male and female. So, again, the egalitarian effort is to show distinction within equality. “Praying and Prophecying in the Assemblies,” from *DBE*, 158-159. However, this may be speculation on the cause of Paul’s concern, and does not adequately address Paul’s actually stated rationale. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Headship is based on the Greek word for “head,” *kephale*, meaning literally “head, brain” or figuratively of “superior rank.” This second meaning of influence, authority, or responsibility in relationship is Paul’s typical usage. See BDAG Ed. 3, 542. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Many egalitarians have now lobbied for the meaning of “head” as “source,” apart from any residue of authority. One supporter of this position is Gilbert Bilezikian, author of *Beyond Sex Roles.* However, to deny any hierarchy of role requires *kephale* to mean something other than what every standard Bible lexicon insists it means. For the weakness of the view that “head” is better translated “source” or “origin,” so as to minimize any authority or hierarchy or role, see Grudem, *CCEV*, pp.121-126. Here, he displays persuasively the fruit of numerous studies confirming that “authority” is always latent within *kephale* (head) when used of a person in relation to another, even if additional features may also be present. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. This completes the three couplets: God the head of Christ, Christ of Man, and Man of Woman. If equality of person is an egalitarian goal, it works for God and Christ, and conceivably for man and woman, but cannot work with Christ and man. It may be that a sense of “honor” is the intent; as the woman is already said to be the “glory of man” (v.7), and we know from elsewhere that Christ is the glory of the Father. And man is to bring glory to Christ. Meanwhile, looking from the “head” down view, some kind of responsibility to reveal authority by providing leadership and nourishment simply fits. This takes its contextual cue from the specific reference in v. 10 that the specifically mentioned issue is “authority over her own head.” [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. The non-viability of reciprocal headship is helpful to keep in mind as we consider the related possibility of the flip side, “mutual submission,” appealed to by many in Eph. 5:21, above. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Also affirmed in 1 Tim. 2:13, “For Adam was formed first, then Eve.” [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. These are a few difficulties raised by various scholars as noted by John W. Schoenheit, in his article, *“Should Women be Silent in the Church?”* found here: <http://www.truthortradition.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1384#null>. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Arnold and Saucy, in *WMM*, p.309. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. See Dec. 2008 article by James Greenbury. *“I Corinthians 14:34-35: Evaluation of Prophecy Revisited,”* *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (JETS)*. Here he mentions these among current views: “Some believe that the passage is culturally conditioned. Others hold that what Paul prohibits in 1 Cor. 14:34-35 is some kind of disruptive speech. Some take the word "speaking" in these verses to be speaking in tongues. Others suggest that the women were largely uneducated and were interrupting the proceedings with questions, which were better dealt with by their husbands in their homes.” [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. The hierarchical view starts with the exclusions for women, and then takes the verbal ministries in vv. 26-33 as only applying to men. This effectively rules out any vocal communication role for women in the gathered church meetings. This is not our position. As 1 Cor. 11 has already revealed women prophesying, we do not see Paul now denying this to women. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. For a great discussion of multiple views and a preference for this distinctive circumstance view, see: Alan F. Johnson, Grant Osbourne/D.Stuart Briscoe/Haddon Robinson editors, *I Corinthians*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series, Downer’s Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004) 265-277. As an example of this view, see Craig S. Keener, *“Learning in the Assemblies”*, in *DBE*, ch. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. John W. Schoenheit, ibid., asserts the logic of Paul's argument flows more naturally as a contiguous unit from v. 33a to 36, with the omission of these troublesome verses, whereas the inclusion of the difficult vv. 33b-35 feels like an inartful intrusion. It seems probable (in this view) that these verses are an interpolation – a non-original, post-Pauline scribal addition. If so, these additions made it into a primary manuscript family early enough to gain universal inclusion. Gordon Fee, writing in The New International Commentary on the New Testament: *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Eerdmans Publishing, lists a host of reasons which cause him to conclude the text is a non-Pauline interpretation, 699-706. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Ben Witherington III concludes that the theory of a “post-Pauline interpolation should be rejected for several reasons.” The reality that some manuscripts have moved these verses to following verse 40 has been traced to a single Western text tradition. We have no existing manuscripts which omit these verses. Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), *288.* [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary, *1 Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), *513* [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. This brief version is represented by Grudem in *CCEF,* pp.142-145. Grudem also refers to scholars including James Hurley, D.A. Carson, John Piper, and Anthony Thiselton as defenders of this view. p.144 FN 1. Proponents of this view believe that these verses are to be taken as authentic and Pauline – i.e. part of God's authoritative word to us. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Any NT appeal to “the Law” can be thorny. Our position is that we are no longer under the Old Covenant Law of Moses. However, two helps may be offered here. 1) This appears to be a generic reference to “the Law” (i.e. the moral ordering by God) rather than the specific legal code under Moses. 2) Our understanding of the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant includes aspects of radical transformation and aspects of continuity. Paul’s referring to the Law here, in either sense, apparently argues for continuity rather than departure – on this topic. In other words, submission is still normative. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. *WMM,* 282-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Ibid., 290. This is in opposition to Aida Spencer's view, which understands Paul to be saying, “I am not *presently* allowing a woman to teach...,” based on the present, active, indicative form of the phrase; thus rendering the prohibition as temporary and not binding. As described by Arnold and Saucy, 295, they find the view uncompelling and the grammar uncommon. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Ibid., 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Ibid., 280.

101 Ibid., 287-307. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. We are aware of modern sensitivities to the word “authority”, due to so much abuse of authority and also the negative connotations of being “authoritative.” However, because the Scriptures use this word – positively – we have chosen to not shy away from it, but to hopefully divest it of its negative baggage and reinvest it with its proper meaning: official responsibility delegated by Christ who declared, “All authority is now given to me… therefore go…” (Matthew 28:17-18 ff). [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Acts 15:1-35 details a scenario in the early church in which a division among church leaders regarding doctrine and practice was resolved by a broad council meeting. Two attending points are relevant here: 1) every elder and leader was himself regulated by the official ruling and thus under the authority of the ruling body. 2) All elders were men. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Again, this is a view that distinguishes “complementarians” from “hierarchicalists.” Men are not “over women” in a generic sense. Rather, God has ordained particular headship relationships within marriage regarding a particular man, and within the church regarding a few select men who together carry oversight responsibility. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. The full lists of combined qualifications include: aspiring to the office, being above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, an effective household manager, dignified, having believing submissive children, not being a recent convert, having a good reputation, not arrogant, hospitable, lover of the good, self-controlled, upright, holy, disciplined, holding firm to sound doctrine – able to teach doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it. Additionally, Titus 1:10-16 includes the need for elders to rebuke those who are contentious and insubordinate, for the sake of unity and soundness in the faith. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Or “bishop” – from *episkopos*, related to guardian, supervisor, superintendent. Literally, one who exercises oversight. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. From *presbuteros*, referring to “older man” in a general way, but also doubling as a reference to those who are engaged in spiritual leadership. Used interchangeably with the office of “overseer” in Titus 1:5-7 and Acts 20:17, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. This focus on authoritative teaching that distinguishes overseers will be resumed in the final section. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. This 2-fold calling of formal oversight and doctrinal teaching are the arenas of authority for which the role of elders exists. A more focused development of these two primary distinctives of the Overseer office follows the section on Deacons. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. This passage referring to “elders” loosely mirrors Paul’s teachings on qualifications of “overseers,” and presents the function (oversight) of the elders, thus bringing both terms together. See also Acts 20:17, 28 where the “elders” function as the “overseers” who “care for the church of God.” [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. From *poiman*. We actually have this word translated as “pastor” only one time, in Ephesians 4:11, as one of four or five offices for key leaders in God’s kingdom thrust (apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers who pastor – or alternately, teachers and pastors *-* who remain as the primary, ongoing spiritual leaders of local churches). In all other cases, the word is translated “shepherd,” which appears to be the function or role of a “pastor.” [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. References to elders *(presbuterous)* in the plural include: 1 Peter 5:1; Acts 11:30, 14:23, 15:2, 20:17, 21:18; James 5:14; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:5. Additionally, in 1 Tim. 4:14 they are referred to as a “council of elders” who laid their hands on Timothy. This is a practical antidote for avoiding potential power abuse by a single elder (or Senior Pastor) who leads in isolation. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Note again the continuation of the “headship-submission” motif, here in regard to leadership-church followership. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. The leaders at this point are “apostles” (not elders) and the servants are nowhere called deacons. However, there is good reason to see this as a prototype of what will later take the more official local church form of overseers and deacons. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. There is one unlikely exception. Egalitarians have appealed to 1 Timothy 5:1-2, where “older man” and “older woman” may actually refer to male and female “presbuteros,” i.e. “elders.” The commands would then be to not rebuke elders but encourage them as fathers, and treat female elders as mothers. A case for this interpretation is made by Kenneth Bailey in an article called, *“Women in the New Testament: A Middle Eastern Cultural View,”* published in *Theology Matters*, Vol. 6, No. 1, Jan./Feb. 2000. However, this view requires special pleading. In the immediate context, 5:1-2 refers to how to treat older men, younger men, older women, and younger women. Should we look for a possible office for younger men & women here as well? It is much more reasonable to take the usage of “presbuteros/as” here in their normal, non-technical usage. For corroboration, there is a place (Titus 2:1-5) where Paul describes older men and women with character traits, including “sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled,” which appear on the qualifications list for elders in the prior chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Or, literally, “a man of one woman,” or a “one woman man” (i.e. a faithful husband). Specifically, this would rule out multiple wives or having a mistress or being in an adulterous relationship (as opposed to ruling out a single man or a divorcee). This has been misinterpreted in Roman Catholic tradition to require that spiritual leaders may *not* have a wife. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Meaning servant or one who ministers to others, and translated variously as servant or minister, or transliterated as deacon. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Paul mentions 27 people to commend in greetings, specifically including probably seven women by name, in addition to Rufus’s mother, Nereus’s sister, brothers and sisters of Hermas, and the families of Aristobulus and Narcissus. By ratio, approximately 1/3 of the servants he commends are women. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. While the disciples seem to be laying the groundwork for the offices of overseer and deacon, which would come later, they are not yet formalizing church offices. Meanwhile, some factors are noteworthy: at this point, all those assisting the disciples are men; they are all appointed/commissioned by the laying on of hands; they include Stephen – said to be “full of grace and power” in verse 8 – who is skilled in teaching Scripture and preaching the gospel, and who became the first martyr. So, this position of ministry to which women are later included is quite substantial! [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. While “leadership” and “ministry” overlap significantly, it is worth noting that we consistently see elders/overseers in the role of leading/administrating/exercising authority/being held responsible for the flock, while the consistent view of deacons is that they are those who minister/serve/assist. It is helpful to keep those lines of demarcation in view. Deacons are not truly tasked with leading, but rather with assisting the leaders (overseers) via serving in various capacities. Here is yet another example of “equal in value” co-existing with a distinction of both role and authority that mutually benefits all. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. These qualifications include: being dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, nor greedy for dishonest gain. They are to hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, must be previously tested to being proven blameless. Male deacons are to have but one wife, and manage their children and household well. Interestingly, the list of qualifications for Deacons is not similarly repeated in Titus 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. The marvelously phrased doctrinal test for deacons is “to hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.” This is a wonderful but substantially different qualification than that of the overseer in Titus 1:9b, “so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. This reading is also supported by the ESV Study Bible. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. For example, the New King James Version uses italics to add words that are presumed to be intended – at least for effective English – but are, nonetheless, not in the original. So, the NKJV reading is: “Likewise *their* wives *must be* reverent….” [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. This would be the most common hierarchical viewpoint. The NET Bible (notes likely by Daniel Wallace) eventually arrives at this conclusion, based on the strangeness of addressing female deacons in the midst of addressing male deacons; the next verse ruling out women as deacons based on “deacons must be husbands of one wife”; and the comparatively reduced requirements for women if this verse is all that is directed to the women deacons; plus a view of women being disallowed to teach, based on 1 Tim. 2:12, hinging on the implication that deacons inherently have a teaching ministry. This fourth point is moot for our considerations, as the teaching ministry has been shown *not* to be particularly a deacon function. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Interestingly, while concluding otherwise, the NET Bible (notes likely by Wallace) offers strong support for this view, based on these things: the immediate context refers to deacons, so shifting to requirements for their wives is odd; there are no requirements for overseers’ wives, so are we to understand deacons have higher qualifications in this arena? Further, we have NT evidence of women in this role. These seem to be stronger arguments, the NET Bible’s conclusion notwithstanding. Additionally, this support could be added: it seems unlikely that a deacon’s ability to serve would be based on his wife’s spiritual maturity. Also, the shift in verse 12 to “Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing … their own households well” seems both awkward and redundant if he has already placed requirements on deacons regarding their wives. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Possible considerations for the omission of these three requirements could be the following. Regarding “greed for dishonest gain” – finances were in the administrative responsibilities of husbands in first-century culture. Regarding being “tested” – perhaps this is already included in the woman’s requirement to be “faithful in all things.” Finally, the responsibility for one’s family fits our understanding of headship established earlier: the husband is responsible to God as head of his family. So, these three requirements were not necessary to be repeated for female deacons. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Our own George Kienzle has an in-house paper called, *A Review of Grudem’s paper*. It is written in partial affirmation of Wayne Grudem’s understanding of two levels of prophecy (one of which carries divine authority, and one of which may be scrutinized), and partial critique. Kienzle offers that there similarly appears to be two types of teaching. In both cases, women are biblically permitted to participate in the latter, while being consistently exempted from the former. His point is integrated into this paper. It is also germane to the prior discussion of 1 Corinthians 14. It is available here: <http://www.keepandshare.com/doc/view.php?id=4308541&da=y> [↑](#footnote-ref-128)