

Introduction

Generations have sought direction for life and how it is to be lived in the pages of Holy Scripture. Many have come to the life-changing revelation that Jesus is Lord and His Word is meant to be eaten and become our daily bread - yet, smaller issues have been shaped as weapons that can fracture apart the unity of the body of Christ. In seeing the importance of unity throughout the teaching of Jesus, we wholeheartedly believe any one of the issues that have proven over time to require careful interpretation should be addressed in a posture of kindness, humility, and honor. We are of one body, His Bride, and that must be the context of any such discourse.

When it comes to considering ministry and gender roles within, it is important to understand that at its basis, ministry means service. In the history of the church, the roles of service as it pertains to men and women have been intensely debated, resulting in a breaking of unity and ultimately leading to a fracturing of the strength that comes from being in one accord. From the Bible, we receive principles that cut across culture and time that lead us to the beauty of Jesus the Christ. It is to this end that we must seek the truth of Scripture, even as it pertains to the question of women and leadership in the church.

In these pages, you will find the beliefs that serve to guide New Song's leadership and governance structure on the roles of men and women in the church. *Is a woman allowed to serve, and to what extent?* This stance is borne out of our belief that it is imperative that we search Scripture and make a formal Biblical stand that is void of cultural blindspots. This undertaking involved extensive study and interpretive labor which cannot be remotely achieved without yielding to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our goal is not to reform passages to society and traditions, but rather reform society and tradition to Scripture. ***Our stance and how we arrived there is made available to clarify any questions you might have as a member of this house, and is not presented for the sake of debate.*** Many have gotten lost in the side roads of infighting over things that take our eyes off of Jesus, and it is not our intent to create grounds for disunifying conversation or discord. Instead, by understanding New Song Church's interpretation, it is our heart to give you the keys to appreciate our position and remain unified with us in glorifying Jesus Christ.

This document is here to undergird and flesh out these points in our statement of belief:

Our Belief

- **We believe that women and men are created equal in the image of God.**
- **We believe that full equality between women and men does not mean women and men are completely the same. There is a unique goodness and beauty represented in each gender that reflects the infinite wisdom and glory of God.**
- **We believe that God raises up leaders for the church on the basis of grace, calling, spiritual gifts, obedience, and character.**
- **We believe both women and men can and should lead, preach, pastor, and minister within the church.**
- **We believe that when men and women lead together, there is a ministry of love and grace that is more robust than can be sustained by one gender alone.**

• We believe women and men can and should serve in pastoral leadership in the local church.

New Song Church believes that men and women are equally gifted and qualified to lead and serve as co-laborers in the church. We do not just permit, but rather emphatically value the presence of both men and women at every level of church leadership, in lay leadership as well as in pastoral and eldership offices –with the one exclusion being the office of lead pastor, as well as the role of lead apostolic elder. We see this as both being in line with the teaching of the Scriptures as well as being practically helpful and wise in regards to headship.

So, how did we get there?

As we have indicated, ministry is service at its most simple definition. As such, asking if women can serve in ministry is not quite the right question. We see many instances of women acting in some form of ministry throughout Scripture. This includes the evangelization of the empty tomb and women serving the Lord, such as Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and Joanna (Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12, John 20:1-18). Instead, the question we should be asking is *to what extent does God ordain a woman to operate in a ministry office?*

The nature of the subject is presented Scripturally in a wide variety of texts. This leads to the need for careful interpretation, and has resulted in a wide spectrum of views throughout church history and in modern ecclesiastical practice. It is important to recognize the dangers of misapplying or distorting theological principles as we strive to remain faithful to the truth. History has shown that when theology is taken to extremes or used as a tool for control, it can lead to harmful consequences.

Throughout church history, two opposing views on the subject have emerged: Complementarianism and Egalitarianism. As with many things, positions fall on a spectrum; the same is true with these. Described below is a general basis for each position.

Complementarianism is built upon the idea that man was created first and women created second. This is interpreted to mean that women were made for man and the role of women will always inherently reflect this. The fundamental belief of the Complementarian view is that men and women, while equal in value before God, have different roles within a God-ordained hierarchy of authority when it comes to leadership in the church, family, and community.

Egalitarianism is built on the idea that men and women were created equal, and as such, the roles of men and women are also equal. This is a term with origins in the political and philosophical sphere, not one originally theological in nature.

This is how the spectrum of beliefs could be explained:

Hard Egalitarianism	Soft Egalitarianism	Soft Complementarianism	Hard Complementarianism
No gender distinctions in societal and ecclesiological contexts.	Some gender distinctions in a societal context and none in an ecclesiological context.	Some gender distinctions in both a societal and ecclesiological context	Strict gender distinctions in both a societal and ecclesiological context

It is our intent, when examining the Scriptures, to be careful not to pit one verse against another, as if the Bible is in some form of internal fight. Rather, our goal is harmonizing passages through properly exegeting what they provide in the context in which they are found.

In the Complementarian perspective, the primary passages cited to support the viewpoint are 1 Timothy 2:11-15, 1 Corinthians 11:3-15, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Ephesians 5:22-33, Isaiah 3:12, Genesis 3:16, Titus 1:5-9, and 1 Timothy 3:1-12.

Now from the Egalitarian view, the main passages used to build that interpretation are Galatians 3:28, 1 Corinthians 11:11-12, Acts 2:17-18, Romans 16:1, Romans 16:7, Acts 18:24-26, Acts 21:8-9, Philipians 4:2-3, 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, Judges 4:4-5, Micah 6:4, and Proverbs 31:10-31.

How to Read This Document

Throughout this document, we will go over three foundational concepts that guide how we culminate our beliefs on ecclesiology (the study of the church) and women's ordination. Concept number one is the Biblical Narrative, which is the story Scripture tells about this issue. Concept two is Biblical Exegesis, or how we read from the passages in a pursuit of instruction and understanding. And finally, concept three is Church History, in which we can find how the church has responded since its founding days to the question of women in ministry and the offices they can hold.

1 - The Biblical Narrative

One of the principles of hermeneutics, or the study and interpretation of Scripture, is to pay attention to the Bible Narrative. It is through this lens that we can observe the subject (in this case, women in leadership) and the role they play in God's story. This gives us the opportunity to look at what is clear before we go on to more complex methods of interpretation. We will begin by looking at the narrative beginning in Creation and culminating in Reconciliation, to see how the Bible views women in leadership spaces. When studying Scripture, there are a few chief tenets of our faith considered to be the central core of the Christian confession of faith, such as the deity of Christ, the Triune identity of God, and the divine authority of Scripture. Outside of that core, there are other important theological topics that have been sources of debate and division. These topics are sometimes called "non-essential", not because they are unimportant, but because they have never been considered part of the core of defining Christian beliefs throughout history. As we study the Biblical Narrative on women in ministry, we realize these are not a part of the central core so are often found playing in the background to the most central themes of the Christian faith. Because of our belief that Scripture is God-breathed, we believe it is important to take note of everything, including the narrative surrounding women, that God chose to be passed down to us.

Bible Narrative: Creation & The Fall

Every narrative has a beginning. In the Biblical account, the story starts with the creation of the world. On the sixth day, after forming the heavens, the earth, and all living creatures, God creates man (the Hebrew word *'ā·dām*, meaning mankind) in His own image and likeness.

Genesis 1:26-28 (ESV) Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created

them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

The use of the word *'ā-qām* is essential for us to see there is no distinction indicated here. This speaks to the idea of all people, or humanity - it is not gender specific. This word carries no separation, whether by gender nor function or responsibility. The plurality of this position is further asserted by the word "them". Again, here, there is no distinction over the ability to exercise dominion and where it is to be exercised. In as much as God Himself is not divided, He creates mankind without division but existing in unity as He Himself does. The following verse proceeds to then differentiate the "them" or *'ā-qām* and gives us new words *ū-nə-qê-bāh*, meaning female, and *zā-kār*, meaning male. This differentiation does not absolve one or the other from the initial mandate, as the very next verse (v. 28) reiterates the direction to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion to both the male and female. We understand, from these passages, that both men and women were created in the image of God and given the same mandate at creation. Women are therefore no less than man in value, in purpose, or in their ability to carry out the mandate that God gave. In this we see the design of God before sin entered in. Here is a picture of unity and equality in God's image.

At the culmination of Genesis 1, God declares that everything is good. Genesis 1 is a summation, in poetic form, of creation and Genesis 2 begins the detailing of the creation account. In Genesis 2, we see that while God continues to declare His creation good, He comes to a point in which He sees something not good, or as we can infer from the following story, something incomplete.

Genesis 2:18, 21-23 (ESV), "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

Upon awakening, the man makes a declaration as if awakened to a desire he had always had but did not know before. This is a helper fit, or comparable, to him. Both Adam and Eve were beings fashioned to be a reflection of God's essence.

The Bible goes on to paint a picture of peace and unity as man and woman exist together in harmony. God provides a beautiful freedom for them, which they can exercise by eating fruit from any tree bar one. This gives mankind the opportunity to exercise free will by either choosing obedience or going against the commandment. The serenity of this original design would not last, however.

Genesis 2:16-17, 3:1, 3:4-8 (ESV), And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were

naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”

At this point, sin enters in. Now having broken relationship with God, consequences come into the world and God tells the man and woman, Adam and Eve, the fundamental change that is to take place in their operation in the world.

Genesis 3:16-18, 23 (ESV), To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you." And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.

This summary of Creation and the Fall is meant to capture the essence and the weight of the tragedy that has occurred. This is where the entirety of the debate begins: the Creation order and the Fall of man. Woman, often viewed as the direct cause of the Fall and as a vessel for the entrance of sin, has been cursed with a desire contrary to her husband, leading to the interpretation that she must live in subordination to him. Because of this, some argue that woman must submit to her husband's every decision and whim, seeing it as her display of the curse placed upon her. This is why, according to this interpretation, the man must lead and live as the head of women, for she was deceived and must pay the due penalty.

But is this really what the Biblical story reveals? Is this what Genesis tells us? Was it not also the failure of man to eat of the fruit? Isn't sin described as entering the world through one man (Romans 5:12)? Shifting the blame misses the entire point. Just as Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent (Genesis 3:12-13), they did not grasp the full weight of their actions. In the striving to blame and point fingers in this ongoing gender debate, we too miss the point. We are a redeemed people.

There should be no doubt that sin has distorted the relationship between male and female. This distortion has been evident throughout history and is still clear in our modern-day world. Sin has drawn a line between the two flesh, meant to be one, meant to be comparable or corresponding to one another in reflection of God. This natural contention is just one facet of the Fall, but it is one that Christ intended to redeem. Here, at the scene of the Fall, is where the entire Biblical story is set into motion.

To fully grasp the details of the story that is to follow in Scripture, we must first expound on some important details described in the creation account we've just journeyed through.

Biblical Narrative: The Qualities of Man and Woman

The Imago Dei, or Image of God, is the foundation upon which Christians understand the inherent value and dignity of both men and women. When we speak of being created in the image of God, we do not mean that we bear God's physical form or possess the divine attributes that make God who He is. Rather, we refer to ontology — the essence and nature that reflects God's character. Both male and female are created with this divine essence, embodying the nature of God.

Though Genesis 2 details the creation of Adam first and then Eve proceeding from Adam, this does not exclude Eve from being made in the image of God. The term used in Genesis 1:27 for “man” is the Hebrew word *’ā-dām*, which, unless specified otherwise, refers to humankind as a whole. In this context, *’ā-dām* includes both male and female, meaning that women equally share in the divine essence of being created in God’s image.

However, it is important to distinguish that while male and female share the same essence, they are not identical in a virtual sense. When this shared essence is expressed or lived out, male and female display distinct characteristics and roles. These differences, while fundamental, do not diminish their total equality in their shared essence as bearers of the Imago Dei.

The distinct characteristics of men and women are more fully realized in Genesis 2. After God states that it is not good for man to be alone, He declares, *“I will make him a helper fit for him”* (Genesis 2:18, ESV). The term “helper” is the Hebrew word *ezer*. Given our understanding of the ontology of men and women, bearing the Imago Dei, *ezer* cannot imply that women are somehow inferior to men. In fact, *ezer* is a term used in various places in Scripture, even describing God as the helper of Israel. For example, in Psalm 33:20, it says, *“Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield.”* (ESV). Additionally, in Deuteronomy 33:29, Moses blesses Israel by saying, *“Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help and the sword of your triumph!”* (ESV).

God’s observation that creation was “not good” when man was alone reveals an incompleteness in creation prior to the creation of woman. The expression of man was not fully realized without the expression of woman, even though man was made in the image of God. Woman is the *ezer* — the helper fit — in that she provides what is lacking in man. Together, they form a unity that reflects the fullness of God’s image.

This unity cannot be understood as a hierarchical relationship merely because woman came from man or because man is seen as bearing headship. In the nature of the Triune God, the Son proceeds from the Father (John 15:26), and the Spirit speaks not of His own authority (John 16:13). Yet, we do not argue that this implies a hierarchy within the Trinity; the Son is equal to the Father (Philippians 2:6), not subordinate. Similarly, the fact that Eve was created from the side of Adam signifies that she is not below Adam, nor above him, but beside him as an equal partner.

Felix Culpa, or “fortunate fault,” is a theological phrase used to describe the Fall in the Garden of Eden. This phrase captures the paradox that, while the Fall brought sin into the world, it also set the stage for God’s redemptive plan. In the Garden, immediately after Eve eats of the forbidden fruit, she hands it to Adam. She does not search for him nor call for his name as if he were somewhere else; rather, she simply hands it to him. During the conversation between the serpent and the woman — a conversation that changed everything — the man was right there, watching, listening, and being present. It is inaccurate to place the entire weight of the Fall upon the woman, for the man was also there. Instead, they both failed and fell into temptation.

Because of this Fall, the image of God that they bore was tainted and, in a sense, lost. As Peter proclaims, it is now our goal to become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), indicating that we were no longer partakers of it in our fallen state. However, as the Protoevangelium in Genesis 3:15 foretold, from the offspring of the woman would come the one who will crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15).

The proclamation of Felix Culpa is our cry that even though our fallen state — caused by both man and woman — has brought sin into the world, it also initiated God's plan of redemption and reconciliation. Though the relationship between man and woman and their Imago Dei has been marred by sin, they are both vessels in God's redemptive plan. The woman would bear the Redeemer (Isaiah 7:14), and the man, through Christ, was to bruise his heel in crushing the head of the serpent (Romans 16:20).

Biblical Narrative: The Old Testament

This plan of redemption, hinted at in the earliest pages of Genesis, unfolds throughout the entirety of the Old Testament and into the New. God's promise to crush the head of the serpent through the offspring of the woman finds its continuation in the covenant He establishes with Abraham. Through Abraham's lineage, God sets in motion the formation of a chosen people, through whom the Redeemer would eventually come.

God chose Abraham to be the father of many nations (Genesis 17:4-5). Abraham's son, Isaac, bore Jacob, whom God loved and chose (Genesis 25:23, Malachi 1:2). Jacob, later renamed Israel (Genesis 32:28), had many sons, including Judah. King David would come from the tribe of Judah (1 Samuel 16:13) and have a son named Solomon (2 Samuel 12:24, 1 Kings 1:39) who would also become king.

After the reign of Solomon, the kingdom split in two: the Northern Kingdom, called Israel, and the Southern Kingdom, called Judah (1 Kings 12:20-24). The Southern Kingdom of Judah had twenty kings, all of whom guided the nation in various directions, leading ultimately to the eventual coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who was from the lineage of David in the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:1-2, Isaiah 11:1, Micah 5:2). From the Tribe of Judah, there in a manger was born our God, our King, our High Priest, our Redeemer, and our Christ (Luke 2:7).

Throughout this entire narrative that unfolds through the pages of the Old Testament, filled with a cyclical falling away from God and God's desire to restore His people back to Him, the traditional Jewish view of women was clearly reflected in the stories of the people, as encapsulated in the Birkat HaShachar prayer: *"Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has not made me a woman."* Yet, despite these cultural norms, God consistently used women in profound and impactful ways, even before the coming of the Messiah.

Consider Rebekah, for instance. As the wife of Isaac and the mother of Jacob and Esau, Rebekah played a crucial role in God's plan, ensuring that Jacob, rather than Esau, would receive Isaac's blessing, thus advancing the divine promise (Genesis 27:5-10).

Then there are Leah and Rachel, the wives of Jacob, whose lives were central to the birth of the twelve patriarchs of Israel (Genesis 29:31-35; 30:22-24). Alongside their maidservants, Zilpah and Bilhah, they became the mothers of the twelve tribes, foundational figures in the history of Israel (Genesis 30:1-13).

Miriam the prophetess is another remarkable figure. She not only played a pivotal role in the survival of her infant brother, Moses (Exodus 2:4-8), but later emerged as a leader among the Israelites, guiding the women in worship after the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20-21).

Think also of the faithfulness of Ruth, a Moabite woman in a foreign land who chose to stay with her mother-in-law Naomi and adopt the God of Israel as her own (Ruth 1:16). Her trust in God through every circumstance led to her becoming the great-grandmother of King David, securing her place in the lineage of Christ (Ruth 4:17).

Hannah's story offers another powerful example. In deep anguish, she prayed earnestly for a son, and when God answered her prayer, she dedicated her son Samuel to the Lord's service (1 Samuel 1:10-11, 27-28). Samuel would go on to become one of Israel's greatest prophets and judges (1 Samuel 3:19-20), underscoring Hannah's pivotal role in the development of Israel's spiritual leadership.

And then there's Deborah, a judge and prophetess who led Israel to victory against their enemies (Judges 4:4-7). Her leadership and wisdom were crucial in a time when Israel needed guidance and strength.

Abigail's quick thinking and wisdom prevented bloodshed when she intervened to calm David's anger against her foolish husband, Nabal (1 Samuel 25:18-35). Her actions saved her household and later led to her becoming one of David's wives (1 Samuel 25:39-42).

Finally, consider Esther, the courageous queen who risked her life to save her people from destruction (Esther 4:16). Her bravery and strategic thinking ensured the survival of the Jewish people during a time of great peril, establishing the festival of Purim as a lasting celebration of deliverance (Esther 9:26-28).

Biblical Narrative: The New Testament

However, despite the tremendous impact of these women, they still were viewed as lesser in society. Jumping ahead to the time of Christ, we see that when Jesus is speaking with the Samaritan woman at the well, John notes in John 4:27 that no one dared asked "*why are you talking with her?*". This statement displays how it was considered inappropriate for a male, especially a teacher, to engage in a private conversation with a woman.

But in contrast to the culture, just like the tables in the temple, Jesus flips everything upside down, reflecting a very different view of women. All throughout the gospels, Jesus utilizes women for public ministry. He does not reduce their roles or capabilities because of society's lens, but rather, for the sake of the gospel, uplifts them and empowers them.

There may be no better example in all of Scripture than Mary the Mother of Jesus, or as the Christians of the Orthodox confession state, the "Blessed Theotokos" or "God-bearer." It was through her that our God and Savior was born (Luke 1:31-33). What an immense trust was placed in her to be the one chosen to raise the Christ.

And what of Mary Magdalene, the first witness of the resurrection, entrusted to spread to the rest of the disciples the good news of the resurrection (John 20:16-18). It is because of that role that she has been known as the Apostle of Apostles.

There is the Samaritan Woman at the well, the one whom Jesus broke with cultural normality to minister to, enthusiastically became an evangelist and sharing with her community about His coming (John 4:28-30).

And then there is Phoebe, the deaconess at the church of Cenchreae entrusted with the delivery and exegesis of the very book of Romans, often considered the most theologically dense book in all of Scripture (Romans 16:1-2).

There is Priscilla, a missionary and leader of the early church. In addition to being mentioned prior to her husband, noting that she perhaps led more prominently than he, she was one of the chief teachers of Apollos, who is seen as a learned man within the will of God leading in the

early church movement, yet he was able to be taught by Priscilla (*Acts 18:26 ESV*, “He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.”).

Junia the Apostle is noted as outstanding amongst the Apostles, highlighting the important role she had in the early church (*Romans 16:7 ESV*, “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.”).

Or Lydia, the first European convert, hosting a church in her home to educate people on the Gospel (*Acts 16:14-15*).

Through all the examples of God’s mobilization of women in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, we see that God has utilized women in powerful ways, even when they were against the grain of culture.

Biblical Narrative: Reconciliation

Upon Calvary, the full punishment of sin was inflicted on every part of Christ’s being (*Matthew 27:46*). The bleeding stripes and the straining breaths were all to pay for each and every sin we committed (*Isaiah 53:5*). God the Father turned His face away from His Son, imposing a punishment far beyond the physical, as He bore the full weight of what it meant to pay for sin.

We as Christians now can have the mind of Christ! What a beautiful thing. We must put aside the effects and mindset of the Fall. It was not the intent of Paul, when saying “it was woman who was deceived” in a reference to Creation, to restrict women to their fallen natures. As we know, Paul echoes that there is now no more condemnation (*Romans 8:1*). Rather, Paul is reinforcing why women are to learn in a teachable attitude (*1 Timothy 2:11*).

Through the reconciliation of Christ, we have been entrusted with this very message. We, men and women, are the world; it was unto us, both genders, that this message of reconciliation was entrusted, after the Fall and after the cross (*Galatians 3:28*). The curse of women desiring to rule over man has also been reconciled (*Colossians 3:10-11*). Though everything has been reconciled, it is still being fully realized (*Romans 8:22-23*).

This is the Biblical Narrative: that it was through mankind that sin was introduced into the world, tainting the very identity of mankind.

Romans 5:12 (ESV), “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”

Through God’s guidance, He led mankind—men and women—through His sovereign plan to bring about the Christ.

Isaiah 9:6-7 (ESV), “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.”

And from the Christ, God brought reconciliation to us, reestablishing His kingdom upon earth.

Corinthians 5:18-19 ESV, "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."

This is the Gospel, and through this lens we must view all other doctrine.

Biblical Exegesis

In Biblical Exegesis, our goal is to extract from the passage the author's intent. This is done through a process called hermeneutics, which is interpretation of literary texts. Our hermeneutic method involves a multi-step process to understand each passage best.

1. Contextual Continuity (Flow of Thought)

- This method involves interpreting a passage by carefully following the author's flow of thought, ensuring that each verse or section is understood in light of what precedes and follows it. This approach acknowledges that Biblical writers often build on previous statements to develop their argument or teaching, and it ensures that interpretations remain consistent with the overall argument and themes of the passage.

2. Identifying the Central Principle (Main Point Focus)

- This hermeneutic focuses on discerning the underlying principle or main point that the Biblical author is emphasizing, rather than getting caught up in cultural or situational specifics. The goal is to identify the timeless truth or doctrine that transcends the original context, ensuring that interpretations and applications align with the core message intended by the author.

3. Situational Context (Understanding the Occasion)

- This method seeks to understand the specific circumstances or issues that prompted the Biblical author to write a particular passage. It involves asking why the author felt the need to address a certain topic and what was happening in the community or culture at the time. By grasping the situational context, interpreters can better understand the intent behind the text and apply it more accurately.

4. Scripture Interprets Scripture

- This principle is based on the idea that the Bible, as a unified and coherent revelation from God, should be interpreted by itself. Clear and explicit teachings in Scripture should guide the interpretation of less clear or difficult passages. This approach ensures that interpretations are consistent with the broader Biblical message and doctrine, avoiding the isolation of verses from their Scriptural context.

5. Implicit Gives Way to Explicit

- This hermeneutic approach emphasizes that when interpreting Scripture, clear and explicit teachings take precedence over those that are implicit or less clear. If a passage or concept is only hinted at or implied, it should not be used to form a doctrine or interpretation unless it is supported by an explicit, unambiguous statement elsewhere in Scripture. This principle helps to maintain sound and grounded interpretations.

6. Historical and Cultural Context

- Understanding the historical and cultural background of the Biblical text is crucial for accurate interpretation. This method takes into account the time, place, and culture in which the text was written, helping to differentiate between culturally specific practices and timeless principles. By doing so, it ensures that the text is understood in its original context before applying it to the present day.

7. Genre Awareness

- Recognizing the literary genre of a Biblical passage is essential for proper interpretation. Different genres—such as poetry, prophecy, narrative, epistle, and apocalyptic literature—have unique characteristics and interpretive rules. Understanding the genre helps readers interpret the text in a way that aligns with the author’s intent and the conventions of the genre, leading to more accurate and faithful readings of Scripture.

In this portion, it must be noted that we take our position with humility. The Word of God is a divine revelation, and thus, we should submit our minds to it, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us in all understanding. It is vital to approach each interpretation with an open heart, setting aside any pre-existing differences. With this mindset, we can now explore the passages of controversy.

Biblical Exegesis: 1 Timothy 2:12

To understand 1 Timothy 2:12, one of the most debated Scriptures regarding women in the New Testament, we have to understand the broader scope and purpose of this epistle. So let's jump into the backdrop to these words: at the beginning of 1 Timothy, Paul urges Timothy to stay in Ephesus due to false teachings arising (1 Timothy 1:3). Paul seems to specifically be combating speculative or mysterious teachings (1 Timothy 1:4, 6:3-4).

At the end of the letter, Paul mentions two individuals, Hymenaeus and Alexander, who have greatly erred in their ways, making a shipwreck of their faith (1 Timothy 1:19-20). In response to these errors, Paul urges Timothy to pray for the salvation of all people, emphasizing that God desires everyone to come to the knowledge of the truth—that there is one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:1-5).

What are the false teachings Paul is referencing? Scholars have a few thoughts, but it all comes down to syncretism. Syncretism is when two different thoughts merge together to form one. In Ephesus we are aware of a religious cult known as the Cult of Artemis, referenced in Acts 19. A prominent New Testament scholar says:

“Artemis was indeed great. She (Artemis is her Greek name; her Roman name is Diana) was the most powerful divinity in the place, and had been for a long time. In the distant past a meteorite had smashed into the surface of the earth somewhere near Ephesus, and the local people had regarded it as a gift from heaven, a statue (though presumably not very life-like) of the goddess herself. That’s what the town clerk is referring to in verse 35. The temple of Artemis was massive, and her cult — run entirely by female officials — was the religious centre of the whole area. Images of Artemis, large and small, dominated the city. Archaeologists have found dozens of them, with the distinctive mother-goddess feature of multiple breasts. What was once manufactured as an object of religious devotion is still today manufactured for sale in the area, only as a tourist souvenir.” - NT Wright (<https://www.ntwrightonline.org/great-was-artemis-of-the-ephesians/>)

There is also the belief that Gnosticism (meaning knowledge) was rising. Gnostic thought believed that salvation came from knowledge of the divine, given to special individuals. Many things that Paul says are quoted by later theologians and used against gnostic groups. The following gives support to understanding what the gnostic landscape could look like at this time:

“Let, however, any man approach the subject from a knowledge of the faith which he has otherwise learned, as soon as he finds so many names of Æons, so many marriages, so many offsprings, so many exits, so many issues, felicities and infelicities of a dispersed and mutilated Deity, will that man hesitate at once to pronounce that these are ‘the fables and endless genealogies’ which the inspired apostle by anticipation condemned, while these seeds of heresy were even then shooting forth?” -Tertullian Against the Valentinians

“It was necessary clearly to prove, that, as their very opinions and regulations exhibit them, those who are of the school of Valentinus derive their origin from such mothers, fathers, and ancestors, and also to bring forward their doctrines, with the hope that perchance some of them, exercising repentance and returning to the only Creator, and God the Former of the universe, may obtain salvation, and that others may not henceforth be drawn away by their wicked, although plausible, persuasions, imagining that they will obtain from them the knowledge of some greater and more sublime mysteries.” - Iranaeus Against Heresies 1.31

“He has also laid it down as a truth, that the Saviour was without birth, without body, and without figure, but was, by supposition, a visible man; and he maintained that the God of the Jews was one of the angels; and, on this account, because all the powers wished to annihilate his father, Christ came to destroy the God of the Jews, but to save such as believe in him; that is, those who possess the spark of his life. This heretic was the first to affirm that two kinds of men were formed by the angels — the one wicked, and the other good.” - Iranaeus Against Heresies 1.24

However, despite this, there is no solid demonstration of an entire gnostic belief before A.D. 135, meaning we must be careful to settle on interpreting the cultural landscape of Ephesus with a broad brush. It was most likely to have several significant cultural practices happening at once:

“A total dismissal of all Gnostic interpretations of Ephesians would not be a proper conclusion to draw ... Even if the thoroughgoing dualism characteristic of fully developed Gnosis cannot be demonstrated before A.D. 135 ... other streams of religious influence (with permutations already in process) may have existed which had a profound impact on developing Gnosis. One or a number of these merging streams may have been converging in the first century forming the beginning of Gnosis.” - Arnold, Ephesians: Power and Magic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)

What do we do with all this information? We must understand the environment in Ephesus was fraught with contention, as new forms of religion were emerging, even as the Cult of Artemis dominated the religious landscape. At the same time, Christianity was beginning to make a significant impact in the region. In light of this, Paul writes to Timothy, offering practical wisdom on how to navigate each situation and urging him to stand firm in the teachings that had been passed down to him by the apostles.

The main scope of context for 1 Timothy 2:12 is verses 11 through 15.

1 Timothy 2:11-15 (ESV), "Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control."

The first question, is what has led Paul to say this? After saying everyone should pray for all people, Paul says men everywhere should lift up prayers without anger, presumably referring back to leading peaceable lives (1 Timothy 2:8). If this is what Paul is referring back to for men, that their goal is to live peaceably and not angry lives, his goal then would be to cover the next gender. So Paul in verse 10 asks women to adorn themselves with good works rather than material things (1 Timothy 2:9-10).

How can they adorn themselves in good works? First, they are to learn in quietness and submission; this is to submit themselves to learning the wise doctrine passed down by the apostles, not to the noise from the surrounding culture (1 Timothy 2:11, Acts 2:42). This then brings us to the next verse: if women are to learn, does this mean they are to become the dominant teachers as well? Looking at the culture, such as the Cult of Artemis, it was women who dominated men. Paul says no! Let them learn, but they are not to usurp the authority that God has given to men (1 Timothy 2:12). Paul bases this argument on two things: that the woman was the transgressor and that Adam was made first.

These two details are of utmost importance as they point us to where Paul's flow of thought is actually rising from, which is Genesis 3. The two curses that a woman experiences are pain in childbearing and a desire to rule her husband (Genesis 3:16). These are the two themes that Paul is building his structure off of. Within 1 Timothy 2, Paul gives women the "right" to learn, which is culturally radical (1 Timothy 2:11). Due to this allowance, it probably would come to Timothy's mind that now women can rule over men just as in the rest of Ephesus, or in other words assume authority in place of. It is very key to understand the verbiage used in this verse points not to simply teaching a man, as we have seen Paul endorse Priscilla doing with Apollos or Phoebe doing with the letter of Romans, but teaching in place of a man - as in, taking the role completely away from man. While this was culturally prevalent in Ephesus in the Cult of Artemis, this is not creation order. We see man and woman, created by God with the image of God imprinted on them. Paul corrects this thought, reminding that man was created to hold dominion which they are not to abdicate, but to lead in, as they were created first.

The unlearnedness of women in this culture would have also presented a very good reason for Paul to restrict women from teaching, as Paul also restricts those who are unable to teach in the Scriptures following in 1 Timothy 3:2 (*"Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,"* ESV). The entire concept of needing to tell women to learn in a quiet or teachable spirit speaks to a culture in which the fervor for learning within the culture could quickly lead to things being out of balance. The process of learning involves getting quiet and taking in what you are being taught - and if women had never been given the opportunity to learn, they would need to understand what was being asked of them; something, perhaps, Timothy would need instruction for how to do.

Finally, Paul ends the passage by stating that women will be saved through childbearing. When understood in light of Genesis 3, Paul is not speaking of salvation in the sense of how women get to heaven—this is always done through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Rather, Paul is providing women hope that they will be preserved through childbirth, undoubtedly a titan of a process. Modern medicine wasn't there to help, and the pain was immeasurable, but Paul gives Timothy

the words to provide expecting mothers with hope, telling them to be faithful to God, and God will preserve them (Psalm 34:19, Isaiah 43:2).

Paul ending on this note demonstrates that his tone is not condemning women for being of the same gender as Eve, who was the first transgressor, but rather Paul is trying to uplift them and give them hope, as was Paul's goal for the letter to both men and women (*1 Timothy 1:5 ESV, "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."*).

In conclusion, Paul passionately underscores the qualifications for various church offices by drawing on the themes of creation order and the fall. He illustrates how the absence of knowledge can lead to spiritual death (Hosea 4:6) and emphasizes the importance of maintaining order and structure within the church (1 Corinthians 14:40). Paul insists that those appointed to leadership must be individuals of integrity, godliness, and deep understanding, ensuring that the church remains a well-ordered and spiritually healthy community.

When addressing the topic of gender roles, Paul upholds the principle that male leadership should hold the highest authority within the church, in the design of headship, rooted in the divine design of creation (*1 Corinthians 11:3 ESV, "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God."*). Rather than viewing this as outdated or problematic, we should recognize it as part of God's good and purposeful design. This design also honors the unique and vital role of women in preserving life and nurturing through childbirth—an essential contribution to the growth of God's kingdom.

Biblical Exegesis: Galatians 3:28

Galatians 3:28 (ESV), "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

This verse is the most popular verse to quote for the Egalitarian position. The emphasis is usually placed upon the phrase "nor male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This is often seen as the golden verse for equality, and it is, but it's often used in the wrong way. Within this verse, Paul states there is no Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, and female. However, Paul is not asking us to forsake our identities in which we find ourselves, as in many instances Paul embraces these differences. In Ephesians 5, Paul differentiates between male and female. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul speaks how he becomes Jew for Jews and becomes "outside the law" for those "outside the law". Finally, in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul says that the body consists of many members, being Jews, Greeks, slaves, and free; yet, though we are different, we are unified under the same body.

If this is the case, as we know Scripture must interpret Scripture, then Galatians 3:28 must not mean that within Christ we suddenly lose our gender or ethnic identities. In reading the beginning of Galatians, the purpose of the letter becomes clear. Paul is writing to the church in Galatia, instructing not to Judaize the Gentiles and neither to have the Gentiles follow specific Jewish practices in order to achieve salvation (Galatians 1:6-7).

Paul writes that he is shocked at how quickly they have "left" the gospel and goes on to speak of how advanced he was in Judaism, giving weight to the belief he now holds (Galatians 1:13-14). Paul even condemns Peter (called Cephas) himself, speaking of hypocrisy on the practices of Judaism and requiring things of the Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-14).

Paul then speaks to the testimony of the Galatians, saying it was before their eyes that Christ was crucified—possibly referring to the witness of the 500 (Galatians 3:1, 1 Corinthians 15:6). Paul then, in chapter three, explains the purpose of the Law to them, giving them understanding as to why it was made in the first place, as well as understanding of how grace works in accordance with it (Galatians 3:19-24).

So what of Galatians 3:28 then? Because Paul is speaking that we are all saved through faith rather than in accordance with the Law (Galatians 3:23-25), and speaking in the verse before that those who are baptized with Christ are clothed in Christ (Galatians 3:27), verse 28 then is speaking about how there is no barrier for those who want to be in Christ. Circumcision, a male-exclusive practice in Judaism, would have excluded women from performing the practice and “becoming a child of Abraham”. “The children of the promise” are Abraham’s children, rather than those who are Abraham’s by physical descent, as Paul writes to the Romans and at the end of Galatians 3 (Romans 9:6-8, Galatians 3:29).

The universal practice for all is now instituted as baptism, allowing both Gentile as well as Jews and slave and free and male and female to be placed in Christ and be a child of Abraham. So in a more simple way, Galatians 3:28 means that regardless of your status—ethnic, social, or gender—you can all come to Christ, for in Christ you are all one (Galatians 3:29 (ESV), “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”).

Biblical Exegesis: 1 Corinthians 11:6-16 & 14:34-36

1 Corinthians 11:6-16 (NIV) “For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.”

1 Corinthians 14:34-36 (NIV) “Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?”

The goddess Aphrodite had her temple in Corinth at the Acrocorinth, a monolithic rock that overlooks the city. It is said that in her temple, women were in service to the goddess and functioned as “holy prostitutes”. Many were slave women, purchased at a high price because of their beauty. Other women sought to go into the service of Aphrodite, because unlike regular prostitutes, these were considered highly in society due to their “holy” duties and had the freedom of the city.

Once in the service of Aphrodite, they would often shave their heads or cut it short as a sign of submission to Aphrodite. They would also wear sandals inscribed on the bottom with the words, in Greek, “follow me”. As they stepped on the dusty roads, this would be visible and

mark them apart from other women that people might know their role. This led suitors (men and women, as all forms of sexual exploration was encouraged and celebrated in this culture) to engage in sexual acts that were seen as a sign of worship to the goddess.

These women were not considered low class citizens. It is commonly taught that there were 1000 “holy prostitutes” in service at one time, meaning no where near that number could have lived in the temple at once - instead, many lived about the city and performed their services in the houses they were given by the temple. The company of men who respected these women was common. Another class of women were business women who conducted business with men and were considered educated and vocal. The third group was common women (married, daughters, etc), and the fourth group were prostitutes not associated with Aphrodite, and this was the lowest class.

Now, in order to be freed as a slave of Aphrodite you could not simply just quit: you had to be bought out. This would require substantial means. It is believed that Erastus, mentioned in Scripture in Romans 16:23, would have been the person to do so. His political role was one that carried much wealth, and he was a part of the local Christian church in Corinth.

In 1 Corinthians 11, on the issue of head covering, Paul was creating grounds for unity and order. Some of the worshippers of Aphrodite got saved - and it would have been quickly very clear their past role, due to their lack of hair or short hair. So in order to discourage division, gossip, and an unrighteous view of these women, as well as disassociation of the worship to Aphrodite, he encouraged women to cover their heads. He speaks to the hair or covering as associated with submission, just as was practice before Aphrodite:

“That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.”
1 Corinthians 11:10 ESV

Thus the type of covering on your hair speaks to whom you are submitted to.

Women coming from these backgrounds would try and ask questions during services - a freedom they were accustomed to. They would want to present themselves as knowledgeable since both those formerly in service of Aphrodite and those in business were used to free self-expression, often without order. Paul has to address this, looking to order in service, and admonishing them not to talk but to listen in submission and ask questions at home. The Greek word used for talk is the word *laleó*, meaning to chatter. Men and women would additionally often sit on opposite sides of the church. One could imagine a service, as the Word is ministered, having people loudly asking, *what does that mean?* or *what did he say?* Especially thinking of a spouse sitting on the other side of the room - you can picture why Paul would have addressed this.

Biblical Exegesis: Ephesians 5:22-33

Ephesians 5:22-23 (ESV), “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, his body, and is himself its Savior.”

It is from this passage that the idea of male headship was developed. Headship is often a confused topic, so we should first clarify that headship does not in any way mean hierarchy. Remember that Eve was made from the side or the rib of Adam, not his feet nor his head (Genesis 2:21-22). This must be stressed for the sake of theology, as we see elsewhere in Scripture that the head of Christ is God (1 Corinthians 11:3). To assert that headship is a

hierarchical concept is to assert that there is hierarchy within the Trinity, which is a form of thought known as Monarchianism.

Whilst there are many different types of Monarchianism, such as Modalistic and Dynamic, these two forms of thought share in common the idea that Christ is subordinate to the Father and that the Father is the sole deity. The reason the Father must be seen as the only deity in this view is that it separates the essences of the Father and the Son, implying that one is greater in essence and the other lesser in essence. This introduces a difference, just as 2 is greater than 1, but 2 is not equal to 1. This is why Dynamic Monarchianism states that Christ was the Son of God only because He was filled with (this is the keyword) divine wisdom and power. This subjects Christ to being a created being, which blatantly contradicts other Scriptures that demonstrate the eternality of Christ (*John 1:1-3 [ESV], "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."*; *John 8:58 [ESV], "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'"*).

The other form, Modalistic Monarchianism, similar to Modalism, maintains that the Father and the Son are different designations of the same subject. This denies the procession of the Son from the Father, instead asserting that the Father and the Son are not coexisting, which is contrary to what we see constantly in Scripture, where all three persons of the Trinity interact with each other distinctly and continually (Matthew 3:16-17, John 14:16-17).

So, what is headship, and what does it mean for the wife and the husband? In this specific passage, head is used as a term distinct from the body, as it calls the church the body of Christ, with Christ as the head. Elsewhere in Scripture, Paul uses the body metaphorically to describe the unity and function of the church, where each member has a role, but all operate under the head, which is Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12).

In this passage, the husband is instructed to love his wife as his own body, feeding and caring for her (Ephesians 5:28-29). Just as Christ is the sustenance of the church, providing spiritual nourishment (as symbolized in the Eucharist), the husband is called to be the head and to provide for his wife. This passage specifically addresses the dynamics within believing marriages, though other passages provide guidance for those with an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:12-14).

Finally, this passage ends with the command that wives are to respect their husbands (Ephesians 5:33). Understanding this, the husband is the head, or the guiding will and functioning leader of the body, who is called to provide and do everything in the best interest of the body. The wife, as the body, is called to support and act in harmony with the head, upholding and respecting the husband.

1 Corinthians 11:3 (ESV), "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God."

Biblical headship, exemplified in marriage, provides a framework for understanding leadership roles within the church. The Greek word for headship, *kephalé*, signifies not superiority but responsibility and source. Just as Christ is the head of the Church, husbands are designated as the heads of their wives, a role emphasizing loving leadership and responsibility, mirroring the functional distinctions within the Trinity (1 Corinthians 11:3).

This understanding of headship as a function, not a hierarchy, is crucial. Scripture links effective church leadership to the ability to manage one's household (1 Timothy 3:5). This implies distinct, non-conflicting roles within the family unit. A husband's loving and godly

headship, guiding his family according to God's will, necessitates the wife's willing submission, recognizing the ultimate direction comes from the Lord.

Biblical Exegesis: 1 Timothy 3:1-7 & Titus 1:6-9

1 Timothy 3:1-7 (ESV), "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be 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. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil."

Titus 1:6-9 (ESV), "if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. 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."

Scripture is clear on the expectations for the role of elder (or overseer) in the church. For the purposes of this document, our question is simply if a female may operate in the role of elder. The two phrases we must address, within this line of questioning, is the use of the pronouns "he" in the texts above, as well as "husband of one wife".

When we examine the text above and the use of the pronouns "he", we understand we are reading an English translation of an originally Greek text. Therefore, we must turn to the Greek for our examination. There, we find the text lacking the "he"s that riddle our English translation, and speaking more to a person rather than a male desiring this noble task.

But what of the husband of one wife? While this is explicitly referring to a male, is the intent of this text to disqualify the wife of one husband? Or is it speaking more to a spouse of one spouse, and the fidelity and circumspect lifestyle that should be apparent in the life of a church elder?

If we are to take this in a wholly literal sense, meaning if we are to take each qualification in conjunction with all the others such that all must be followed instead of gathering the picture of someone with a life wholly given to God, that would also mean only married males with children are allowed to operate in the role of elder. However, Paul himself would not have met these qualifications, as an unmarried man with no children. Yet, he is looked at as one of the leaders of the early church, for which some would term early church fathers and mothers or elders. Instead, from this passage, we get a sense of the high calling it is to live the life of an elder, one that does not detract from the picture of Christ.

Similarly, as early church leaders of both male and female genders operated in leadership, we can examine the operation of the male-given term "deacon" in the case of Phoebe the Deacon. Phoebe was called a deacon in Scripture, and functioned in what some churches have stereotyped as a male role. 1 Timothy 3:12 describes qualifications for a deacon - who "must be faithful to his wife and manage his children and household well" (NIV). The Greek word used for deacon comes from *diakonos*, the same word used in Romans 16:1 when introducing

Phoebe as a deacon or servant of God. Historical honor of Phoebe and her role in church governance in Greece makes clear she was someone operating at a high level of authority. Phoebe the Deacon is believed to have taught the letters of Romans, thus fulfilling the picture of a trusted *female* teacher operating in this role that 1 Timothy 3:12 could be misunderstood to mean should have only been filled by males. It is then our conclusion that the role of elder is similarly open to both male and female, and the use of male wording is simply defaulting to the most likely audience, which in the days of the New Testament would have been heavily male.

The same key Scriptures for this examination (*1 Timothy 3:1-7 & Titus 1:6-9*) do not reference explicitly the function of an elder, but only the qualifications. Many adaptations of eldership include that of an advisory council, in which elders do not have authority to unilaterally make changes within the church body, but to council and serve with the lead pastor (shepherd) to govern and advise on spiritual direction of the body. Taking this into account, 2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12 showcases Nathan the Prophet advising and rebuking David the King on matters of national governance. From this, we can understand one of many examples in Scripture of prophets operating in an advisory role to leaders in the Old Testament. There are many examples of female prophets in the Bible, not limited to Anna, Miriam, and Deborah (*who also served as judge of Israel: see Luke 2:36, Exodus 15:20, Judges 4:4*). It could be understood that these women would have operated as Nathan did, to advise leadership, which is how some churches have adapted as the function of eldership in the local body. Additionally, operation of prophecy would have needed to be understandable, as in 1 Corinthians 14:31, Paul advises that prophecy should be delivered in a way in which one could learn, utilizing the term *manthanó*, which is to teach or to give understanding. While we do not infer elders to all operate in the gift or office of prophet, we know the Bible clearly states women were in the office of prophet, and in this role they were both able to advise and teach, two key operations of the office of elder in most churches today.

Biblical Exegesis: Isaiah 3:12

Isaiah 3:12 [ESV], "My people—infants are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, your guides mislead you, and they have swallowed up the course of your paths."

This passage contains one of the most intriguing arguments of this discussion. This verse speaks of women ruling over God's people and leading them astray. In some more rare arguments, this verse is used to state that female leadership is a sign of the judgment of God; figures such as Jezebel come to mind for many people. The reason for this is because there are Scriptures that state that God establishes every authority (Romans 13:1). However, when exegeting a passage, we must be careful when dealing with prophecy as not every prophecy applies to us.

Think of Jeremiah 29:11, a popular verse among evangelicals. The verse definitely feels good, speaking over ourselves that God will prosper us and has plans for us (*Jeremiah 29:11 [ESV], "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."*).

Theologically, there really is nothing wrong with this; however, this verse was not prophesied for us, but rather for the people of Israel through Jeremiah. The verse is actually rooted in the Babylonian exile, speaking to the nation of Israel to stay strong for God's plan to return them to their homeland, which is not an easy walk for the soon-to-be restored nation (*Jeremiah 29:10 [ESV], "For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place."*).

The reason we can take this verse and apply it to us is due to other verses explicitly giving way to other verses implicitly (*2 Timothy 3:16 [ESV], "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness"*).

For Isaiah 3, the context is speaking of two peoples, Jerusalem and Judah, and God's judgment upon them. Within it, the prophet highlights the moral decay of the nations, showing the consequences of sin, pride, and rebellion against God (Isaiah 3:8-9). God removes leaders of competence and instills leaders like infants and boys and women (Isaiah 3:4). However, it would be odd for an infant to be the leader of a nation; instead, we must understand this as symbolism. Infants and boys can speak to elders who are not qualified to be leaders, symbolizing rebellious leaders, and women can symbolize prideful and arrogant leaders as the passage later goes on to condemn how the women of that time conducted themselves (*Isaiah 3:16 [ESV], "The LORD said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet,"*).

We do not take away here that infants and boys are something God hates, indeed, they are made in His image. Likewise, women are made in the image of God and a deeper meaning is being communicated here.

This verse is at times applied to any form of leadership in the church. It is improper to apply it here, as once again we see many female leaders throughout the New Testament endorsed and put in place by Paul himself. If again, we are referencing back to headship, we have to understand not all offices operate in this way. It is also important to note that roles and functions of offices mentioned in Scripture are not always explicit in their function and have evolved over time. Scripture does not give us a detailed account of the exact duties of each office; rather, it introduces these roles and outlines the qualifications for them (*1 Timothy 3:1-13 [ESV], "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task..."*). When we look beyond Scripture to how different churches have historically been structured and functioned, we can gain some insights, but this does not necessarily reflect the same structure or practices of the early church.

Church History

The early Christian church grew rapidly, from gatherings of a few people to communities of thousands, meeting in homes or attending sermons in open spaces (Acts 2:46-47). Over time, the church began to establish dedicated buildings for worship (often called churches), and within these, distinctive roles were developed to ensure orderly worship and proper functioning.

Different churches today may have varying structures. For example, some may have a pastor who delivers the sermon during the weekend services, while a deacon might be responsible for administering the sacraments (such as communion) to the congregation. Others may organize their roles differently. This exploration of how the church operates and should operate, including considerations of its structure and even its decor, falls under the study of ecclesiology—the theological study of the church (*1 Corinthians 14:40 [ESV], "But all things should be done decently and in order."*).

What, then, have the roles looked like and how have they been expressed through women in Church History?

First, let's talk about Mary Magdalene. After being delivered from seven demons (Luke 8:2), she became an integral part of the ministry of Jesus. Mary Magdalene is mentioned 12 times in the Gospels, more than most of the apostles and any other woman, which already demonstrates the prominence she had in the ministry. When the ministry had run out of resources, Mary Magdalene helped support them with her own resources, probably indicating her wealth but also her humility (Luke 8:3).

Throughout history, it has been mistakenly believed that she is the same Mary as the Mary who anointed the feet of Christ. This belief started with Pope Gregory the Great (Pope Gregory's 23rd Homily), who conflated her with the "sinful woman" in Luke 7:36-50. However, Pope Paul VI removed this identification in 1969 during the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (Calendarium Romanum, 1969).

Despite this misconception, the view of Mary Magdalene within the Church remains high. She is recognized as a saint within the Catholic Church, where she is venerated on the 22nd of July (Roman Martyrology). And she holds this prominent position for good reason: she was the first person to see the risen Christ (John 20:14-16), though she initially mistook Him for a gardener. Having seen Jesus risen, she found the disciples to tell them the good news, earning herself the title in Christian tradition as the "Apostle to the Apostles" (Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium Ioannis Lectura*).

By the grace of God, He in His sovereign wisdom entrusted a woman — often considered lowly in society and incapable of bearing messages of any importance — to carry the first announcement of the Good News of His resurrection to the rest of the apostles. This alone should demonstrate to each of us that God does indeed qualify women to carry out His message, not just to others, but also to men (*John 20:17-18 [ESV]*, "Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'—and that he had said these things to her.").

There is the next female apostle, Junia, regarded by Paul as outstanding amongst the apostles and a fellow prisoner (*Romans 16:7 [ESV]*, "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me."). Two significant details about Junia: she was imprisoned for her faith, demonstrating that women can and do endure for their faith, and are not to be seen as mentally weak vessels. John Chrysostom, an early church father, praises her, saying, "Oh, how great is the devotion of this woman that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle" (*Homilies on Romans 31*). The title of apostle was no small one; it demonstrated something greater of the person than just disciple. But what qualifies an apostle for such a title?

The early apostles, according to scripture, were required to witness the resurrected Christ. In Acts, Peter specifies that the replacement of Judas had to be someone who could testify to the resurrection (Acts 1:21-22). An apostle also received the title divinely from Jesus Christ and God the Father, not from another man or even another apostle (Galatians 1:1). Apostles had the authority to preach and teach, to establish churches, doctrine, and correct errors, as evidenced by the roles of Paul (1 Corinthians 9:1-2) and Peter (1 Peter 5:1-2). Apostles were also expected to endure hardship for Christ and receive revelation from God (2 Corinthians 11:23-28, Galatians 1:12). Finally, the significant role of an apostle was to establish the foundation of the church, being compared to prophets (Ephesians 2:20). All of this makes it evident that the role and ministry of an apostle was great and even higher than the Catholic Church's regard for the pope and his authority. If the office of apostle was open for both female and male, would God then restrict positions of much lower authority from women, or was

Paul's purpose in many of his passages much different?

While the early church received and honored leaders like Mary Magdalene and Junia as apostles, as described above, we can also recognize the church's struggle over time with women operating in authoritative leadership. During the Reformation, the belief gained traction that women could not be apostles. Despite the lack of evidence to support Junia's name was an error in early manuscripts and lack of any issues amongst the early church with her leadership (see the quote above from John Chrysostom, who died in 407 AD), the female name Junia was edited to the male name Junias in the 14th to 16th centuries. It was as recent as the 21st century that prominent Bible translations corrected her name to the female form, Junia, in order to be faithful to manuscripts of Scripture, a key component of Biblical translation, even as the church mourned the editing out of Scripture a female leader. If we believe all Scripture is God-breathed and inerrant, we must be faithful to what the Bible actually says, lest we end up trying to twist Scripture to our current cultural views.

Let's move on to Priscilla (also called Prisca), the wife of Aquila. Priscilla was a significant figure in the early Christian church, known for her leadership and hospitality. Along with her husband, she hosted a church in their home, making their residence a center of Christian fellowship and teaching (Romans 16:3-5).

Interestingly, Paul often mentions Priscilla before her husband, Aquila, which is unusual given the cultural norms of the time. This reversal of the typical order (female before male) has led some scholars to suggest that Priscilla may have had a more prominent role in teaching and leadership within the early church than her husband. Additionally, Paul speaks of them as his fellow workers, counting them as peers.

Priscilla is particularly known for her role in instructing Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria who was highly educated and eloquent in his knowledge of the Scriptures. Although Apollos was fervent in spirit and well-versed in the Jewish Scriptures, he lacked a full understanding of the gospel, knowing only the baptism of John (Acts 18:24-25).

Recognizing his potential, Priscilla, along with Aquila, took Apollos aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. This enabled Apollos to become a powerful advocate for the Christian faith, effectively debating and refuting the Jews in public, using the Scriptures to prove that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 18:27-28).

Apollos' prominence in the early church is evident from the fact that he garnered a significant following, as mentioned by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, in which some were referencing devotion to Paul or Apollos (1 Corinthians 1:12). Paul, however, urged the believers not to divide themselves based on their allegiance to different leaders, reminding them that all were baptized into Christ and that the work of each leader was part of the larger mission of God (1 Corinthians 3:4-6).

The success and impact of Apollos' ministry, especially in Corinth, underscores the significance of Priscilla's teaching and guidance. Her ability to instruct someone as learned as Apollos speaks to her deep understanding of the Christian faith and her capacity as a teacher and leader.

However, it's important to recognize that the ministry Priscilla shared with her husband, Aquila, exemplifies the power of partnership in the service of God. While Priscilla may have had a prominent role, it was their combined efforts that made their ministry effective. Together, they exemplify how men and women can work in unity towards the fulfillment of God's calling, making a lasting impact on the early Christian church.

Phoebe, mentioned in just two verses in the New Testament, is a figure whose significance has sparked considerable discussion in both the scholarly and ecclesiastical world. In Romans 16, Paul lists 29 people, greeting 28 of them, but he singles out one for special commendation— Phoebe (*Romans 16:1-2 [ESV]*, “*I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant 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.*”). This commendation, rather than a mere greeting, speaks volumes about her role and importance.

Paul refers to Phoebe as a “servant” (*Greek: diakonos*) and a “benefactor” (*Greek: prostatis*). The term *diakonos* is masculine in Greek and is typically translated as “deacon” or “minister,” suggesting that Phoebe held an official position within the leadership of the church at Cenchreae. This role was not a minor one; as a deacon, Phoebe would have been involved in significant aspects of church ministry, such as serving the needs of the congregation, assisting in worship, and possibly even teaching.

The title “benefactor” or *prostatis* indicates that Phoebe was a person of means who used her resources to support the church, potentially organizing and providing for the needs of the community. N.T. Wright, a renowned Biblical scholar, suggests that Phoebe’s role extended beyond her local church in Cenchreae. Phoebe is recognized as the one who delivered Paul’s Epistle to the Romans and may have even been responsible for reading and interpreting the letter to the Roman Christians. Wright argues, “The letter-bearer would normally be the one to read it out to the recipients and explain its contents.”

The fact that Paul commends Phoebe so highly — rather than merely greeting her like the others — supports the idea that she played a crucial role in delivering and perhaps even explaining the letter. This is particularly significant given that the Roman church was not her local congregation, implying that her task was of considerable importance and trust.

But what exactly is a deacon? The term “deacon” has evolved throughout church history. Initially, the word *diakonos* in the New Testament was used to describe both men and women who served the church in various capacities. However, over time, the role of female deacons was diminished as the term “deaconess” came into use. This feminization of the term, despite its masculine form in Greek, led to the position being seen as subordinate to that of male deacons.

Up until the sixth century, women served as deacons in the church, but the role eventually lost prominence, particularly as the office of deacon became subsumed into the ordination process for the Roman Catholic priesthood. However, during the Reformation, the significance of Romans and its interpretation brought renewed attention to the role of deacon. John Calvin, recognizing the importance of women in ministry, argued for the inclusion of women in the diaconate. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin asserted that women should serve as deacons, particularly in roles that involved caring for the poor and sick, thus restoring women’s influence in church ministry.

Phoebe’s role as a deacon and benefactor, coupled with her possible responsibility for delivering and interpreting one of the most theologically significant letters in the New Testament being called the “purest gospel” by Martin Luther, goes to show the significance she had within the church.

Prophecy is a topic of much debate amongst Christians today, particularly regarding its nature in the modern church. However, there is broad agreement about its role in the New Testament. One New Testament prophetess was Anna, a devout Jew from the tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36).

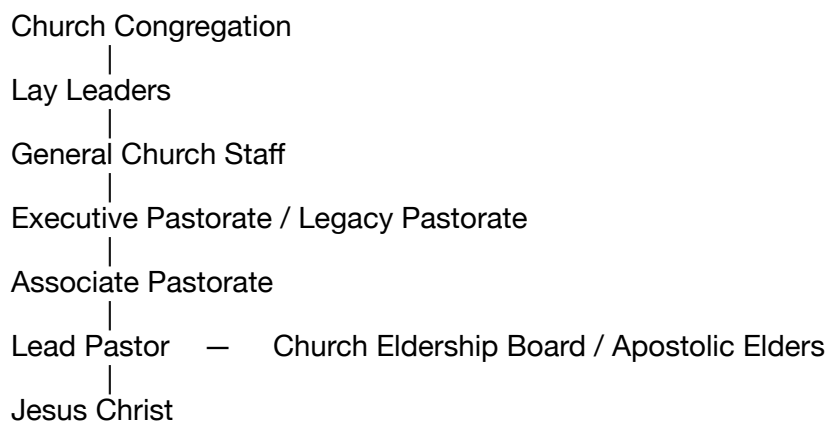
Despite the loss of her husband, she remained faithful, spending her life in the temple, fasting and praying (Luke 2:37). After witnessing the infant Christ, Anna proclaimed the news to those waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem (Luke 2:38). Anna exemplifies faithfulness and vigilance, reminiscent of Jesus’s parable of the ten virgins, some of whom kept their lamps full of oil as they awaited the bridegroom (Matthew 25:1-13). Anna is a powerful example of someone whose “lamp” was full, waiting faithfully until her very last moments for the fulfillment of God’s promises.

Conclusion

With the interpretation of these texts in hand, functionally New Song operates as a church family with a head, submitted to the headship of Christ. This family whole-heartedly endorses empowerment to run after Christ and in the commission of the church that we see all across the New Testament and in early church history.

Here is where New Song’s belief on headship comes in. At New Song, women are encouraged and empowered to operate within their God-given giftings and callings, including those that place them in leadership, pastoral, and eldership roles. The lead (or head) pastor is male. This allows us to operate in a picture congruent with the family outline described in Scripture, a picture we believe the local church family is to reflect. Additionally, our lead (or head) apostolic elder (or head overseer) is also male for this same reason. This does not preclude women from operating in senior leadership roles, but provides the headship covering we see displayed in Scripture. This picture of the family unit is a key mirror, in which male and female alike, as members of the body or sheep in the sheepfold, can submit to the fathers and mothers of the house under the covering of headship provided by the lead pastor. Just as we observe in Scripture, we affirm and desire to have both genders in place in every role of leadership with the exception of headship, just as we see in female apostles, shepherds, deacons, prophets, and evangelists throughout Scripture.

In a similar way to the leaders of the church in the New Testament, our leadership is comprised of males and females. In response to the questions we have received over time seeking an understanding of the literal function in an organizational sense, we would present it to you in this way that you might understand what this looks like in everyday life at New Song Church.



The Church Congregation is the flock. Just as Christ gave His life for the church, we believe the local church is meant to be a display of this, where under the headship of Christ, the church authorities exist to nourish, correct, love, and serve the body.

Both Lay Leaders and General Church Staff is made up of those who have been asked to step into ministry offices and serve the body. These are people of whom we have recognized callings on their lives and operate in service (ministry) to the body. From an organizational sense, General Church Staff help oversee Lay Leaders. General Church Staff includes Coordinators, Directors, and Assistant (or Associate of [Department]) Pastors.

The Executive Pastorate are shepherds that have been charged with overseeing different departments of New Song, through the development and leading of vision for their areas of oversight. In shepherding terms, they could be seen as overseeing portions of the pasture. The Executive team is tasked with leading the church functionally, under the guidance of the Associate & Lead Pastors. At this time, New Song has seven Executive Pastors (over the departments of Connections & Community, Creative & Production, Discipleship & Member Care, Kids, Missions & Outreach, Students, and Worship & Prayer,).

The Legacy Pastoral distinction is given to those in a semi-retired position, allowing for operation of church leadership without the same function of workplace expectations and departmental roles as the rest of the staff. At this time, New Song has one Legacy Pastor.

The Associate Pastorate operates in support of the overall vision of all departments and as an advisory to the Lead Pastor. New Song operates with a single Associate Pastor, in support and oversight of the Executive Pastorate as they oversee the function of their departments. The Associate Pastor is also responsible for overseeing Operations of the church.

The Lead (or Head) Pastor operates as the head of this church family, expressing headship through operation as chief servant, in submission to Christ who is head of the church. This is a key principle from Matthew 20:26-28, in which the headship of Christ is displayed in His servanthood. Just as Jesus came not to be served but to serve, this should be displayed in all levels of leadership and modeled by the leadership of the head of the family, following the headship of Christ. That is why he is placed not at the top, but the bottom, for true headship is to serve. He operates as the covering of all ministry at New Song Church.

While at New Song, our Lead and Associate Pastor happen to also be our founding pastors, as well as husband and wife, we see their roles as distinct and functional apart from their marital roles, and indeed, strengthened by it. Just as we see in Scripture, husband and wife serving together is a beautiful thing. While these roles work closely together, their roles are distinct.

The New Song Eldership Board operates not through any sort of hierarchical leadership over the congregation or staff, and is thus set off to the side, but as a council of advisors, operating within the parameters set for eldership at New Song. This means an elder is not making department changes, but advising and voting on budgets and governance issues for the body. Both the Lead and Associate Pastors sit on this council. The elders operate in a place of mutual submission, as they both hold authority for the governance of the church body, and practice submission to the vision of the house.

In the event of the Lead Pastor's displacement, the New Song Eldership Board would be in contact with New Song Apostolic Eldership, who normally act in an advisory role and which may be comprised of men and women at any time. The chief or head apostolic elder is male. In the instance of the displacement of the current Lead Pastor, the installation of a new Lead Pastor would be done by the Eldership Board, under advisement of the Apostolic Elders.

As this all relates to women in leadership offices, and as New Song endorses the ability of women to serve as elders, New Song holds only that the Lead (Head) Pastor and lead Apostolic Elder roles must be male in accordance with the view of God-ordained headship. In

all other functions, New Song endorses the full ability and call on females to operate in all ministry offices. New Song also affirms and supports finding a balanced and diversified picture of leadership, that the leadership gifting of both men and women may be expressed for the betterment and care of the body.