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ABBREVIATIONS

ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
BDAG	Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
CBE	Christians for Biblical Equality
CBMW	Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood
CEV	Century English Version
<i>CJ</i>	Concordia Journal
<i>DBE</i>	<i>Discovering Biblical Equality</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
GGBB	<i>Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
KJV	King James Version
<i>LBCF</i>	<i>London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689)</i>
LXX	Septuagint
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1995)
NBD	New Bible Dictionary
NET	New English Translation
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament

NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>RBMW</i>	<i>Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>RQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TNIV	Today's New International Version
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WCF</i>	<i>Westminster Confession of Faith</i>
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>

Student number: 5082-902-5

I declare that

A New Case For Female Elders: An Analytical Reformed-Evangelical Approach is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

SIGNATURE
(JA Hübner)

DATE

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SUMMARY

This study is the product of research in the field of systematic theology, particularly the subject of women in ministry. The goal was to provide, given the scope and limits of the study, the most persuasive case for women elders (or “pastors”) from a Reformed-Evangelical approach to date. The primary means of accomplishing this goal is by making an analytically constructed argument that is both exegetically and theologically sound.

The introduction outlines the study’s basic objectives, structure, research methods, assumptions, and overall direction. Two gives a detailed literature review of major publications on the subject of women ministry in order to track the movement of the debate. Three explores theological methods that addresses theological loci, the role of hermeneutics, and the theological-analytical structure and content of Reformed-Evangelical arguments for women elders. Chapter Four explores conceptual framework, which frames the specific, contemporary debate over women elders in Reformed-Evangelical circles, and then addresses the insights and challenges of feminist theology and Roman Catholic theology.

The heart of the study is captured in three main chapters that present a case for women elders in the church. The first argument provides a detailed examination of the “prohibition passages” in the New Testament and concludes that they do not prohibit women from being elders. The second argument provides a sweeping account of the proclamation of the gospel in New Testament theology, and affirms that anti-women-elder readings and attitudes simply do not conform to the actions, attitudes, and teachings of the early church regarding gender and gospel-proclamation. Finally, the third section provides three additional arguments in favor of women

elders. The first argument addresses the nature of hermeneutics and application of specific interpretations, the second addresses the nature of marriage and its relationship to church leadership, and the third deals with functions of women in NT ministry.

The research concludes with Chapter Eight, which summarizes the argument and introduces practical ramifications if the study's premises and conclusions are true.

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

Church Government; Church Offices; Ecclesiology; Elders; Eldership; Evangelical; Female Elders; Gender; Ministry; Pastor; Pastoral Ministry; Priesthood; Reformed; Women; Women Pastors

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

One of the most controversial subjects in Reformed and Evangelical theology today is the participation of women in ministry. Christians who have a “high” view of Scripture and seek to interpret it according to its cultural and literary context do not agree on whether women should or should not be pastors (or “elders,” to use alternate New Testament terminology). Against most of church history, some assert that the teachings in the New and Old Testament Scriptures do in fact allow (and encourage) women to occupy the ecclesiastical office of elder (known as “Christian egalitarians” or “biblical feminists”)—given that they are properly qualified. Others assert the opposite and believe that the Scriptures explicitly and theologically forbid women from both functioning as elders and being recognized as elders (“complementarians” and “traditionalists”). This thesis argues for the former—that female eldership is validated by a sound theology of the New Testament.

1.1 The Problem

The traditional, historical ban on female elders in the Reformed-Evangelical Church has been challenged throughout many periods of church history, especially after the Reformation. Martin Luther’s teaching about the priesthood of all believers eventually challenged the church to

consider the different reasons (than just the requirements of Old Covenant priesthood) in order to substantiate their ban on women elders in the New Covenant (Tucker 1992:161; Edwards 1989:11-112; Clouse 1989:11; Grenz 1995:180-184). The First and Second Great Awakening (1700-1800s) also gave rise to similar challenges that began to open more doors for women in ministry (Larsen 2007: 213-16; Grenz 1995:40-44; Tucker 1992:166-171; Brown 2012:42-46). The “first wave” of feminism in the early twentieth century, which largely revolved around women’s right to vote in public and state affairs, gave the church an opportunity to reconsider many of its traditions on gender and church ministry (Groothuis 1997a:1-107). Many Christian denominations at that time approved of women deacons and elders. The next wave of feminism (’60s-70s) gained traction from post-war conditions and gave rise to further demands of equality in America (note that it is a point of dispute whether this particular movement harmed or hurt the case for female elders in Evangelicalism, see Groothuis 1997a:1-107; cf. Storkey 2001:13-60). Today, amongst another wave of feminism, the particular debate over women and ministry in Protestant Christianity has polarized into more refined camps—that of “Christian egalitarianism” (“egalitarianism” for short) or “Evangelical feminism,” and “complementarianism.” Each of these movements brings Evangelical, theological scholarship to bear on the question of female elders. What is lacking, however, is a systematic, analytically constructed argument that demonstrates the validity of women elders from a Reformed-Evangelical perspective—and does so in a way that is exegetically and theologically sound. While there are many approaches to constructing an argument for female elders, few properly assemble the various elements of the debate into a rational argument that involves clear premises with a conclusion that is also logically entailed—and does so with the emphasis on exegetical theology found in Evangelical and Reformed theology. This study seeks to fill in such a gap.

1.2 The Origin of This Study

This study is essentially a sequel to my master's dissertation, entitled "A Case for Female Deacons," presented on the campus of Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, NC in 2012 (and under contract for publication by Wipf and Stock). When I started the graduate research on women deacons, I was generally against the idea of women pastors. There was also no desire to pursue the subject of women in ministry any further. But the study of women deacons inevitably led to research in women elders, and after researching 1 Timothy 2:12 and other resources more thoroughly, it became evident that not only were women pastors theologically and biblically justified within the basic assumptions of my faith, but there was much room for improvement in going about arguing for such a conclusion. The affirmation of women elders went against my theological traditions, the teaching of my seminary professors, and the position of my thesis advisor. It was also a conclusion that is, unfortunately, potentially threatening for certain academic careers (e.g., many Evangelical and Reformed seminaries and institutions do not hire faculty members who approve of women elders). Despite these various concerns, this work stems from a conviction that the subject of women elders is too important not to address in a meaningful, coherent fashion (hence "analytical" in the title of this study)—precisely because the preaching of the gospel and the edification of the church is central to the Christian faith, and that is what is at stake. If the universal ban of half the church from functioning as pastors has no sound theological basis, then there is great harm being done on a global scale, and the importance of this study becomes greater.

1.3 Content

The content of this study can be sufficiently divided up into three categories: language, subject matter, and perspective.

1.3.1 Language

The scope of the research will largely be limited to the English-speaking world of scholarship. However, this does not preclude biblical studies in the original languages. At several points in the research, there will be brief consultations to Greek grammar and syntactical analysis. This limitation also does not preclude the use of translations of either the Bible or scholarly works. English translations of various works in other languages may be occasionally consulted. Nevertheless, the vast majority of research will be done using English resources.

1.3.2 Subject Matter

This thesis is a study in systematic theology. Within the broad category of systematic theology, this study focuses on ecclesiology, and within ecclesiology, focuses on church government, namely, pastoral ministry and the requirements for pastoral work/office. Although the subject of women prophets, apostles, and deacons will be addressed, it is not the primary focus. As a study regarding women and church functions, this research also overlaps with “gender studies” and “biblical studies.” Furthermore, since this work argues for women’s full participation in church ministry, it might also be categorized under “feminist theology.”

The primary focus of this research deals with the New Covenant community (the “church”), and thus engages primarily with the New Testament Scriptures. Occasion will give rise to brief references and subarguments that originate in Old Testament theology, but they are not the primary focus. Therefore, this work might also be considered a study in “New Testament theology.”

1.3.3 Perspective and Presuppositions

As shown in the title, this study is limited to the “Reformed-Evangelical” theological perspective. This also specifies the general theological framework from which the research will be conducted and also the specific audience to which it is generally addressed (see below).

1.4 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The conceptual and theoretical framework of this study may be briefly summarized by first providing a short explanation of some of the key terms in the title of this study, and then summarizing some of the major theories involved in the debate over women elders. (Note that chapter four is dedicated to discussing conceptual framework, and that this section merely provides a summary).

1.4.1 “Evangelical”

The term “Evangelical” broadly delineates a branch of Christianity that identifies with the Protestant tradition. The “Protestant tradition” is typically defined as that third branch of Christianity that stems from the time of the Reformation, with Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholicism being the two other major branches. Due to the similarities in beliefs and emphases, “Evangelicalism” and “Protestantism” are often paired together in the phrase label “Protestant-Evangelical.” In any case, it is not necessary to fully define all of these terms, but only to define what is meant by “Evangelical.”

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA, established in 1846) is a global organization dedicated to uniting various denominations and organizations that have the same basic purpose and confession of faith. The “Statement of Faith” on the WEA website (<http://www.worldea.org/whoweare/statementoffaith>, accessed November 5, 2013) will suffice to generally define what is meant by “Evangelical” in the title of this study:

“We Believe in

...in the Holy Scriptures as originally given by God, divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy; and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct...

One God, eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...

Our Lord Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, His virgin birth, His sinless human life, His divine miracles, His vicarious and atoning death, His bodily resurrection, His ascension, His mediatorial work, and His Personal return in power and glory...

The Salvation of lost and sinful man through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith apart from works, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit...

The Holy Spirit, by whose indwelling the believer is enabled to live a holy life, to witness and work for the Lord Jesus Christ...

The Unity of the Spirit of all true believers, the Church, the Body of Christ...

The Resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life, they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation” (WEA 2001).

Perhaps the assertion that most readily impacts this study is the one about the nature of the “Holy Scriptures,” which limits the range of possible outcomes in any given theological study. If the

Scriptures (a sixty-six book canon in this case) are generally true in what is asserted and taught in them (what this means will be addressed in “Hermeneutics” below), and they are “infallible” and “entirely trustworthy,” and furthermore, are “the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct,” then theological study takes on a very different shape than if this were not the case. The Evangelical sees the Scriptures as a divine document as much as a human document, and therefore stands on a higher plane of authority than, for example, creeds and confessions. In comparing this doctrine with mainstream feminists, McCreight accurately points out that “Here we see the fundamental dividing gulf between biblical feminism and mainline feminism: biblical feminists, because they understand the Bible to be an inspired witness to the grace and life offered by God in Jesus Christ, will not approach Scripture with the degree of skepticism which mainline feminists demand” (McCreight 2000:40).

Additionally, this assumption about the divine nature of Scripture also has implications for hermeneutics (see chapter three), such as the nature of so-called “contradictions.” As it will be shown in the literary review below, some Christians have suggested that the Apostle Paul taught genuinely contradictory teachings regarding women, while others (call them “Evangelicals proper”) reject this assertion and instead find the Apostle Paul providing harmonious teaching. Evangelicals, then, naturally tend toward a stress on properly interpreting the Scriptures in theological study precisely because it is considered the most trustworthy source of theological information.

However, this tendency has historically led to a form of “biblicism” that places unrealistic expectations on the Scriptural documents. Take the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, for

example, which says (ICBI 1978:6) the Bible “is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches,” and attributes the same degree of truthfulness, authority, and “inspiration” to every sentence in the Protestant canon—or to at least, the (hypothetical) “autographs” of this collection of writings. In this simplistic model of inspiration, “God’s speaking” is—wholesale and without major qualifications—equivocated with the original texts of this Protestant canon (for an excellent example of this position, see Grudem 2000:47-140). Evangelicals from various backgrounds have recently pointed out the untenability of this position (see Walton and Sandy 2013; Wright 2013; Bird 2013; Smith 2012; Bovell 2012; Bacote et. al. 2004; Goldingay 2004), since there were apparently multiple co-existent “autographs,” attributing “inerrancy” and “inspiration” only to a *text* is impossible given the nature of hermeneutics and authorship (cf. “Hermeneutics” in section 3.3), and “authority” is multifaceted. The “Evangelical view of Scripture,” then, may encompass a number of views under the broad claims of being “reliable,” “infallible,” and “inspired” without falling into a fundamentalist biblicism.

Finally, the phrase “as originally given by God” is worth noting, since Evangelicals do not believe in an inspired “translation” (e.g., KJV) or text form (e.g., Nestle-Aland 27th Edition, *Textus Receptus*). This phrase, found in thousands of university and church statements of faith, is nevertheless ambiguous since “given” can be the act of God giving revelation to the prophets or biblical authors, or it can refer the original text of Scripture being given to the church in its “canonical form” (Davids 2002:81-20; Walton and Sandy 2013:281). In either case, it is still the responsibility of the biblical scholar to do what is necessary to try and obtain the earliest/original text of the Scriptures, whether in a hypothetical “autograph” or “canonical form.” Thus, there is clear differentiation of Evangelicals from fundamentalist groups who assert that certain

translations (like the King James Version) are infallible. This teaching also highlights the importance of textual criticism.

1.4.2 “Reformed”

“Reformed” is a more specific branch under “Evangelicalism.” It is a theology sympathetic to the Reformed tradition as expressed throughout the various Reformed creeds and confessions since the 16th century (Westminster Confession of Faith, Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, Canons of Dordt, Heidelberg Catechism, etc.). Broadly speaking, an intentionally God-centered and Bible-centered theology is part and parcel of the Reformed emphasis.

It is common to speak of the “Five *Solas* of the Reformation” when discussing Reformed theology. The Five *Solas* are five Latin phrases that emerged out of the Reformation to distinguish Reformed theology from Roman Catholic theology: *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide*, *Solus Christus*, and *Sola Deo Gloria*. Below is my own summary of these teachings (for a similar summary, see Boice 2009).

Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone) asserts that the Scriptures (the sixty-six books of the New and Old Testaments) are the sole infallible rule of faith and practice for the church. The Bible is the *norma normans*, the “norming norm.” *Sola Scriptura* therefore assumes various aspects about what the Bible is, the relevance of its origins, hermeneutics, language, etc. In the basic theory, if any human tradition contradicts the teaching contained in the Scriptures, the Scriptures take priority. In some versions of *Sola Scriptura*, it is even appropriate to claims that God’s words are

the *ultimate authority* for truth claims in any area of knowledge (cf. quotation of the *Chicago Statement* above). The Scriptures are also *sufficient* for the Christian (i.e., the church's spiritual journey, doctrinal purity, etc.). The Reformed teaching of *Sola Scriptura*, then, is not terribly different from an Evangelical position on Scripture (for a defense of *Sola Scriptura*, see Webster and King 2001 and Kistler, et. al. 2009). Nevertheless, it should be noted that *Sola Scriptura* does *not* assert the following:

- The Bible contains all truths.
- The Bible makes direct assertions about every field of knowledge.
- The Bible should be interpreted in isolation from the church, church traditions, and academia.
- The Bible always requires a wooden-literal interpretation.
- Certain English translations, or certain manuscript families, are infallible.
- The Bible can and/or does genuinely contradict the facts of history, science, or any other discipline.

Sola Gratia (grace alone) teaches that the sovereign grace of God is sufficient and necessary to save sinners. No additional righteousness or merit is necessary for (nor possible to contribute to) the redemption and glorification of human persons (Is 64:6; Php 1:6; cf. Rm 8:29-30; 3:20-28). Grace is unmerited favor from God; salvation from the penalty of sin cannot be earned by human effort.

Sola Fide (faith alone) teaches that the instrumental means by which God's grace is wrought out in the life of a sinner is saving faith. As Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace you have been saved through [δὴ] faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (ESV). Though faith is exercised by the believer, it is nevertheless a "gift of God" that stands in contrast to human effort (cf. Rom 4:4-5; 1:16-17; 9:16; Gal 3:22-24).

Solus Christus (Christ alone) asserts that Christ alone is the way of salvation. “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tm 2:5). There is no “co-redemptrix” or “co-mediatrix,” whether one speaks of Mary or the Saints. Only Christ is “the way, the truth, and the life,” and “no one comes to the Father except through [Him]” (Jn 14:6). Thus, due to the fact that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone, the glory rightly belongs to God alone, *Soli Deo Gloria*. Salvation is, from beginning to end, a work of God (“monergism”), not merely a cooperative work between God and human persons (“synergism”).

Due to the overlap of these particular teachings within Evangelicalism, it is possible for certain Evangelicals to even define their theological identity in terms of the five *Solas*. A good example is the *Cambridge Declaration* (1996) composed by the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. The document is little more than a contemporary exposition of the Five *Solas*.

One might also define Reformed theology according to global associations. Like the WEA, the World Reformed Fellowship (WRF) is a global organization dedicated to uniting churches and organizations of similar spiritual and theological goals. Its website has a “Formal Doctrinal Basis” (<http://www.wrfnet.org/about/statement-of-faith>, November 5, 2013) which states:

- “We affirm the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the God-breathed Word of God, without error in all that it affirms.

- We stand in the mainstream of the historic Christian Faith in affirming the following catholic creeds of the Early Church: The Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Chalcedonian Definition.
- More specifically, every voting member of the WRF affirms one of the following historic expressions of the Reformed Faith: The Gallican Confession [1559], The Belgic Confession [1561-1619], The Heidelberg Catechism [1563], The Thirty-Nine Articles [1562], The Second Helvetic Confession [1562-1564], The Canons of Dort [1618-1619], The Westminster Confession of Faith [1648], the Second London Confession [1689], or the Savoy Declaration [1658]” (WRF 2010).

The Fellowship has an ecumenical basis as well as a more specific theological interest. This is expressed in its initial affirmation of the ecumenical creeds, and then in its subsequent listing of Reformed confessions. The Reformed confessions are highly nuanced statements of faith that vary in one degree or another, but tend to stress the sovereignty of God in salvation, the sinfulness of human beings in their nature state, and the role of Christ as Savior. This focus on Christ’s sufficiency, God’s sovereignty, and people’s inability to save themselves is often referred to as “Calvinism,” which takes its name after the Reformer John Calvin.

Being “Reformed,” as it was already mentioned above, tends to stress the spiritual depravity of the natural person outside of God’s saving grace. In contrast with Roman Catholic, Pelagian, and Semi-Pelagian systems of thought, the natural person is not merely spiritually “sick,” but spiritual *dead* (Steele et. al 2004:18-26; Ryken and Boice 2002:69-90; Reymond 1998:450-456). Sin has tainted each aspect of human existence—and, as *egalitarian* Reformed theologians would emphasize, pollution of sin also includes the realm of gender, which manifests itself in

male domination, oppression of women, and patriarchal societies throughout history. (It should be noted, however, that it has historically not been characteristic of Reformed theology to make this connection between the doctrine of total depravity and the specific evils of male-domination and female oppression).

The Reformed confessions also tend to stress a particular way of viewing Scripture as a redemptive-historical book: Covenant Theology. All of the above documents listed by the WRF (with the exception of the Thirty-Nine Articles) mention and/or elaborate upon the concept of “covenant.”¹ For traditional Reformed theology, Covenant Theology is typically understood as three covenants: the Covenant of Redemption (an agreement between the members of the Trinity to send Jesus to save the world), the Covenant of Grace (the promise of salvation made to all of God’s chosen people), and the Covenant of Works (the promise of life on the basis of obedience—chiefly given to Adam in the garden) (Robertson 1981; Grudem 2000a:515-527; Reymond 1998:404-407). However, there is a tremendous degree of variation within Reformed circles regarding Covenant Theology (see e.g., Gundry 1999; Barcellos 2013; Nichols 2011; Vos 1948; Gentry and Wellum 2012; Kaiser 2008). While some readily acknowledge these three basic covenants, some see the primary redemptive-historical (or “biblical-theological”) categories of Scripture as Old Covenant and New Covenant, while others give stress to covenantal diversity in the biblical narrative itself (God’s covenant with Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, etc.).

¹ See the Heidelberg Catechism Question 68, 74, 79, 82; the Westminster Confession (London Baptist Confession, Savoy Declaration), chapter 7, 14, 19, 27, 28, 30; Belgic Confession, Article 34; 2nd Helvetic Confession, chapter 17 and 20.

Despite such diversity, Covenant Theology can be broadly contrasted with Dispensationalism—an alternative and more recent method of interpreting redemptive history that largely originated by the Irish preacher John Darby in the mid and late 1800s (Sweetnam and Gribbin 2007; Hübner 2013b). While covenant theologians see redemptive history as being divided up into various “covenants” (or “pledges,” “promises,” etc.), Dispensationalists see the redemptive structure as consisting of “dispensations.” However, there is overlap between “covenants” and “dispensations” and even between the two theological systems as a whole, but they are typically divided on matters relating to “law and gospel,” eschatology, and relationship between Israel and the church. Since this is primarily a study in NT theology, and since the teachings of Covenant theologians (particularly the covenant theology assumed in this work) and Dispensationalists regarding the New Covenant do overlap (e.g., stressing the newness of the New Covenant, see below), it is not necessary to further delineate the differences of these theologies. It is sufficient for the moment to simply state that this work is *not* done from an Evangelical *Dispensational* perspective.

Covenant Theology is particularly important since it is inherently canonical in nature (zooming out to the broad structures of Scripture and salvation history), and therefore changes the entire landscape of hermeneutics. This, in turn, can change the landscape of debates regarding the legitimacy of women elders. For example, a hermeneutic that stresses the continuity between the Old and New Covenants in Scripture may be likely to adopt more patriarchal views regarding gender since (it could be contended) such patriarchal views dominate the Old more than the New Covenant. Conversely, those stressing the newness of the New Covenant tend to stress more

egalitarian ideals since a message of equality seems to be more evident in the New Covenant/New Testament than the Old Testament.

1.4.3 The Meaning of “Reformed” Summarized

The present author generally holds to the five *Solas* as described above, but with some qualifications—one being that the biblicist version of the doctrine of Scripture outlined above (which strongly overlaps with *Sola Scriptura*) is not adopted. For example, I would not affirm a position that says “The autographic text of the Protestant canon is the ultimate standard for truth claims.” I also would tend to avoid unnecessary and misleading phrases such as “the Bible says,” because of my view of Scripture and also theory of hermeneutics (see below), though I sometimes capitulate for the sake of simplicity and familiarity. This does not detract from the importance of exegetical and biblical theology, but it does raise questions about the value of “biblical views” on certain topics and what that means (see Smith 2012:111)—subjects that need not be explored here. Also, I do not exhaustively and absolutely subscribe to any of the Reformed creeds listed by the WRF, though I agree with their broader emphases on a God-centered, Christ-centered theology. As far as covenant theology is concerned, my position can be summarized in three points:

1. Covenant theology is properly oriented around the biblical covenants in Scripture (Garden covenant, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New) as opposed to the more abstract (and perhaps artificial) categories of traditional Reformed theology (see Gentry and Wellum 2012).

2. The New Covenant is substantially superior to the Old (White 2004b; 2005). The biblical covenants are not simply a rehashing of extant realities, for however similar and equal they are, they are based on the same, unchanging character of God. As the Covenant in Christ's own blood (Lk 22:20; Mt 26:28; Hb 7-9), the covenants prior to Christ have their fulfillment in Christ Himself, so much that the Mosaic Covenant can be referred to as "obsolete" (Hb 8:13) in the NT. (This does not, however, render the Old Testament Scriptures useful for only "historical" purposes. As opposed to some versions of "New Covenant Theology," the Christian, to some degree, ought to discern how to apply God's "moral law" in the Old Testament to New Covenant contexts. See Poythress 1991; Gentry and Wellum 2012:604-652.)
3. Christ remains the center of redemptive history. As such, it is not wrong to also see redemptive history as being "divided" into the two general categories: pre-Incarnation and post-Incarnation. Generally speaking, God's people prior to the Incarnate Christ look forward to Christ, and God's people after Christ (death, burial, resurrection) look back to Christ and what He has accomplished (Moo 1999). With traditional language, we will identify these two general periods/categories as "Old Covenant" and "New Covenant"—though it may be necessary to further distinguish these categories when necessary (e.g., "Old Covenant" in the book of Hebrews means the Covenant made at Sinai).

These assumptions may help make sense of both the exegetical data and the broader, systematic theological claims regarding the subject of gender and women in ministry. For example, it may be significant that the sign of being "in the covenant" in the Old Covenant was circumcision, which was male-only, but in the New Covenant the sign of being in the covenant community is baptism—distributed to women as much as men. Does this fact say something about the gender-

equality nature of the New Covenant and the New Covenant community (the church)? Perhaps, and this is just one case study of countless others that demonstrates the important role that Covenant Theology (and the discipline of “biblical-theology”) can play in affirming elders in Evangelical tradition.

1.4.4 “Female Elders”

This work also presupposes that the two main, general “offices” or “positions of ministry” in ecclesiastical affairs and in the Scriptures are “elders” and “deacons” (to adopt the language of the New Testament.) “Elders” in the NT are essentially the same as “pastors” (White 2004a:272-279) and function as the primary leaders and teachers of the church; deacons are generally servants of the church (1 Tim 3; Tit 1). A “Case for Female Elders,” then, is simply a technical way of saying “An Argument for Women Pastors.”

This work is also limited in that it will not address the subject of “ordination” (if one considers ordination in its own category), mainly because it is highly questionable whether ordination is even a legitimate theological category. As such, this study does not address the legitimacy of ordained or non-ordained Christian women, but focuses on whether it is legitimate for Christian women to function as pastors regardless if they are “ordained.”

Also, the meaning of “female elders” is not any different from “women elders.” “Female” is simply chosen as a more technical (sexual) word that hopefully avoids any confusion over what

is meant in the argument. Note, for example, the words of feminist theologian Schüssler Fiorenza (2011:30):

“Different feminist approaches enter their critical analysis at different notal points...and hence emphasize different aspects of the sex-gender system. They generally distinguish the following terms: *male/female*, which classify human beings on the basis of anatomical differences; *man/woman*, which are based on social relations; and *masculine/feminine*, which are seen as the cultural-religious ideals, norms, values, and standards appropriate to one’s gender position.”

For the sake of avoiding confusion, this work will use “man/woman” to mean the same as “male/female.”

1.4.5 “Complementarianism” and “Egalitarianism”

Although not limited to these two groups, the debate over women elders in Evangelical and Reformed churches has been dominated by two theologies known as “complementarianism” (against women elders) and “egalitarianism”/“biblical feminism” (in favor of women elders), both of which originated in North America in the 1980s. There are competing claims about how each theology originated—especially regarding how much impact feminism has had on Christian egalitarianism, and how much impact reactionary anti-feminism has had on complementarianism. Nevertheless, it is sufficient to say that, to one degree or another, both complementarianism and evangelical feminism have roots in the American feminist revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, either as a reaction or an extension (Cochran 2005; Groothuis 1997a).

Both groups agree on a number of key theological points, such as the authority and infallibility of the Scriptures, the way of salvation in Jesus Christ, etc. Their primary disagreement lies on

three levels: doctrine of God, doctrine of creation, and the doctrine of the church. Regarding the doctrine of God, complementarians tend to be Trinitarian gradationists (see for example Grudem 2000a and Ware 2005), meaning that God the Father is at the top of an eternal “chain of command” while the Son (Jesus) and the Spirit are eternally subordinate to the Father. Egalitarians, however, tend to be Trinitarian equivalentists (see for example, Giles 2002; Erickson 2009), meaning that all three members of the Trinity are equal in power and authority. Regarding the doctrine of creation, complementarians teach that human beings are made fundamentally “equal,” but have unequal “roles.” Egalitarians, on the other hand, either believe that there are no permanent “roles” established at creation at all, or that whatever “roles” do exist (today or at the original creation) are (largely) products of each individual’s abilities and spiritual gifts.

Regarding the doctrine of the church—and this is the primary focus of this study—complementarians believe that only men should be leaders in church (e.g. pastors), while egalitarians do not believe in such a restriction. Due to both group’s doctrine of Scripture, the debate tends to focus on scriptural theology, especially the theology of the New Testament, its exegesis, and its harmonization with broader theological concepts.

1.4.6 My Own Perspective/Presuppositions

It is also necessary to identify other aspects of my own perspective. As a white American male, I grew up in the North American Baptist denomination and have attended Presbyterian churches for most of my adult life. I currently serve as an Assistant Professor for Christian Studies at a

non-denominational classical liberal arts college, where I teach Greek, courses in theology, and ethics. I am also a former complementarian, having publicly argued against women elders on an academic level.

While this position neither excludes the possibility of genuine research, nor automatically requires that certain biases even be consistently upheld, a study coming from this (and indeed, any) perspective is bound to have certain inclinations. Nevertheless, it may well be the case that this particular background is a promising aspect of this research. One of the reasons I chose the topic of women elders for this doctoral study is precisely because I am so familiar with the arguments against women elders, and that I (hopefully) know what arguments in the debate are genuinely strong and which ones are weak. This particular background (and having already made a case for women deacons for my Masters dissertation) gave rise to the particular structure of this entire study. My goal is that what emerges from this research will serve the interests of the global church.

There is no such thing as absolute neutrality. But, fully acknowledging and recognizing these presuppositions both before and during the research helps curb the power of any potentially harmful biases (I tend to agree with the “critical-realist” assessment in Wright 1992 and Smith 2010). Both the author’s perspective and the perspective (or “narrative,” see Storkey 2001:57) of others must be taken into consideration in any study to keep these biases “in check.”

1.5 Outline of Chapters

Following this chapter which serves as an “introduction” to the study is Chapter Two entitled “Literature Review.” The latter provides a thorough review of the arguments for and against women elders that have appeared within Reformed and Evangelical publications since the late 1960s to the present day. It follows a chronological order and is divided up into three main sections. Chapter Three is entitled “Methodology,” where the particular approach to this study and the subject of hermeneutics is addressed. Chapter Four explores the “Conceptual Framework,” which focuses on theological methodology and various approaches to the subject matter, including the contemporary debate between complementarians and egalitarians, approaches in feminist theology, and Roman Catholic theology. Chapter Five begins the formal argument with an examination of perhaps the most central obstacle of women elders—the prohibitions found in 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:35-36. Having examined the primary biblical objection to women elders in the latter chapter, Chapter Six continues to confront the larger topic of New Testament theology and the primacy of gospel-preaching. Chapter Seven contains three confirming arguments that add positive support to women elders. The study concludes with Chapter Eight, a final reiteration of the argument and an affirmation of the findings.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. Introduction

This chapter provides the literature review. The structure of the review will be both logical and chronological. It is logical in that it will give priority to Evangelical and Reformed works that argue for women elders and against women elders. It is chronological in that it will deal with each major category of works from the earliest publications to the later. The review will be divided into three chronological sections: (1) “Formative Works,” which come before the formation of the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) and the organization Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE); (2) works produced by CBMW and CBE (and parallel works produced by non-Council members) from the formation of the two organizations (1987-1988) to the publication of *Discovering Biblical Equality* (2004, which marked perhaps the most popular scholarly culmination of Evangelical Feminism), and (3) “Recent Works (publications from 2004 to the present). Due to the scope of this work and the relevance of the subject matter, this review will generally not examine works prior to the 1960s and 1970s, or works outside the Evangelical and Reformed traditions. The focus will also be on books, though some scholarly essays will be examined along the way.

2.1 Formative Works

One of the earliest Evangelical arguments specifically for women elders is Paul Jewett's *The Ordination of Women* (1980). Jewett was a systematic theologian at one of the largest Evangelical seminaries in the Western world (Fuller Theological Seminary, which now has over eight campuses). In many ways, his work is a follow-up to his earlier book *Man as Male and Female* (1975), which specifically addressed gender in theological anthropology. One of the most controversial claims that Jewett made in both works is the assertion that the Apostle Paul essentially contradicted himself when addressing the subject of gender (cf. Williams 2010:20). Although this concession on the doctrine of inerrancy puts Jewett outside the scope of many definitions of "Evangelicalism" (note Knight 1985:2, 44), this study will briefly examine his argument simply because the bulk of it still falls in line with a mainstream Evangelical perspective.

The Ordination of Women is largely defensive. Each chapter consists of a popular objection to women pastors, and a refutation of that objection. The first (chapter two) critiques "the argument from the nature of woman that women should not be admitted to the order of ministry in the church," the second critiques, "the argument from the nature of the ministerial office that women should not be admitted to the order of ministry in the church," and the third critiques "the argument that the masculinity of God entails a male order of ministry in the church" (Jewett 1980). The fifth chapter affirms "woman's right to the order of ministry."

It is clear that the concerns and objections that Jewett is dealing with are different than some of the objections that are commonly given today. Jewett responds to, for example, much broader theological objections to women in ministry whereas today's debate is often contingent on

narrow exegetical arguments dealing with key biblical passages. The current study will not address much of what Jewett has already addressed both because he has adequately responded to such objections and also because the dynamic of the debate has shifted (e.g., few Evangelicals today argue against women elders—at least, overtly—on the basis of their inferiority or on the basis of masculine language of God).

Nevertheless, the most relevant contribution of Jewett's book towards the present study is the third chapter on the nature of the ministerial office, and the fifth chapter that addresses the positive arguments regarding women in ministry. In addition to other points, he makes the vital point that female subordinationism in relationship to men is a central reason for the ban on women elders (e.g., 1980:19), and that this point is not so easily made if one is to be theologically consistent. Where Jewett's argument lacks punch, however, is (a) in its lack of exegetical precision on key texts and (b) in its imbalance in placing weight on certain arguments. Regarding (b), for example, Jewett does not see women apostles (e.g., Junia in Rom 16:7), deacons (e.g., Phoebe in Rom 16:1-2), and prophetesses as being particularly weighty to an argument for women elders. He does address such passages as part of his argument, but usually only as an addendum to less pertinent debates (e.g., 1980:70ff, where women deacons and apostles are address as an addendum to the debate on the masculinity of God). The present study, in contrast, will give more weight to these particular concerns.

Jewett's book marked the early beginnings of formal arguments for women elders in Evangelical circles, but it was not the first book to address the topic in broader ways. In 1975, Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty wrote *All We're Meant To Be*, which is one of the earliest

attempts at bringing the fruits of the contemporary feminist movement to bear in Christian life.

Thus, one author writing in 1977 summarizes:

“Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty respond to women’s liberation by offering a Biblical approach. While admitting various attitudes in the Bible to the male-female polarity, including debarment (women segregated during their menstrual cycle), complementation, and synthesis (the unity of ‘one flesh’), their ideal is “transcendancy,” based on Galatians 3:28, “There is neither...male nor female; for you are all one in Jesus Christ” (Williams 2010:15).

Even in the most theologically conservative circles—such as Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, the book was not dismissed or altogether rejected. This was all the more surprising since at least one of the authors (Hardesty) approved of abortion and make controversial remarks on lesbianism (see Cochran 2005:29). One of the Seminary’s professors, Harvie Conn, provided an accurate summary of the book in 1984:

“Unlike so much evangelical writing, the work was not simply a negative, knee-jerk reaction against earlier feminist literature the evangelical frequently characterizes as “liberal” or “secular.” Scanzoni and Hardesty, working within the evangelical orbit, startled it by commending an egalitarian position. Their call for equality in the male-female relationship, coming from within a community that assumed a hierarchical position as theoretically biblical, initiated discussion....Its serious attention to Scripture placed it in the evangelical camp and thus demanded evangelical attention for its new conclusion....it also appears rather thin and superficial in its exegetical treatment of texts” (Conn 1984:105-106).

A couple years later, Patricia Gundry wrote *Woman be Free* (1977). Women elders are the topic of discussion at several key points in the book, such as chapter six, “What Can Woman Do?” After surveying the biblical landscape of women in God’s plan of redemption, Gundry concludes that “a woman can do anything—provided God is the One directing her to do it. Women are God’s persons, who just happen to be female” (1977:103). Much of the biblical data presented in this chapter is similar to that presented by Jewett in *The Ordination of Women*. However, she presents a more straightforward exegetical summary of some of what she calls, “Those Problem

Passages” (1977:57-88), all of which are generally the conclusions that will be substantiated in this study. She argues that 1 Corinthians 14 is not properly interpreted as a permanent ban on women’s speaking, but is rather addressing “a particular abuse” (1977:70), and that “headship” in Ephesians 5 is “one of loving service and care, not one of domination” (1977:73). Regarding 1 Timothy 2, she presents four possible interpretations. However, her overall conclusion is one that will be substantiated in this study: “The principle set forth seems to be, in accord with the context, that Christians should behave in the public meetings in a respectable manner in accordance with generally accepted standards of propriety” (1977:77, cf. 76). Although Gundry’s work is primarily aimed at mainstream Christians and was written during a period before great exegetical strides were made on the subject, the book still manages to provide a straightforward and concise reading of key texts, and addresses a broad range of topics within a short space. Many of her key claims were also vindicated by the advances of New Testament scholarship.

A parallel work that focuses more on the Apostle Paul’s teachings about women in the church is Don Williams’ *The Apostle Paul and Women in the Church* (1977, republished in 2010). In contrast with Jewett’s 1975 publication, Williams argues that Paul does in fact affirm women in church leadership positions and that Paul is not inconsistent with himself (Williams 2010:134). Williams’ approach is to go through Paul’s letters to examine Paul’s attitude regarding men and women. This is a particularly useful study since a great portion of the books following this period tend to limit their discussion to texts that only directly speak about men and women’s roles in the church. Williams, however, goes to less popular texts to show that Paul has a fairly balanced approach to treating men and women. For example, Williams notes the equal condemnation of both homosexuality and lesbianism in Romans 1:26-27, the equal impotence

noted about Sarah and Abraham in Romans 4:19-20, the lack of rabbinic bias in talking about marriage laws in Romans 7:1-3, prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:15-16, 1 Corinthians 7, etc. (2010:31-35).

Regarding Ephesians 5, Williams says “while Paul maintains the traditional hierarchical structure of the submission of wives to their husbands, he modifies it by mutual submission and changes the content. Christ is the standard and model” (1977:85). It is unclear at this point what the “structure” amounts to in today’s world since it has been transformed by Christ. He even says later in the book that “Since Christ came to serve and to give Himself, headship is servanthood” and that “women are now lifted to a new position as the hierarchy is infused with new content by Christ himself” (Williams 2010:132). Again, it is unclear what the difference is between the abolishment of hierarchy and an “infused” hierarchy with “new content” where women are “lifted to a new position.” He also says that “hierarchy is revalued by *agape* love, which leads us naturally to see its expression in ‘partnership’ without contradiction” (2010:133), and that “Rather than embracing ‘partnership’ in distinction to ‘hierarchy,’ they will discover how hierarchy serves them within the one family of Christ” (2010:141). Perhaps Williams is simply trying to hold egalitarianism and traditional hierarchy in marriage (as assumed by Paul, in his view) at the same time since he thinks they are both present in Scripture. But the result is somewhat confusing.

Perhaps what causes this inconsistency is Williams’ general theological approach. Regarding Galatians 3:28, he says:

“Conflict, division, and discrimination are also overcome through the gospel which liberates Jews, Greeks, slaves, free men, and male and female bondage of the law and the limitations of the created order” (Williams 2010:134).

In other words, the gospel of Christ does not bring restoration, but *progress beyond creation*. Thus, he can speak of Paul “endorsing female subordination in creation” while also presenting good news that “this is not the last word” (2010:134).

This position is remarkably similar to the “transcendence” teaching of Hardesty and Scanzoni, where the ideal for the sexes is not in the original creation as much as it is in the eschatological realization of the gospel. As such, neither author spends much time discussing the gospel and the New Covenant era as restorative, but both have a strong emphasis on a new age that connects to the final state (Williams 2010:136). Williams is even willing to say that “The order of the church, however, must be determined not by creation or the fall but by Christ’s work in redemption” (Williams 2010:137). Even so, Williams explicitly distinguishes his position from Hardesty and Scanzoni. He says “the diversity of the sexes is sustained. Unity and equality in diversity, rather than ‘transcendence’ (Scanzoni and Hardesty) is the result” (Williams 2010:135; cf. 141). Williams, in other words, is trying to give justice for the differences in sexuality that do exist. But it is difficult to see how his position is practically any different to that of Scanzoni and Hardesty since all of his theological conclusions point to the same concepts. Both assert that the differences established at creation as well as cultural gender roles are “transcended,” if you will, by the gospel; both assert that marriage is characterized by mutuality and symmetry of responsibility, etc.

Whatever the case, perhaps one of the more significant contributions of Williams' work—at least as it relates to the present study—is his emphasis on the importance of 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 (Williams 2010:45-46, 64). This is a topic that will be taken up in more detail in chapter six of this study. Williams' point is that precisely because mutuality and equality exist in the most fundamental aspects of the marital relationship, it is wrong to suggest that there is a permanent hierarchy of power between husband and wife. If leadership in the home extends into the church, then women elders would (in theory) be supported, since marriage is mutual and egalitarian.

The conclusion to Williams' book is the full participation of women in ministry—wherever they are called and gifted. Part of his passionate conclusion ties in together a number of concepts and resonates with many egalitarians of his time and times to follow. He says:

“The church can only accept and affirm Christ's gifts, it cannot fabricate them. When this is done in a sexist way, the New Testament theology and practice is abandoned for cultural presumption against women. More devastatingly, the gospel is compromised if not denied because Christ's redemption which makes us one is contradicted by our practice. The result is a mocking world and a weakened church. Rather than finding true female identity and liberation in Christ, the world is forced to view Christ and the church as the subjectors of women. The world then creates political and economic gospels which only emancipate to enslave, becoming themselves idolatrous. Now women are liberated by becoming men (unisex) or by abandoning men (political lesbianism). What absurdity—this is a judgment upon the failure of the church. Women will only be liberated as the church is used by God to bring them to new life in Christ in the context of a redemptive community where they experience a choice of roles consistent with their calling and gifts” (Williams 2010:140-141).

In the same year (1977) and in a revised form in 1985, George Knight III wrote *The Role Relationships of Men and Women: The New Testament Teaching*. Even though the work is exceedingly narrow in its scope and purpose (there are only two main chapters that consist of less than thirty-five pages), its arguments would eventually become the launch pad of CBMW.

The basic argument of the book is the opposite of Williams: the New Testament teaches a hierarchy in marriage where the husband has authority over his wife who is a permanent (due to biology), simple subordinate, and that this hierarchy extends into the sphere of the church. The office of women elders, then, is theologically wrong because it would violate “male headship” (Knight 1985). Nevertheless, somehow, men and women act as equals: “Elders and husbands are heads not because they are inherently superior—for they exercise their functions among and with equals—but because they have been called by God to their tasks” (Knight 1985:47). What is somewhat confusing about this assertion is (a) how this does not render God’s “call” as rather arbitrary (since it is not based on how God made men and women), and (b) the lack of distinction between God calling specific people for “their tasks” and *who* they are. In other words, is not *being* the “head” (whatever it may mean) different than doing the things that a “head” does, and if so, has it really been established that women simply are not called to do things, like being a pastor? Knight responds to a handful of objections, but few, if any, are directly arguments made by such evangelical feminists as Gundry.

Where Knight’s argument is particularly weak is in (a) its limited scope and (b) in its methodology. Regarding the former, almost all of the New Testament teaching regarding women in ministry is absent (even Conn, a Reformed theologian like Knight, goes as far as to say that the book “is extremely compact and difficult to follow,” and adds a number of other strong criticisms, 1984:110-111). There is no discussion of the women disciples, ministers, deacons, prophetesses, widows, or apostles that comprised the driving force of the first century Christian church. There is also no discussion of Paul’s (arguably) lengthiest description on gender and the relationship between husband and wife, 1 Corinthians 7. Knight’s discussion is limited in only

addressing concepts of authority and submission, and thus limits his discussion to only a small number of biblical texts (e.g., 1 Corinthians 11, Ephesians 5).

Regarding methodology, Knight's argument appears flawed by reading preferred concepts of male headship into texts where it may be absent. After reading the brief book, one is left with the impression that a biblical interpreter can simply insert male authority/headship in any text that mentions husband and wife, and that any citation of Genesis 1-2 can automatically be assumed to be cited for its "creation order." In other words, what may be lacking is precisely what Knight is trying to provide: genuine exegesis (reading out of the text), as opposed to eisegesis (reading into the text).

One example will suffice to illustrate. Knight reads 1 Timothy 2:11-14 and 1 Corinthians 14:34 as establishing prohibitions on women's speaking and teaching because it would violate male headship (1985:25), even though neither text speaks of any such concepts (as Paul is commonly argued for doing in, for example, Ephesians 5 or 1 Corinthians 11). The argument regarding 1 Corinthians 14 is made rather quickly, and only by implication:

"...the correlation of speaking and silence found here is paralleled in 1 Timothy 2:11-14, where what is prohibited is women teaching men. Such an understanding seems most appropriate for 1 Corinthians 14. Therefore, women are prohibited from speaking in church because it would violate the role and relationship between men and women that God has established" (1980: 24-25).

But if 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is addressing the manner in which women learn and not prohibiting the generic exercise of authority, and if 1 Timothy 2:13-15 is simply Paul's attempt at humbling the Ephesian women and not some appeal to a "creation order," then there is no basis to simply read into 1 Corinthians 14 what Knight does. In fact, even if 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is interpreted to be a

ban against women elders, Knight's conclusion that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is making the same prohibition is not substantiated. Many scholars today (especially complementarian) see the text as either banning women from weighing prophecies, or banning women from a certain type of speaking. So, while Knight rightly acknowledges the similarities between the two texts, he forces 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 to mean something not on the basis of exegesis of the text itself, but by inference and conjecture from his interpretation of other verses. Chapter five of this study will demonstrate Knight's interpretations to be mistaken on both texts (cf. Keener 2004:80).

Knight also makes the assertion that women are only allowed to pray and prophesy in church because 1 Corinthians 11 allows it, and Paul allows it because (in the logical sequence of Knight's assumptions) these activities do not violate male headship. Nevertheless, a kind of speaking that involves *teaching* does violate such headship:

“Praying publicly in the midst of mothers does not imply or involve any authority or headship over others. Likewise prophesying, an activity in which the one prophesying is essentially a passive instrument through which God communicates, does not necessarily imply or involve an authority or headship of the one prophesying over the others” (Knight 1985:34).

This distinction between teaching and prophesying will be addressed in chapter seven of this study, and Knight's argument will be shown to be problematic. But notice four things in his discussion at this point: (a) the concept of “headship” once again subtly drives theology—not just theology of gender, but theology of teaching, prophesying, etc.; (b) the place of apostleship and how women apostles relate to “headship” is not discussed; (c) the meaning of 1 Corinthians 12:28, “God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers,” and if it is theologically consistent to allow women prophets (and apostles) but not women teachers over men in the church, is not discussed; (d) the ban of generic teaching and exercising authority that

is (so it is argued) found in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is the determiner of how one is to interpret other texts that address similar subjects and ultimately, how one is to regulate women's activities in minister. This last point is particularly noteworthy since it is a common pattern in books that critique the concept of women elders.

These gaps and problems in Knight's study would soon be addressed in forthcoming works. Some were addressed in Susan Foh's book *Women and the Word of God* (1979), which was published in the same year the Reformed Church in America began ordaining women. Foh's work is thorough and broad, and while on the same page as Knight with regard to women elders, she makes a number of other assertions that are still being repeated in the debate to this day. She also makes arguments that would a year later be refuted by Jewett's *The Ordination of Women*, but also makes arguments that stand in line with Jewett's book as well.

For example, Foh believes that since all of Jesus' chosen apostles were male, this is evidence against women elders:

"To argue that Jesus' choice of apostles was determined by culture is to ignore the fact that God chose the culture and time in which his Son was to be born. No detail escapes God's consideration. Jesus' choice is consistent with the Old Testament teaching that a woman submits herself to her husband; the explicit application of that principle which relates to the choice of the male apostolate is stated in 1 Timothy 2:11-12" (1979:93; inconsistently, on page 237, Foh calls this very argument "inadequate" to prohibit women elders).

However, Foh is not consistent in this theological argumentation when it comes to the *Jewishness* of all twelve apostles. As Jewett remarked a year later:

"...when it comes to the *original* apostolate, one should look upon its male character as having no more (and no less) theological significance than its Jewish character. Since the witness of the apostles was to *begin* in Jerusalem and Judea, since they came with a

message ‘to the Jew *first*’ and *then* ‘also to the Greek’ (Acts 1:8; Rom. 1:16), is it to be wondered at that our Lord chose men who, like himself, were Jews? But if no one would reason that because Jesus and the original apostles were all Jews, therefore the Christian ministry should be Jewish to perpetuity, why reason from the fact that they were all men to the conclusion that it should be *male* to perpetuity?” (Jewett 1980: 59).

On the other hand, Foh agrees with Jewett on some points, like when she says “Nowhere in Scripture is there any statement that [says that] to represent Christ, one must be male” (1979:96, cf. Jewett 1980:26-55). But, at the same time, Foh maintains that 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is speaking of generic exercising of authority and teaching over men, and therefore says, “Women are forbidden to teach and exercise authority over men (1 Tim. 2:11-12), and women should not hold any church office in which they would have to do these two things. The woman cannot be an elder because of these two requirements, not because acting as Christ’s representative demands maleness,” (1979:96). Foh also agrees with Jewett in her section of “Invalid Arguments” in the chapter “Women and the Church.” She plainly says, “The reason women are not allowed to teach or exercise authority over men is not because God is our Father or Christ is the Son or because Jesus chose men for apostles or because women are inferior,” (1979:238).

Foh plainly acknowledges the possibility of female deacons in Romans 16:1-2 and 1 Timothy 3:11 (1979:96). She rejects the assertion that Romans 16:7 is speaking of a female apostle (1979:97), and asserts, like Knight, that in Ephesians 5 the “comparison of the marriage relation to Christ and the church points to the ultimacy of the authority structure in marriage (in this age)” (1979: 134). Foh rejects that 1 Timothy 2:12-15 teaches women’s inherent susceptibility to error (1979:127), affirms with Knight that men and women are equal, and that “The wife’s submission is not based on the husband’s superiority or the wife’s inferiority” (1979:130)—and like Knight, also does not see this as being logically or theologically problematic in any way.

Regarding 1 Corinthians 7, Foh says “there is mutuality in marriage that reflects the equal personhood of the partners but that does not annul the headship of the husband” (1979:131). She then attempts to explain what exactly this means, and this is not altogether clear. She appears to believe, in contrast with others who argue against women elders, that women take a position of authority in marriage and thus are (apparently) not in such a position prior to marriage (1979:133). In other words, women in general are not subordinate to men. But this assertion creates obvious problems for her theology, since women’s subordination is supposedly found in the “creation order,” which means *all* women—not just women in church or wives—are subordinate, and that *all* men—not just men at church or husbands—are authoritarian leaders or “heads.” If Foh is going to argue that women’s submission and male authority is based on creation (which she does), then this principle should apply not just in marriage and in church, but everywhere in society. She even says, “Why the creation order applies to the church as well as the home is not made clear; and guesses...are only guesses” (Foh 1979:239). Later authors would correct this inconsistency (see Neuer below), though it would generally remain a less popular position in Evangelical scholarship.

Foh also makes other problematic statements, such as, “...Scripture does not speak of basic constitutional differences between men and women, and it does speak of the different roles men and women have in relation to one another” (1979:133). But if, for example, women’s unique ability to bear and nurture children and all of the other biological differences between the sexes that are acknowledged in Scripture do not qualify as “constitutional differences,” it is not clear what does. This is especially noteworthy since a page earlier, Foh says that sexual intercourse—

which Scripture speaks much about (e.g., Song of Solomon, 1 Cor 7, etc.)—“involves all aspects of the human being, not just the physical” (1979:132). Why, then, does not sexual differences comprise “constitutional differences”?

Chapter nine of her book specifically addresses the topic of “women and the church.” Her position is clear: “There is only one sufficient argument against women’s ordination: scriptural prohibition,” and, “a clear prohibition against the ordination of women to the ministry is 1 Timothy 2:12” (1977:238). This conclusion vividly demonstrates the centrality of scriptural exegesis of this key text. It should also be noted that this particular stance on women elders remains normative for Evangelicals who—in an as sound theological manner as they can—forbid women elders today. If 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is found *not* to forbid women elders, the argument against women elders is severely diminished.

In summary, Foh’s work stands as one of the most articulate works that would later become the theological platform known as “complementarianism.” It contains one of the largest theological critiques of women elders and Evangelical feminism for its time.

Three parallel works also forged in response to various strains of feminism include Stephen Clark’s *Man and Woman in Christ* (1980),¹ James Hurley’s *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (1981) and Werner Neuer’s *Man and Woman in Christian Perspective* (1981, translated from German to English in 1990). All three books affirm the major points that have been previously established by Foh: (a) 1 Timothy 2:12 forbids women elders, (b) a God-

¹ This work will use the 2006 Tabor House edition.

ordained hierarchy exists in marriage where man has authority over woman, and this authority expresses itself in church—yet, the Christian may still refer to both sexes as being created fundamentally “equal.” Neuer goes further than Foh (and Hurley), however, in at least two respects. First, Neuer asserts that female subordinationism and male authority extends not only from marriage into church, but into “society” as well (Neuer 1991:180). Neuer also believes that 1 Corinthians 14:34, is in fact, “a total ban on women speaking in church worship” (1991:117), not just a ban on certain types of “speaking.”

Neuer also believes that Junia in Romans 16:7 is speaking of a male apostle (1991:131), where Foh believes that Junia is a female, but not an apostle (1979:97). Hurley accepts that Junia is both a woman and an apostle, but not an *Apostle*, like one of the twelve; she was rather a traveling missionary (1981:122). In any of these cases, none of the authors find Romans 16:7 as indicating anything substantial about women in ministry—certainly not to the point of supporting women elders.

Hurley follows the theological method of Foh in giving primacy to 1 Timothy 2:12 in interpreting other verses and in regulating women’s ministries in church (note Foh 1979:253-254). For example, in Hurley’s concluding chapter, which involves case studies and scenarios of what is and is not appropriate for women to do in church, he repeatedly makes reference to what qualifies as falling under the ban of 1 Timothy 2:12, and draws conclusions accordingly (e.g., 1981:243, 248, 25).

Clark's *Man and Woman in Christ* is nearly twice the size of other works on the subject since it involves a discussion of the social sciences in addition to biblical theology. It is also one of the more popular works, having a variety of positive reviews and endorsements. The book is very similar to evangelical works on the subject as it begins with a biblical study of Genesis and then moves into the New Testament period, and finally into more ethical questions such as women's ordination. But it is also noticeably alarmist when other works were not as explicit. Clark says in the preface:

“Today there is a flood of books on women. Most of them are written by women who in one way or another are part of the modern feminist movement...Their writings are a symptom of a serious problem area in our society, and are a fair warning that it is no longer possible to approach men and women in a traditional way or even with the remnants of a traditional approach....The flood of material has produced a certain amount of confusion and unclarity. Before people in our society are rushed down a steep bank into the sea, Christians need to look again at this area to understand how they should approach it” (Clark 2006:7)²

Clark goes on to say in the preface that his book “does not really treat the question” of women's ordination (2006:8). But it *does*. Not only are all of the key NT texts relating to women and ministry singled out and exegeted at length (2006:95-158), but it also dedicates a subsection to “Ordination of Women” (2006:479-481), where Clark argues in the negative.

In chapters three and four of the book, Clark develops an argument similar to chapter six in this work, where the relationship of husband and wife and the relationships in the family inform our understanding of church government. Clark takes a radically traditional perspective on gender roles in marriage, where he boils down (his perspective on) NT teaching to simple formulations as “The man provides the food; the woman prepares and serves it....The man receives the guest

² This section is not actually numbered, and the book begins page one after the preface. In order to accurately cite the page number, the physical page number (beginning with the first page after the cover) in italics is used in this citation and in all citations that come from the preface.

and sees that he is cared for. The woman gets the guest something to eat, prepares his room, washes his clothing” (Clark 2006:65), and so forth. These conclusions are drawn by a narrow reading of the New Testament itself, limiting his discussion to only a handful of texts (e.g., the commonly cited Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, 1 Peter 3)—just like Knight. He even goes as far as to make the (demonstratively untrue) statement, “The New Testament presents only two explicit commands for husbands and wives” (Clark 2006:64), for 1 Corinthians 7 uses *multiple imperatives* for husbands and wives. Eventually this perspective on marriage and family leads to similar conclusions in external organizations like church. He says, “Some people today...presume that family and community can be easily separated from one another and operate differently. In fact, family and community cannot be separated. If someone learns how to be a man, he must be a man in every situation in his life, and he needs his male role to be taught everywhere....the pattern of community government [in the early church] was arranged to support the unity of the family” (Clark 2006:93, cf. 146). Since Clark’s NT theology of gender is so limited in scope, this undermines the vast majority of the arguments following in the book since they rely on it. For example, just on pages 110-111, one can find the following phrases: “New Testament teaching provides...”, “The New Testament likewise teaches...”, “this is not the perspective of the New Testament,” “The New Testament sorts out...”, “the New Testament contains...”, etc. (cf. 148-149). And by all of these phrases, Clark is only referring to the handful of texts examined in his brief introductory study. Thus, Clark’s various conclusions, many far-reaching, are drawn prematurely.

Clark’s methodological bias in this respect is clearly seen in the introductory sentences to chapter seven:

“Six major texts directly address the question of the roles of men and women: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, 1 Corinthians 14:33-38, 1 Timothy 2:8-15, Ephesians 5:22-33, Colossians 3:18-19, and 1 Peter 3:1-7. In addition, two minor texts provide instructional material for the roles of men and women: 1 Timothy 5:1-2 and Titus 2:1-6” (Clark 2006:115).

Disregarding the possible methodological problems (e.g., simply harvesting the Protestant canon of relevant texts and declaring a ‘biblical view’ as the legitimate one), this is a highly subjective assertion and can be easily challenged. As it was said above, 1 Corinthians 7 is nearly an entire chapter dedicated to the relationship between husband and wife, and can be argued to be perhaps the most enlightening discussion on gender and marriage in the NT (see, e.g., Pierce’s *First Corinthians 7: Paul’s Neglected Treatise on Gender* - 2009). The differences in the qualifications between male deacons and women deacons in 1 Timothy 3 could also be argued to shed important light on men and women in church. In short, it is unclear what constitutes a criterion in determining a text that “directly addresses the question of the roles of men and women.” Why, for instance, isn’t the actual historical records of what men and women do in the church of central value (e.g., Rom 16:1-2, 7; Php 4:2-3; cf. Col 4:15, etc.) in the discussion of gender in the NT? This is simply one of many methodological gaps in Clark’s study. In fact, the primary methodological aspect of Clark’s study are taken up in retrospect. The basic hermeneutical issues of biblical interpretation are addressed in the summary of the section on NT teaching (2006:145-164), as opposed to the beginning.

Clark also responds to Jewett’s theology of Paul in the same manner as Hurley and Knight. Clark says:

“The view that Paul’s teaching is contradictory has been pressed into service by many who wish to argue for a change in the traditional Christian views of the roles of men and women in the church. However, unless we assume that Paul is normally incoherent, it

would make more sense to begin with the view that Paul had some way of putting together passages like Gal 3:28 and 1 Cor 11:2-16, which were probably written within a year or two of one another....a simple contradiction in his thinking here is very unlikely” (Clark 2006:104).

The year 1984 was eventful for the debate over women in ministry. It was the year that the Evangelical Covenant Church affirmed women’s ordination for pastoral ministry (Johnston 1986:34), the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution forbidding women’s ordination, and the Evangelical Colloquium on Women and the Bible (October 9-11, 1984), which was held “in hopes of furthering dialog on the biblical and hermeneutical issues surrounding women in ministry” (Mickelsen 1984:4). It was also a year of important publications. George W. Knight III wrote the influential essay, “*Authenteo* Reference to Women in 1 Timothy 2:12” (1984:143-57), which examined the *hapax legomenon* ἀθεντέω in 1 Timothy 2:12. He generally argued that the term can have a variety of meanings, but that it should mean a generic “exercise authority over” or “have authority.” As such, the work provided traditionalists and complementarians grounds for denying women pastors, since they were (thus) forbidden to “exercise authority over” men in the church. The essay would remain a standard go-to reference for those who deny women elders until Baldwin’s more extensive work in 1995.

Ben Witherington III also published *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, which was based on his doctoral work at the University of Durham. It was perhaps the most scholarly discussion about women in the life and work of Jesus available in the English language at the time. Witherington’s sequel book *Women in the Earliest Churches* (1988) has more direct implications on the subject of women in ministry and its relationship to NT theology. Both of these books were condensed into the 1990 publication *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (see below).

A year later, the complementarian Wayne Grudem wrote an essay entitled, “Does κεφαλή Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature?” (1985), which challenges the assertion that κεφαλή means “source” in Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 11. By establishing some basis for an “authority over” translation, Grudem and others against women elders could assert a hierarchy in marriage in the NT, which is then used as an argument for a hierarchy in church that precludes women from being elders. The debate over this term had long taken place before 1985 (see for example, Bedale 1954), and the debate continues to this day (for an outdated, but helpful bibliographical review of the debate, see Johnson 2006). But, in the case of Grudem’s argument, it proved to be a bit rash and biased as Cervin demonstrated in his 1989 response in the *Trinity Journal* (Cervin 1989). Grudem, however, would not back down easily, and published a brief response to Cervin in 1990 in the *Trinity Journal*. After scholarly works were released on the subject by Andrew Perriman in 1994 and Anthony Thiselton in 2000, Grudem published a revised study entitled “The Meaning of κεφαλή: An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged” (2001). Unfortunately, the essay contains little meaningful interaction with the specific claims of Perriman, Thiselton, and Cervin; so it appears Grudem (and to some extent, complementarianism) has lost the case that “head” in Ephesians 5:22 (and elsewhere) must mean and involve “authority.”

In the same year (1985), Gilbert Bilezikian released the first edition of *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman’s Place in Church and Family*, which since 2006 has been in its third edition. Bilezikian says in the preface that, “For the sake of convenience and brevity, I dialogue mainly with Hurley’s work” (2006:11). Readers should not be misled in thinking that this means the book is primarily reactionary. Indeed, one of the unique features of the book is its

more balanced structure that moves from one epoch of redemptive history to another in order to provide primarily a positive theology of man and woman. The chapter titles are adequate to demonstrate: “God’s Creation Design,” “Sudden Death,” “The Old Covenant Promise,” “The New Creation in Christ,” “The New Community” (Bilezikian 2006:7). This format allows the work to provide one of the more consistently theological works on the subject.

The redemptive-historical approach also contributes to the discussion by placing women in ministry in its larger context and showing the movement through God’s plan of redemption. This is particularly insightful since most other discussions on the subject tend to mix exegesis with systematic theology without being able to properly assemble them together in the covenantal/historical framework assumed within the biblical canon. Traditionalist, fundamentalist and Reformed scholars of the time (e.g., Clark, Knight, Grudem, Hurley, etc.), for example, tended to proof-text and elevate certain verses to draw a broader, universal conclusions about what it means to be a man or a woman, often without thought to the progressive nature of biblical revelation. Bilezikian, on the other hand, can summarize theological points in such ways like:

“the old covenant period as a time of partial accommodation to sinful realities as a way of achieving their eventual resolution in the new covenant....The old covenant gave many indications that the time of male rulership would come to an end” (2006:51).

These kinds of observations allow the fruits of exegetical theology to be placed in their larger context.

In providing such a study, Bilezikian manages to provide much of the framework for the CBE Statement of 1988. He argues against female subordination in the creation account of Genesis 2-

3 (2006:21-36), argues that Christ overturned traditional social distinctions including those of gender (ch. 4), and that differences in rank, race, and gender are “irrelevant in the church” (2006:90-97). On that basis, women should not be prohibited from being elders in the church simply because they are female. Unlike the argument made in chapter seven of this study, Bilezikian does not make a *direct* argument for women elders on the basis of the mutual relationship between husbands and wives (2006:118-126) extending into the sphere of the church, but it is certainly implied.

Bilezikian’s book was noticeably geared towards critiquing patriarchy and hierarchy, often to the point of distraction. This is unfortunate since a more objective canonical-theology of gender is rarely found in the literature and therefore would have been beneficial. It is also unclear just how Bilezikian’s methodology works given his critique that patriarchy cannot be substantiated from the biblical documents, and simultaneous critique of the Old Testament in general for its patriarchal perspective.

In another important work, the ordained Presbyterian minister and seminary professor Aída Spencer published *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry* (1985). Her particular argument for women in ministry focuses on correcting theological errors emanating from Genesis 1-3. Having established the fundamental equality that exists in the nature of human persons, she goes on to argue that this equality places no restrictions on women in ministry. Like others, her treatment moves through biblical theology beginning with Genesis and ending with the New Covenant period. It includes a thorough study of Jewish traditions regarding women and Jesus’ behavior and teachings in contrast, a chapter on Paul’s theology, a study on the order of ministers

(as given by Paul), and a chapter on how feminine images of God have/can be used for Christian ministry. The argumentation is rigorous and the research is full.

Nevertheless, there are some areas that could be improved. Spencer's study lacks a chapter on Old Testament law, which is unfortunate for how much attention she gives to Judaism. The majority of her argumentation seems to suffer from a strong focus on the Gentile-Jewish tension in NT theology. This focus is beneficial at many points, but it also tends to limit the perspective and the coherence of her argumentation. Her chapter on Paul's theology is somewhat confusing in its structure—moving from Galatians 3:28 to 1 Timothy 2, and then on to a different matter.

Spencer interprets 1 Timothy 2:12 to be prohibiting women from teaching in a certain kind of way, and also that Paul's command was a "temporary injunction" (1985:88). She says:

"Paul was slowing down the process which was leading to a genuine full and equal participation between women and men. Before people are 'liberated' in Christ they need to be recognized and understand the nature of that liberation. Otherwise, they might strive after a pseudo-liberation which would terminate as slavery" (Spencer 1985:91).

Spencer also sees Paul's encouragement of women to learn in 1 Timothy 2 as a fulfillment of Galatians 3:28 (1985:97).

On the other hand, Spencer offers a valuable contribution to the debate in her fourth chapter, "First Apostles, Second Prophets, Third Teachers." This title is derived from 1 Corinthians 12:28 where Paul says, "And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues." She argues that "if even one woman could be found who was affirmed as an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, a pastor, or a teacher, then one could—one must—conclude that women

have been given gifts from God for positions to which we now ordain people and for positions considered authoritative in the first century church” (1985:99-100). Of course, she easily finds women fulfilling such positions in the Scriptures. Although her argument for women teachers is relatively weak, her main point from 1 Corinthians 12 is a strong one.

It was around this time that Evangelical feminists called the “Evangelical Colloquium on Women and the Bible” (October 9-11, 1984) in Oak Brook, Illinois. The gathering of thirty-six Evangelicals led to the publication of the symposium *Women, Authority, and the Bible* (1986) two years later, edited by the Evangelical feminist Alvera Mickelsen. The volume contained the most mature development of the women elders debate of its time. Since the gathering was initiated by Evangelical feminists and the editor of the book is also an Evangelical feminist, it is natural that most of the authors in the book are Evangelical feminists as well.

As the title indicates, the compromises made on the doctrine of Scripture by certain evangelical feminists (e.g., Jewett) have “finally” (Hurley 1981: 204) culminated in a discussion about biblical authority and biblical interpretation. Robert Johnston contributed an essay on hermeneutics in the second chapter of the volume. Although the next chapter (three) of this study will address hermeneutics, two particular assertions are immediately worth noting. First, Johnston says, “The immediate context of a passage should be considered before one looks at other parallel texts (e.g., 1 Cor 14:40 is more helpful in interpreting 1 Cor 14:34 than 1 Tim 2:11-14),” (1986:31). This, of course, is a challenge directed at Knight (see discussion of *The Role Relationships* above). Priority should be given to the immediate context. This point is brought to bear in chapter five of this work. Second, Johnston says, “Insight into texts that are

obscure must be gained from those that are plain,” and Johnston cites 1 Timothy 2 as a particular example of an obscure text. This point will be discussed in chapter seven of this study—where it will be argued that, regardless of how one interprets 1 Timothy 2:12, it should not be enacted as a universal ban on women elders precisely because of its historical and contemporary ambiguity.

Roger Nicole, one of the few Reformed theologians to contribute to the volume, wrote an essay in the next chapter that challenged the assertion that Evangelical feminism threatens the authority of Scripture. He makes a number of important observations, such as the need to distinguish between “descriptive passages and mandates,” between “intimations of the Old Testament” and “the practice of the Jews,” between “Scripture as circumstantial or cultural,” between static and “progressive” revelation,” etc. (Nicole 1986:42-47). These distinctions, as it will be noted in the next chapter, are not unique to egalitarian hermeneutics nor are they new to the subject. But Nicole finds it necessary to review certain principles because of their inconsistent application when dealing with texts that address gender. Richard Longenecker and other scholars also address the subject of hermeneutics in the volume, followed by responses.

Other notable contributions in the volume include a thorough discussion of key exegetical debates, such as the meaning of 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12 and the meaning of “head” (κεφαλή) in Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 11. With such a strong egalitarian presence, the ardent complementarian J. I. Packer even admitted about the 1984 Colloquium: “the burden of proof regarding the exclusion of women from the office of teaching and ruling within the congregation now lies on those who maintain the exclusion rather than on those who challenge it” (1986:289).

Also in 1986 was the release of Walter Liefeld and Ruth Tucker's *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from the New Testament Times to the Present*. The purpose of the volume is to fill in the historical gap with regard to women in ministry. Both authors come from a perspective that favors women elders.

In 1987, Gretchen Hull released *Equal to Serve: Women and Men Working Together Revealing the Gospel*. The book is more of a mainstream work that repeats the basic arguments of previous Evangelical feminists' works. It is similar to Bilezikian's work in that it critiques patriarchy and hierarchalism in marriage. It is endorsed by Bilezikian and Nicole, and has an appendix by Mickelsen and Kroeger—all four who, along with Hull, forged the Christians for Biblical Equality Statement "Men, Women, and Biblical Equality" two years later.

Patricia Gundry (whose husband, Stanley, is also another co-author of the CBE Statement) picked up the pen the same year and wrote *Neither Slave Nor Free: Helping Women Answer the Call to Church Leadership* (1987), which was a more targeted book than her first *Woman Be Free!*. The argument is more practical than biblical and theological. One of her major goals is to provide strategies for enacting a non-traditionalist model for church leadership.

In response to the growing popularity of "Biblical feminism" or "Evangelical feminism" or "Christian egalitarianism," the conservative (traditionalist) wing of Evangelicalism and the Reformed church mobilized a response: The Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW). This permanent organization assembled in Danvers, Massachusetts in 1987 and forged

their doctrine in *The Danvers Statement*, which was later published in its final form in Wheaton, Illinois in 1988—the same year the Evangelical Free Church of America restricted women from being pastors (Hamel 2012:2). After the meeting at Danvers in 1987, the (conservative)³ egalitarian wing of Evangelicalism established the Council for Biblical Equality on January 2, 1988. By 1989, they produced their own confessional statement that essentially served as a response to the Danvers’ statement and a positive affirmation of their own beliefs.

Since these two documents are landmark publications outlining central theological disagreements in the ongoing Evangelical-Reformed debate over women in ministry, we will examine each document in chapter four (“Conceptual Framework”).

2.2 Works During and After the Formation of the CBMW and CBE (1988-2004)

The period from 1988 to 2005 (when *Discovering Biblical Equality* was written) marks an explosion of literature on the subject of women elders. Below is a summary of some of the major movements and contributions.

While the CBMW and CBE were being formed in 1987-1988, *What Paul Really Said About Women* was being published by John Bristow (1988). The book contained a very straightforward argument: Paul’s writings in the NT are not a legitimate basis for traditional views of women in

³ There was originally the Evangelical Women’s Caucus. But “after the group adopted several resolutions, including one that affirmed civil rights for gay and lesbian persons, a large group of members broke away and formed Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) to dissociate themselves from what they considered an unbiblical endorsement of homosexuality” (Scanzoni 2010:70). Given its broader leanings (it was later renamed to the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women’s Caucus) and approval of homosexuality, and given the scope of this work (see chapter one), we will focus on the CBE as primarily representing “Evangelical Feminism.”

marriage, family, and church. Rather, Paul was actually *intentionally trying to undermine* the low views of women that were dominant in his time. In contrast to those who say that the Apostle had an erroneous view of gender, Paul is actually women's friend in the goal of emancipation. Scholarship and exegetical insight, Bristow argues, demonstrates this fact.

The first chapters of the work attempt to establish that the low view of women that has dominated culture (and Christianity) for the past two thousand years is largely due to the Greeks (Bristow 1988:1-30). And while Roman culture opened many doors for wives and women (cf. Belleville 2000), they were still far from an ethical ideal. Bristow makes a number of insights when sifting through Hellenistic and rabbinic primary sources, making connections between the Greek and Jewish beliefs about women. He says regarding the Hellenistic period, "The influence of Greek thought within Judaism was subtle and far-reaching," and that this was particularly true with regard to topics of gender (Bristow 1988:24). Since Christian scholars and apologists were trained in Stoic philosophy and studied the "classics" of the Greek Age—like Tertullian and Augustine—Christianity naturally took on views of gender that originated from Greek philosophy and not the Scriptures (1988:28-29). Paul, on the other hand, intentionally crafted his statements and words about marriage and women to contrast with the norm of his day (1988:35-42)—ironically, in the very texts that are used to justify traditionalist, subordinationist views of marriage and gender (e.g., Eph. 5). If anything is clear in these first two chapters of Bristow's work, it is that exegetical studies can directly determine the direction of theology—and the theology of the dignity and vocation of women is no exception.

The third chapter focuses on women in ministry and contains few new insights. But one point that isn't typically found in other works has to do with the character of Paul. He draws the important observation that Luke makes it a point to say that Paul, before he was a Christian, persecuted Christians without respect to gender. Acts 8:3, 9:1-2, and 22:4-5 explicitly say "both men and women" (τε ἄνδρας καὶ γυναῖκας), so Bristow reasons that "Since Paul began his relationship with Christianity by treating women and men the same, it seems unlikely that he would favor one over the other after his conversion" (Bristow 1988:55). This is a fair point that has perhaps not been heard loud enough in the debate (cf. Wright 2006:7).

With the gender debate reaching a new peak, *Women in Ministry: Four Views* (Clouse and Clouse, 1989) was released a year later.⁴ The book contains two Evangelical scholars who argue against women elders (Robert Culver and Susan Foh), and two Evangelical scholars who argue for women elders (Walter Liefeld and Alvera Mickelsen). The title rightly summarizes the content as four views and not two, since the arguments made by each scholar are not exactly the same (though years later Zondervan would release *Two Views of Women in Ministry*, which also had a two versus two structure, and had as much diversity as *Women in Ministry: Four Views*). The book is especially useful since each position is presented and is immediately followed by responses from the other three authors. Differences within the complementarian and egalitarian camps become particularly clear.

⁴ In the same year, Ruth Edwards (a Scottish Episcopal Deacon) wrote *A Case For Women's Ministry* (1989). Since it is not technically an "Evangelical" or "Reformed" work (see next chapter), her approach is much broader than the scope of this book. Suffice it to say, she makes an argument for women elders and deacons by appealing to a mix of church tradition, theology, and biblical studies.

Culver appears to follow in line with Neuer's particular emphasis on male primacy and female subordinationism—especially as it unfolds in silence and submission in church. For example, Culver agrees with Neuer in that 1 Corinthians requires a general silence of women at church (Culver 1989:28-29). He also agrees that “authority” in 1 Corinthians 11:10 is man's authority over woman, not woman's authority over herself (Foh corrects Culver on this in 1989:54). Foh's arguments are essentially the same as in her previous work *Women and the Word of God* (1979). Liefeld's case for women elders is a mix of exegetical and theological study in a manner similar to Foh's argument, though it contains a far greater section on reflection and prolegomena (Liefeld 1989:127-134). Before bringing his New Testament expertise to bear, he goes to great lengths to re-frame the argument so that it is debated in a meaningful fashion. Finally, Mickelsen makes another argument for women in ministry, and asserts many of the egalitarian positions in a broader theological scheme. She pays less attention towards the exegetical arguments and aims instead at the broader strokes of redemptive history (“biblical theology”)—which is somewhat of an embodiment of those assertions in the CBE statement that underline the importance of a theology that comes from *all* of Scripture (CBE 1988:1), and not a few select verses.

Both sides accuse each other of poor hermeneutics, and both have square disagreements on what certain words mean in key biblical texts (e.g., “authority” in 1 Tim 2:12; “head” in 1 Cor 11 and Eph 5, etc.). Perhaps the most revealing part of the book is that it demonstrates the fact that the concept of women elders is not without (actual or potential) biblical and theological basis, and that one can pose an argument for female elders without sacrificing a high view of Scripture.

In 1990, a Reformed scholar entered the debate with the release of *Gender and Grace* (Van Leeuwen 1990). Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, a psychologist and professor at Calvin College, wrote her provocative theological treatise to address the meaning of gender from a Reformed perspective (1990:10-11). Although the book is primarily aimed at addressing the relationship between the social sciences and theology, she makes a number of relevant contributions. Van Leeuwen follows through with the biblical-theological emphasis in Evangelical feminism (1990:34-51, 70-71, 211-218). But this is more of a result from her Calvinist (and Kuyperian)⁵ perspective—which asserts the centrality of the unfolding creation-fall-redemption-consummation scheme in Christian theology—than anything else. This approach, and her own concerns as a psychologist, has evidently increased her sensitivity towards the complementarian movement that was just launched a few years earlier. For example, in commenting on *The Danvers Statement*, she says:

“The detailed meaning of sexual complementarity was not spelled out, but included (for women) a strong emphasis on motherhood and vocational homemaking. And the Council’s president, when interviewed, added the group’s belief that ‘childcare is the primary responsibility of the wife.’ There was not a single reference in the statement to men’s responsibilities as fathers, although there were many references to male ‘headship,’ ‘leadership’ and ‘authority’ in both home and church settings....the discussion on gender roles among Christians has been largely *limited* to the question of headship, with a consequent neglect of the burgeoning literature on sex and gender development, parenting, cognitive sex differences and other issues treated in earlier chapters of this book” (Van Leeuwen 1990:232-233).

Van Leeuwen brings her perspective to bear on the subject of women in ministry towards the end of her book. She critiques the concept of “universal headship” (1990:240-241), where women are

⁵ Abraham Kuyper (1897-1920) was the founder of the Free University in the Netherlands, as well as the country’s Prime Minister (1901). He authored two systematic theologies and was largely known for his lectures concerning “sphere sovereignty” and a theological method that interpreted various aspects of creation in terms of the redemptive-historical categories of creation-fall-redemption.

automatically delegated to positions of authority simply because of their gender. After brief introductory remarks, she says:

“One is tempted to conclude that a complex mixture of sexism, racism and territorialism is what is really at the root of this inconsistency. It is not the idea of women in authority per se that is feared, but women having authority over men of *their own* race on *their own* home turf [because subordinationists are willing to send women missionaries overseas to preach the gospel]. Again it seems that kingdom activity is being treated as a zero-sum game where one group’s success in a given sphere of influence is automatically seen as entailing another group’s eclipse....yet another inconsistency is that subordinationists’ present concern to keep women out of the pulpit and the *pastorate* is actually contrary to historical practice of most of their own churches. Church historian Janette Hassey, in her book *No Time for Silence*, has shown that American evangelicals both advocated and practiced women’s ministries before and after the turn of the century to a degree unheard of today” (Van Leeuwen 1990:242-243).

After further argumentation she says, “The thrust of my argument—and of other parts of this book—is that male headship can be invoked neither by Christian men to preserve their positions of privilege nor by Christian women to avoid responsibility for their choices” (Van Leeuwen 1990:247). As such, women should not be prohibited to be pastors.

Van Leeuwen’s keen observation that “headship” plays a central role in complementarian theology should not be overlooked. Despite her criticisms of this theological imbalance, “headship” would only continue to dominate the Evangelical and Reformed arguments against women elders.

Also in 1990 was the release of Ben Witherington III’s publication *Women and the Genesis of Christianity*, which is a condensed version of his two previous academic books *Women in the Ministry of Jesus* (1984) and *Women in the Earliest Churches* (1988). He says:

“I am convinced that by analogy much of what Jesus and the early Christians said and did and the principles by which they operated are still applicable today. This is especially true for the Church as it seeks a more equitable approach to male-female relations in general and the role of women in the Church in particular” (1990:xiv).

The book is primarily a biblical and cultural study that has theological conclusions, as opposed to a topical study or an exegetical study. It is organized in a way that reads very similar to Bilezikian’s *Beyond Sex Roles*, and as such contributes to the biblical-theological aspect and redemptive-historical movement of Scriptural theology. For instance, Witherington says in the conclusion:

“If the direction of the New Testament data is the reformation of patriarchy coupled with the affirmation of women’s new roles, then could this not lead to a stage in which the Church has reformed itself into a state beyond patriarchy? If the cry of the New Testament authors is ‘always reforming,’ does there come a point where reformation entails abandonment or a point where reformation is no longer necessary? Whatever conclusions one draws...surely the starting point for such a discussion should be the careful, historical exegesis and study of the biblical material itself” (1990:246; cf. Stackhouse 2005:71-72).

H. Wayne House published in the same year *The Role of Women in Ministry Today* (1990), which, in quality of scholarship and critical thought, couldn’t differ more strongly than Witherington’s work. House’s book is based off his earlier essays from *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1988), and is little more than a reaffirmation of the complementarian position, resembling the later work of Doriani (2003). As with several complementarian publications, there is a noticeable flavor of historical naiveté and overconfidence in the way the debate is framed, and we might pause to comment. For example, he opens up the aforementioned essay with the statement, “Until recently, the role of women in the church has been a ‘settled’ matter” (1988:47). Numerous publications in church history have proven these kinds of assertions to be patently untrue. My own research in the history of women deacons (Hübner 2013, under contract for

republication by Wipf and Stock) is sufficient enough to demonstrate that the role of women in the church has been under *continual flux and change*, from one century to the next. Such misleading claims about the historical narrative are clear attempts are marginalizing the modern effort of legitimizing women elders, and they have rarely moved the conversation forward.

Amidst the recent growth of Evangelical feminism, the CBMW organized and released their flagship publication entitled *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Biblical Feminism* (1991, henceforth *RBMW*). The book was (and perhaps remains) the largest and most scholarly critique of Evangelical feminism. It was re-released with a new preface in 2006, and released with a new cover in 2012. The book has over a dozen authors and five sections: (1) Vision and Overview, (2) Exegetical and Theological Studies; (3) Studies from Related Disciplines; (4) Applications and Implications; (5) Conclusion and Prospect. The book also has two appendices, the first is a revised and updated version of Grudem's essay on the meaning of "head" (which came from Knight's earlier work), and the second is *The Danvers Statement*.

It is obvious that the purpose of the book is to refute Evangelical feminism from every possible angle. Many of the essays are revisions of previous works. For example, Douglas Moo's exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:12 is a refined version of his 1980 essay "1 Timothy 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance" from the *Trinity Journal*. One of the most noticeable differences in the newer essay is that Moo seems to no longer open to the possibility that verses 13-15 are pointing towards an inherent deficiency in women (e.g., a particular susceptibility to sin). In his 1980 essay he said, "it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Paul cites Eve's failure as exemplary

and perhaps causative of the nature of women in general and that this susceptibility to deception bars them from engaging in public teaching,” (1980:70-71). But in *RBMW*, he argues the reverse:

“...there is nothing in the Genesis accounts or in Scripture elsewhere to suggest that Eve’s deception is representative of women in general...this interpretation does not mesh with the context. Paul, as we have seen, is concerned to prohibit women from teaching men; the focus is on the role relationship of men and women. But a statement about the nature of women per se would move the discussion away from this central issue, and it would have a serious and strange implication,” (1991:185).

D. A. Carson’s essay on 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 takes the interpretation that Paul is universally forbidding women from weighing prophecies (1991:133-147). This is a possible and increasingly popular interpretation, but will be demonstrated to be improbable (see chapter five). Thomas Schreiner’s essay “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership” goes on to apply the theology of complementarianism in the church (1991:211-227). In line with Knight, Foh, and the others, Schreiner argues that women should not do anything that would interfere with “male headship,” such as pastoring, and teaching and exercising authority over men at church. Of course, what qualifies as “teaching” and “exercising authority” is as subjective as it was in the 1970s and 1980s, and can be argued to mean less or more restrictive behaviors. Though the *CBMW* does not agree on how exactly one should apply 1 Timothy 2:12 and the countless implications of their particular meaning of “male headship” (e.g., Grudem 2004:54-55; note Belleville 2000:151; see chapter seven)—they agree that it at least means that women elders in an official sense should not be permitted.

Indeed, the theological concept of “headship” is absolutely central to the entire work (cf. Storkey’s broader comments in 2001:103). And by “headship,” the authors mean a group of concepts that amount to little more than male primacy, priority, and authority, and inversely the

concepts of woman's submission, subordination, and secondary role. Schreiner's essay title is sufficient to demonstrate this: "The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Headship." Everything that women can or should do is qualified by the theology of "headship," and on the basis of this "headship," any and all activities of Christian women can be regulated—at least in the home and at church. (As it was observed above, those who challenge women elders agree that men are made to be leaders and women are made to be subordinates, but they disagree over the extent of this leadership and subordination). The reverse is not true—where men's roles are defined and limited by what comports with woman's subordination (for such a suggestion would make no sense; a subordinate cannot regulate or determine roles precisely because they are not in control). Thus, women's ministries are affirmed (they are "valuable,"), but are regulated according to the regulatory principle ("headship").

Likewise, the title of Raymond Ortlund Jr.'s essay on Genesis is also biased towards maleness: "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship" (not "Male-Female Equality," or "Male Roles and Female Roles" or some other balanced title). He defines male-female equality as "Man and woman are equal in the sense that they bear God's image" and male headship as "In the partnership of two spiritually equal human beings, man and woman, the man bears the primary responsibility to lead the partnership in a God-glorifying direction," (Ortlund 1991:86). Woman's subordination or any kind of femininity is not defined in marked, italic definitions as equality and male headship in the essay. It is rather assumed that woman's "role" and purpose of existence is simply to affirm man's extant leadership. As Piper and Grudem stated in the introductory section, "Male headship at home and eldership at church mean that men bear the responsibility for the overall pattern of life....Biblical submission for the wife is the divine

calling to honor and affirm her husband's leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts" (Piper and Grudem 1991:59, 43).

This unashamed androcentric perspective logically manifests itself in church ministry. This is argued by the Reformed theologian Vern Poythress in the essay "The Church as Family: Why Male Leadership in the Family Requires Male Leadership in Church" (1991:237-241). Poythress's argument is fairly straightforward in its logic: the fundamental spheres of creation (e.g., marriage and family) bear characteristics that naturally carry over into other spheres (e.g., church). This is one of the sub-arguments in chapter seven of this work—only beginning with an egalitarian perspective on marriage that lacks the androcentricity of complementarian theories of headship, and therefore adds further support to the legitimacy of women elders.

Viewed historically and literarily, *RBMW* makes relatively few new theological contributions to the debate since the works of the 1980s. It does, however, offer a very accessible, organized, rigorous defense of the teachings outlined in *The Danvers Statement* by leading Evangelical and Reformed scholars.

The Evangelical feminist response was immediate. In 1992 Craig Keener published *Paul, Women, and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (1992, with new preface in 2004). Keener writes as a former complementarian and a Baptist, New Testament scholar that specializes in first-century cultural studies. He says "The sole purpose of this book is to examine four passages in Pauline literature which have traditionally been used to argue for the subordination of women. Two of these texts address women's roles in family relationships, and

two address women's speaking in the church" (Keener 2004:10). He concludes in line with the CBE that there is no theological or biblical reason to forbid women in ministry, and that texts on women's submission are not as absolute and universal as they initially appear. Keener's book is very similar to Witherington's work in that it gives a substantial amount of attention to studying the culture of the first century. Both, of course, end up concluding that women elders are not prohibited according to NT theology.

It should also be noted that Keener thoroughly argued—perhaps more rigorously than anyone before him—that one should understand 1 Timothy 2:11-12 as essentially a “temporary fix,” so that Paul is essentially saying “I am not *currently permitting* a woman to teach and exercise authority over a man.” Not only does the grammar allow for such a rendering, Keener contends, but women were generally not as educated as men, and so until they were as educated, they should not be teaching (Keener 2004:101-132). This obviously suggests that once women *did* become educated, they should not be prohibited from teaching roles in church.

In the same year the Reformed historian Ruth Tucker released *Women in the Maze: Questions and Answers on Biblical Equality*. The book is similar to Hull's *Equal to Serve* in that it covers a whole host of topics relating to women and men, and also similar to Jewett's *The Ordination of Women and Man as Male and Female* in that it addresses God, gender and theological language. The tone is strong when compared to other works of its kind, and much of the argumentation consists of direct refutations of the essays in the recently published *RBMW*. The historical theology section is unfortunately much abbreviated and somewhat anecdotal, but that is probably due to its popular audience. Tucker does not technically provide a case for women's ministry but

due to its wide variety of topics and polemic tone, she addresses much of the common objections to the debate. She also takes the same interpretation as Keener regarding 1 Timothy 2:12: “This verse could appropriately be rendered: ‘I am not presently permitting a woman to teach in a manner of usurping authority over a man; she must be quiet’” (1992:115).

As the past several years of debate developed, the role of 1 Timothy 2:12 became critical to the debate for those in the Evangelical community. This was already evident in 1977 when Foh declared the verse to be the sole reason for prohibiting women from being pastors. But after more than a decade of scholarship had occurred, and especially with the recent release of *RBMW*, the weight given to this verse became even greater. For that reason, Catherine Kroeger (the founding President of the CBE) and her husband Richard Kroeger published *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (1992, endorsed by Bilezikian and Hull). Unfortunately, the odd possibilities entertained by the Kroegers’ for the meaning of ἀὐθεντεῖν in 1 Timothy 2:12, such as “proclaim oneself author of a man,” “voluntary death,” and “to thrust oneself” (1992:185-188), have discredited the exegetical credibility of the argument. The Kroegers did, however, revive the ambiguity regarding this key term in this key verse.

In 1993, numerous academics from various institutions (but primarily from Abilene Christian University) decided to cooperatively weigh in on the debate that has been taking place within the folds of Evangelical and Reformed Christianity. The two volume set *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, edited by Carroll Osburn, was released in 1993 and (second volume) 1995. The editor says in the first volume:

“Not all contributors would agree on all aspects of the volume. However, writing independently and free to arrive at their own conclusions, each attempts to follow a common exegetical method which places firm literary and historical controls upon interpretation. The views expressed do yield a rather uniform perspective that is neither fundamentalist nor radical feminist” (Osburn 1995a:x).

The key distinctive of these two volumes, outside their individual contributions, is that they are written by scholars outside of the confessional framework and theologies of the CBE and CBMW.

The first volume covers the Old Testament, “Women in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds,” “Jewish Women in in the Greco-Roman Era,” key biblical texts such as Galatians 3:28, Romans 16:1-2 and 7, 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, Ephesians 5, Acts 16 and Philippians 4, 1 Timothy 2:8-15, 3:11 and 5:3-16, Titus 2:5, 1 Peter, and various topics related to the gospels and Acts. The second volume (1995) covers various biblical characters, additional biblical texts, and a variety of other topics related to church history and hermeneutics. Some unique contributions are made, but most of the essays ultimately fall on either the egalitarian or complementarian side, depending on the essay.

Also in 1993, Ronald Pierce published an essay entitled “Evangelicals and Gender Roles in the 1990s: 1 Tim 2:8-15: A Test Case” for the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. Pierce reviews the recent movements regarding Evangelicals and the study of gender, and reflects on his own changing positions on the subject with a re-evaluation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 (1993:343-345). He concludes that “there is no compelling reason to read into [1 Timothy] 2:8-15 a hierarchical prohibition of a more general nature regarding women’s role in teaching or church leadership for all times” (1993:354), and suggests that “evangelicals from both sides of the

debate must renew their efforts to influence the evangelical community and the Church to become a more responsive, more inviting place for women to minister” (1993:355).

In 1994, the freelance author Rebecca Groothuis published *Women Caught in the Conflict: The Culture War Between Traditionalism and Feminism*,⁶ which discusses the cultural and historical aspect of the gender debate in contemporary Christianity. She sets out to demolish a number of myths regarding various strands of feminism and traditionalism, such as that evangelical feminists undermine the authority of Scripture, that the 20th century household where the husband leaves for work and wife maintains the home is a strictly biblical phenomenon, that all strands of feminism lead to societally degrading behaviors such as abortion, and a number of other common assertions made by complementarians. The book received a number of endorsements by seminary presidents and professors. One of the primary achievements of the book is that it questioned how traditional the so-called “traditional roles” of complementarianism and the CBMW really were (or were not). She would later build off this foundation to address women’s roles in ministry (see *Good News for Women* below).

In 1995—the same year the Christian Reformed Church voted to allow women elders—Stanley Grenz and Denise Kjesbo’s *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* was published. The book represents one of the most complete and articulate defenses of women pastors from the Evangelical community (hence the endorsements by C. Kroeger and Keener). Its order of argument is more logical than chronological, chaptered as follows: “Women in the Churches,” “Women in Church History,” “Women in the Faith Community,” “Women in the Writings of Paul,” “Women in Creation,” “Women in the Church and the Priesthood,” and

⁶ This study will use the 1997 Wipf and Stock edition.

“Women in the Ordained Ministry.” One of the more unique contributions towards the continual debate is the relationship of the priesthood and women pastors. As an Evangelical with Reformed leanings, Grenz argues in line with the theology of Martin Luther that there is a priesthood of all believers. The male priesthood in Scripture cannot be used as an argument against women elders. He says:

“By extending the Old Testament structure of a male-only priesthood to the New Testament church, complementarians fail to understand the radical transformation that our Lord inaugurated. No longer do we look to a special God-ordained priestly class to carry out the religious vocation of his covenant people. Rather, we are all participants in the one mandate to the ministers of God, and to this end we all serve together” (1995:187).

In the same year, the complementarians published what essentially amounts to a response to Kroegers’ work on 1 Timothy 2: *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (1995). The book has a number of complementarian contributors and important insights to the women pastors debate. Most of them are primarily exegetical. Two chapters are worth briefly noting.

The first major contribution is Henry Baldwin’s essay “An Important Word,” which is a nearly exhaustive study of the word ἀθεντέω (“assume authority,” “have authority,” or “domineer”) in ancient Greek literature. Paul says in the epistle, “I do not permit a woman to ἀθεντεῖν...” a man. Since this word is used nowhere else in the NT, and since it is central to the meaning of Paul’s command, it is vital to understand what possible nuance the term might carry. The larger problem is that the term is used very rarely in Greek literature immediately before and after Paul’s time, so there is still to this day significant debate over what Paul really meant. The importance of Baldwin’s study is that it systematically eliminated a number of improbable

renderings (e.g., some of the renderings proposed by the Kroegers), which limits the options for *all* interpreters. It did not establish what exactly Paul meant in 1 Timothy 2:12, but it did establish a range of possible meanings.

The second major contribution is Andreas Köstenberger's essay "A Complex Sentence," which examines the syntax of the verse. After examining hundreds of extra-biblical parallels to the "neither...nor" phrase in 1 Timothy 2:12, he concludes that the pair "teaching" and "exercising authority" should be taken either as both positive or both negative (pejorative), as opposed to one being positive and the other negative. What exactly constitutes a "negative" or "positive" meaning is not decisively established. But, like Baldwin, Köstenberger once again limits the boundaries of meaning for the verse, forcing (primarily egalitarians) to refine their interpretations where necessary.

It was about this time that Evangelical feminists finished some of their best critiques of the 1991 publication *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. Rebecca Groothuis completed the sequel to her 1994 publication *Women Caught in the Conflict* with *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (1997). The book is a more targeted, theological work that builds off the foundation of *Women Caught in the Conflict*. *Good News* is very similar to Hull's *Equal to Serve* and Gundry's *Woman Be Free!*, but is slightly more narrow in scope and focused in argumentation. *Good News* is also similar to Grenz's *Women in the Church*, but more rigorous in its argumentation and concise in its style. One of the differences, however, is Groothuis's more rationalist, logical approach to the subject. She tends to avoid in-depth exegetical discussions for the sake of examining theological consistency. Although some would later

critique her for this logical approach (e.g., Patterson 2005b:72-80), in reality it is a strength of both of her books. As far as Evangelicals and Reformed Christians are concerned, exegesis and biblical theology is only as good as the inferences drawn from them; it is easy, perhaps even common in the debate, for illogical argumentation to proceed from exegetical and biblical arguments, and Groothuis makes an important contribution in that regard. She challenges scholars on both sides of the debate to do more than speculate about exegetical details and instead put together a more coherent theology of gender. In this way, Groothuis delivered what might still be perhaps the single greatest critique of the arguments contained in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.

In the year 2000, Linda Belleville published *Women Leaders and the Church: Three Crucial Questions*. The book was particularly timely since in the same year the largest Protestant denomination in the world (Southern Baptist Convention) revised their distinguishing document “The Baptist Faith and Message” to reflect complementarian theology (Trull 2003). Belleville’s (Belleville 2000:16) study is a more refined and targeted argument for women elders. Her argument is that the debate over women pastors can be properly addressed by answering three simple questions: (1) “In which ministries can women be involved?”; (2) “What roles can women assume in the family and in society?”; (3) “What, if any, positions of authority can women hold in the church?”. In answering each of these questions, Belleville first looks at the cultural, first-century answer to the question and then turns to the biblical answer to the same question.

In answering the first question, she provides a very thorough discussion of cults in the Greco-Roman world and their relationship to how women were treated and perceived. She goes as far

as to say that “Jesus and Paul, in fact, did not affirm any roles for women that weren’t already a possibility in Roman society” (Belleville 2000:47). Hence:

“The quantum leap is to be found, instead, in the realm of attitudes....The fact that Jesus included women in his group of disciples speaks volumes in a society where the religious training of Jewish girls stopped at the age of twelve....[they] accompanied Jesus and the Twelve as they traveled from place to place (Luke 8:1-3). While this fits with the increased mobility of women in the Roman Empire, such independence in Jewish society was quite unusual-even shocking.” (2000:48, 51).

She eventually concludes that “virtually every ministry role that named a man also named a woman” (2000:50). This section resonates very much with Witherington’s work (1990) and Keener’s work (1992).

The book appears to contain cases of overstatement. For example, in addressing why Luke is so brief in describing Philip’s four prophetess daughters, she says “This undoubtedly is because women prophets were so well accepted as leaders in the church that no further commentary was necessary” (2000:57). “Undoubtedly” seems a bit of a stretch; there could have been a number of reasons why Luke was brief on this point. Another example, regarding distinctions between kinds of teaching (official/unofficial, private/public, authoritative/non-authoritative, etc.), she says “The New Testament knows of no distinctions....Nowhere is a distinction made between public and private spheres of instruction” (2000:58). This is similar to what she would say five years later in *Two Views of Women in Ministry*: “there is nothing settled or consistent about leadership in the early church apart from the possession of leadership gifts, whether it was Italy (Rom. 12:4-8), Asia Minor (Eph. 4:7-13), or Greece (1 Cor. 12:7-12, 27-30)” (Belleville 2005b:196-197). But, one may object, just because there is no scriptural verses clearly delineating these various distinctions does not necessarily mean that the church had no

awareness of them. In fact, the burden of proof may actually be on Belleville on this point to demonstrate why the average first century Christian would never have imagined any difference between instructing someone in public in front of hundreds and doing it in private with only a person or two (note “took him aside” in Acts 18:26 as a possible instance of the public/private distinction at work). Indeed, it is somewhat ironic that in trying to identify artificial distinctions, Belleville may be erecting a somewhat artificial argument (though, note 2000:61). Nevertheless, Belleville’s general point does need to be heard since it can be a tendency of modern readers to assume certain formalisms that genuinely were not a concern of the early church.

In answering the second question, Belleville addresses many of the commonly cited passages that are used to limit women in marital and societal roles. Her primary goal is to show that the theological concept of “headship” and the passages on women’s submission do not amount to the permanent subordination of traditionalist theological anthropology.

In answering the third question, Belleville argues against traditional understandings of authority in ecclesiastical affairs, saying, “It is the church, not individuals, that has authority...Ultimate authority rests in God and Christ alone” (2000:134-135). She may once again be stretching her argument in drawing such conclusions as “Nowhere are elders and authority connected” (2000:145) and “Offices with governing authority are foreign to the New Testament” (2000:151), especially given the overlap of “elders,” “overseers” and those who “shepherd,” and given their requirements of being able to teach (1 Tim 3), refute false teaching (Tit 1), and the command for Christians to submit to them (Heb 13:17). The only way of being able to make such fine distinctions is by imposing rather narrow definitions of “authority” and “elder” from

the outset. In any case, Belleville makes an important point regarding ecclesiastical government: leadership is servanthood (2000:138-148). She offers a correction to modern evangelical structures and theories of what it means to be a pastor by showing that true leadership is servant-leadership; merely exercising authority is not the theology of church leadership in the New Testament.

Belleville also demonstrates the CBMW's arbitrary application of what they believe is the New Testament's limitation on women in ministry. For example, she examines the CBMW's list of acceptable and unacceptable positions of leadership that women can partake:

“According to the CBMW, it is okay for a woman to direct Christian education in her local church, but it is not okay for a woman to direct Christian education for her region or denomination. On what basis? The *perceived* degree of governance involved. Yet, in a congregational context, it is actually the local church that makes the decisions, not regional or denominational boards or councils. Also, CBMW says it is okay for a woman to be a Bible professor on a secular campus but not on a Christian campus. On what basis? The *perceived* degree of teaching authority. (A secular school has “no church-authorized authority or doctrinal endorsement.”) Then too, it is okay for a woman to do pastoral ministry with a denominational license but not with denominational ordination. On what basis? The *perceived* degree of public recognition....The leadership language of the New Testament is the language of serving, not governing or ruling, of being last, not first (Matt. 20:26-28)” (Belleville 2000:151).

Like Keener, Giles (2006:112), and others, Belleville interprets 1 Corinthians 14:34 as addressing disruptive behavior. She says the women's “fault was not in the asking per se but in the inappropriate setting for their questions” (2000:161). She also rigorously argues that 1 Timothy 2:12 is not making a universal prohibition of women pastors or exercising generic authority over men, but prohibits a certain manner of behavior that is particularly directed at the Ephesian women being addressed (2000:174-177).

One of the positive attributes of *Women Leaders and the Church* is its organization and its thorough research. However, it may still lack in punch insofar as it gives argument for women elders. Belleville's approach is essentially to undermine a whole host of objections leveled against women in ministry as opposed to delivering an analytic, targeted result. Helpful as they are, the exact reasons why the debate can be boiled down to her three questions is not altogether clear or thoroughly justified.

In 2001 William Webb published the highly controversial *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*. Using the three topics of slaves, women, and homosexuals, Webb addresses the hermeneutical issues that go into Christian ethics. His basic argument is a "redemptive-movement hermeneutic," which asserts that all of Scripture must be interpreted within its own context and that one must pay attention to the direction and trajectory of biblical theology and not merely the "static" words of the Bible. In other words, there is no "ultimate social ethic" (Webb 2001:48) in Scripture since both Scripture and ethics are inevitably contextual.

The grand upshot of Webb's argument is that if it is denied, there is little basis for condemning such unethical acts/institutions as slavery. Traditional hermeneutics (or "static" interpretation, in his words) will result in an affirmation of slavery since it is (a) explicit in Scripture; (b) implemented by God's covenant people; (c) nowhere directly condemned in Scripture; and (d) explicitly regulated in both Testaments. Webb argues that only by tracing and identifying the "spirit of the text" (Webb 2001:53) can one realize what is truly right and wrong for today's age. Ironically, according to his model, traditional theories of Bible interpretation will not yield sound

ethical standards. Rather, the same hermeneutic that legitimately condemns slavery (Webb's proposal) is the same hermeneutic that liberates women from prohibitions and permanent hierarchies.

Webb's analysis is in many ways an exposition of the assumptions in Bilezikian's *Beyond Sex Roles*. While Bilezikian's work embodied a hermeneutic that gives priority to where God is taking creation in the redemptive story, Webb unfolds more concretely how those principles of interpretation work. Webb's work was also so disturbing to the CBMW that they have repeatedly critiqued it in numerous publications, culminating in the recent doctoral thesis by Benjamin Reaoch, *Women, Slaves, and the Gender Debate: A Complementarian Response to The Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic* (2012, endorsed by Köstenberger and Schreiner).

In the same year as Webb's work, the Reformed, British sociologist Elaine Storkey published *Origins of Difference: The Gender Debate Revisited* (2001). The work sets out to frame the gender debate in its historical and ideological context. The book is particularly valuable because of its self-critical nature; the discussion is oriented around examining presuppositions and worldviews, and how these affect the battles and arguments of the gender debate in and outside of Christianity.

After surveying the contours of three periods (what she calls premodernism, modernism, post-modernism), she then discusses theology and gender. She is particularly skilled in pointing out the baggage various Christians bring to the table when it comes to interpreting various Scriptures. For example, regarding the traditionalist reading of Genesis 1:26-28, Storkey says

“Yet, the passage contains nothing at all about breadwinning, childbearing, or homemaking, and not a word about biology or destiny. The verses in Genesis are about something much bigger...”

(Storkey 2001:100). She goes on to say:

“The development of a consumerist, American, macho culture, claiming the right to be *the* interpreters of scriptural truth, has produced an evangelicalism that is often nationalistic, right-wing, and patriarchal. The biggest disappointment is that it cannot see that its own assumptions are anything but biblical. Contributors to the debate are polarized into ‘camps,’ and any subtleties or complexities of the gender debate are quickly lost. In contemporary publications we see gender concepts still subsumed under sexual difference; we still read justification of ‘essentialism’ that masquerade as biblical wisdom.” (2001:101)

Another example is her comments on Ephesians 5—which resonates with many of the observations already undertaken in this literary review:

“It is sad that a magnificent passage on marriage (Eph. 5:22:23) has been subject to such crass and banal interpretations. More than that, it has been used to make precisely the point Paul elsewhere ruled out. To start with, there is no reference to headship in this passage. The word is *kephale*, meaning literally ‘head,’ the complex organ at the top of the neck. Whenever it is used without its literal meaning, it is used metaphorically. There are always great dangers in building a theology on a metaphor, especially if there is any confusion about the meaning of the metaphor. Yet, most of these writers see no ambiguity at all. Ignoring the fact that Paul is using a careful literary device here, they nail the meaning down. They decide that ‘head’ must mean ‘authority,’ construct the notion that ‘headship’ means ‘male authority,’ and see it as a general creational mandate. In two quick stages, we have moved from a gentle metaphor to a universal principle!” (Storkey 2001:1003).

This is an excellent observation. As it will be shown below in the exposition of *The Danvers Statement* and has already been shown in extant complementarian publications, a methodology that finds a theology of “headship” as the central point of discussion and the final point of reference to both interpretation and limiting the roles of women in ministry is highly problematic—and Storkey is keen to point out why that is the case. Research (most notably

Cervin 1989; Thiselton 2000; Perriman 1994; cf. Johnson 2006) favors her claim regarding the ambiguity of the term “head.”

While Storkey does not undermine the importance of biblical studies, at certain points she argues that exegetical matters do not really matter (similar to Stackhouse 2005, see below). Regarding 1 Corinthians 14, she says:

“The various textual interpretations are not, however, the key point. The crucial issue is what underlies the interpretations: the belief that women’s nature decrees them as different from men, and thus subordinate to men, and that this insistence is sanctioned by divine *fiat*, that God has ordained it as a universal principle. Women are therefore charged to respect the roles that God has assigned for men and not try to usurp them. Anything in the New Testament that suggests some other perspective is argued away or particularized. The position rests, as before, on an unyielding essentialism” (Storkey 2001:104).

This is a legitimate point, and it is one that I argued above when discussing Knight’s *The Role Relationships of Men and Women* (1985) and *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (1991). Complementarians tend to read into Scripture and into NT theology their own presuppositions. Storkey might be going a bit far when saying, “various textual interpretations are not, however, the key point,” since the theology of headship is directly based on these interpretations in complementarians’ own theology. If it can be demonstrated, for example, that Ephesians 5, Genesis 1-3, and 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 do not, in fact, establish universal principles of permanent male superordination and female subordination, (some of) the faulty presuppositions of the complementarian position would be laid bare.

In the conclusion to her book, she suggests that there are four paradigms that appear in Scripture, and which various sides of the gender debate have taken as their own (often at the exclusion of

others). They are difference (mainly demonstrated in biology), sameness (essential similarities and purposes for both men and women), complementarity (reciprocation between men and women), and union (in marriage, in salvation and redemption, etc.). She then says, “When we fail to grasp that the Bible contains each of these themes, we inevitably distort the full biblical message....when we work with all four, then we see the sweep of the biblical revelation and the space and scope it gives us to develop our relationship faithfully and creatively” (2000:131).

Also in 2001, Zondervan released *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, with two complementarians (Craig Blomberg and Thomas Schreiner) and two egalitarians (Linda Belleville and Craig Keener) contributing. The book is an important milestone in the debate, especially as one compares it with the parallel publication of 1989, *Four Views of Women in Ministry*. In the volume (revised and republished in 2005), one notices two major differences from the 1989 symposium. The first is that the arguments have shifted. The debate in *Two Views* is more focused and detailed because scholarship has progressed and weeded out poor arguments. Belleville and Schreiner, for example, go head-to-head over the meaning of 1 Timothy 2:12 in significant detail. The second difference is that, perhaps, egalitarians appear much more prepared to deal with the common objections leveled against their position. Little has changed in terms of the complementarian/traditionalist argument against women pastors: the argument from headship, and the argument from 1 Timothy 2:12. However, the egalitarian defense does seem to have undergone development, taking advantage of more certain conclusions such as the apostleship of Junia in Romans 16:7, the plausibility of multiple interpretations of 1 Timothy 2—none of which amounts to a universal prohibition of women pastors, and so forth. As one would expect, the common arguments from Judges 4 (Deborah and Jael as women leaders) and the

central place of women in NT ministry are also cited. It is not surprising that the book is edited by two prominent egalitarians: James R. Beck (former national board member of CBE) and Stanley Gundry (an original co-author of the CBE statement); weight does seem to have shifted in the debate, and the Evangelical feminists are not afraid to show it in scholarly interaction.

This becomes more evident as one examines other books during this period. Complementarian publications simply repeat the arguments made by the CBMW in *RBMW*. The book *Women and Men in Ministry: A Complementarian Perspective* (Saucy and Tenelshof, eds., 2001) is one example. The authors are all professors at Biola University and Talbot School of Theology (Evangelical joint-institutions in Southern California). The authors are all complementarian and offer relatively little to the debate of women in ministry. As a whole, the authors appear slightly more flexible towards women's roles, but it is nevertheless difficult to even ascertain what prompted the publication, except perhaps to try to solidify or expand what the CBMW has said in *RBMW* by filling in select areas of interest, or by producing a work that teaches essentially the same thing by a different group of scholars.

Another example is Daniel Doriani's *Women and Ministry: What the Bible Teaches* (2003). This book, too, makes virtually no new contributions and may in fact harm the complementarian case against women elders. The book tends to be simplistic in its argumentation. The is/ought fallacy⁷ seems to undergird many of the arguments, such as those in chapter 2 ("The Ministries of Women in Biblical History"). Doriani begins his main study with this chapter, and after briefly surveying what "women do" in the Old Testament, he concludes: "In Israel and the church,

⁷ It "is-ought" fallacy is committed when a person argues that something *ought* to be in a certain way because it *is* that way; the fallacy is leaping from a state of affairs to a moral norm.

women do all sorts of things, but not everything” (2003:24). It becomes clear after reading a bit further that the overall argument is exactly that: women’s ministries today should be determined by what they did in biblical times; as such, women shouldn’t be pastors. The obvious problem with this line of argumentation is that it suffers from the “static” hermeneutic that Webb described a year earlier, and therefore leads to absurd conclusions. One could just as easily argue that women (and men for that matter) should never use stoves in their kitchens, and that men should never preach from pulpits on Sunday morning—because we have no instance of these things occurring in Scripture. As a traditional Reformed theologian (which stresses continuity between the Testaments), Doriani’s analysis also suffers from a full exposition of the implications of the New Covenant. As with much in complementarian literature, entire chapters are dedicated to a few select verses that appear to undermine women’s ministries while the rest of NT theology sits rather mute. As a case in point, chapter four entitled “Foundations for Male-Female Roles” begins with a citation of 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14—perhaps the two most popular texts used to restrict women in ministry. Surely this is a clear demonstration of a biased effort to reach a pre-determined conclusion.

Fortunately, more exploratory and scholarly works appeared the same year. Richard Bauckham’s *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* is one in particular. Bauckham begins his introduction with a quote of Elisabeth Schüssler Schüssler Fiorenza: “Imaginatively adopting the perspective of biblical wo/men rather than just looking at them as fixed objects in texts in a fixed context yields a different world and set of possibilities” (Schüssler Fiorenza cited in Bauckham 2002:xi). Bauckham then describes his appreciation towards feminist literature and also adds some correctives to recent trends. His goal is to explore historically, theologically, and

biblically the various aspects and implications of a study of the named women in the Gospels. Although the book is more exploratory than argumentative, Bauckham does deliver a few critiques that have contributed significantly to the women-elders debate.

One critique in particular is Bauckham's discussion on Romans 16:7. Complementarians have for decades denied that Junia in Romans 16:7 was a woman, or they have affirmed that she was a woman but denied that she was an apostle. The entire case study reveals a perfect example of how male-bias leads to a long-term and clear distortion of biblical theology (Epp 2005; Schüssler Fiorenza 2010:91) The simple fact is, the evidence strongly affirms that Junia was both a woman and an apostle and recent efforts to deny this conclusion simply cannot stand up to scholarly scrutiny. Daniel Wallace and M. Burer wrote a journal article in 2001 that tried to assert that the grammatical construction of Romans 16:7 proves that Junia was not faithful "among the apostles" (NASB) but faithful "to the apostles" (ESV) (Burer and Wallace 2001). In a devastating critique, Bauckham shows in his chapter about Junia that this simply is not the case, and that to affirm this conclusion is to misconstrue the evidence in the worst possible way. Bauckham's argument preceded the definitive work on the subject, which would be released three years later: *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Epp 2005). Bauckham and Epp's argument will be more fully examined in chapter seven of this study.

In 2003, a woman scholar independent of both the CBE and CBMW wrote *Men and Women in the Church: Building Consensus on Christian Leadership*. As the subtitle indicates, Sarah Sumner does not want to simply take sides on the women-pastors debate. In fact, her book is endorsed by two complementarians (Harold Brown and Carl F. Henry), even though it amounts

to a rather full case for the equal participation of women and men in ministry. Sumner's argument is not tight or concise because she—like most egalitarians or egalitarian-leaning scholars—attempts to address a variety of topics at the same time. But it does provide a full treatment of the major theological issues and Scriptural texts surrounding the debate of women pastors. Unlike many other books before her time, she dedicates an entire chapter regarding how to approach such texts as 1 Timothy 2:12 instead of simply attempting to provide an interpretation. This is particularly useful since, as it has already been made clear, many complementarians find the verse to be the final and/or only grounds for universally forbidding women elders. Groothuis (among others) had made the point earlier in her book *Women Caught in the Conflict* (1997a:213), but Sumner takes it to the next level by arguing that a “face-value” reading of the text is absurd, so when complementarians claim to be implementing a simple, literal hermeneutic, they are not, in fact, being consistent with their own principles:

“Here again the driving point is that Piper and Grudem [editors and contributors to *RBMW*], like everybody else, nuance their reading of 1 Timothy 2. They respond to 1 Timothy 2:12 as if Paul had said, “I do not allow most women to teach men in person, but I *do* allow for exceptions, and I *do* allow for women to teach men through other mediums such as books and radio because that mode of communication is more impersonal and indirect.” I say this not to single out Piper and Grudem but rather to show that godly conservatives cannot read this passage without adding a caveat to their most careful interpretation” (Sumner 2003:211).

This, of course, has been the problem with traditional readings of 1 Timothy 2 all along: their applications turn out to be inconsistent (cf. block quote of Belleville above; see chapter five of this study). This is all the more reason for Christians to be cautious in their attempts to prohibit women from being pastors on the basis of this text.

Sumner also addresses the subject of submission in marriage and, while she does not simply condense Paul's theology down to a doctrine of "mutual submission" like many egalitarians before her, she does critique the complementarian understanding of Ephesians 5 so that wives are not in a simple, permanent hierarchy when one person has personal authority over the other. This, in combination with a variety of other arguments, solidifies her point that leadership is not simply a masculine activity and submission simply a feminine one.

Also in 2003, a group of Southern Baptist scholars assembled to write the symposium *Putting Women in Their Place: Moving Beyond Gender Stereotypes in Church and Home* (Trull et. al. 2003). The book is written in response to the changes in the 2000 version of the *Baptist Faith and Message*. The book contains a variety of essays in theology, hermeneutics, and historical theology.

A year later the *magnum opus* biblical critique of Evangelical feminism was released: *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of Over 100 Disputed Questions* by Wayne Grudem (2004). The book is designed to be the ultimate biblical (not necessarily theological) refutation of Christian egalitarianism, complete with over 850 pages of text and eight appendices. Grudem systematically, point-by-point, critiques the claims made by such authors as Groothuis, Hull, Belleville, Gundry, Kroeger, Sumner, Keener, Grenz, and others.

Grudem's passion for polemics on this subject (1998) may have blinded him from sound methodology in producing the work. Ironically, this is true for arguments regarding 1 Timothy 2:12. Appendix seven is a "Complete List of Eighty-Two Examples of *Authenteō* ("to exercise

authority”) in Ancient Greek Literature, by H. Scott Baldwin.” The purpose of the appendix is to demonstrate that egalitarian readings of 1 Timothy 2:12 (and the word ἀὐθεντεῖν in it) are not correct because egalitarian renderings (“domineer,” “usurp authority,” “assume authority,” “dominate,” etc.) do not (allegedly) have parallels in ancient Greek literature. The list in the Appendix comes directly from Baldwin’s chapter in *Women in the Church* (1995). But, the elephant in the room regarding this chapter is why each example should be rendered with a neutral “exercise authority over” – and why Grudem excludes the Greek text itself. In other words, the Appendix itself is a form of begging the question. Without providing reasons for why the Greek text of the parallels should be rendered in one way or another, none of the examples serve to shed light on the use of the term in 1 Timothy 2:12. Grudem simply assumes that the list of literary parallels is sufficient in and of itself to support his complementarian interpretation, when it is not.

Grudem demonstrates his instability on this very specific topic when it comes to narrowing the range of meanings regarding the term. In his rather irate 1998 essay, “An Open Letter to Egalitarians,” he makes the claim that, “Whenever we have seen this verb occur, it takes a neutral sense, ‘have authority’ or ‘exercise authority,’...” (1998). This contradicted Schreiner’s 2005 comments that “The recent studies of H. Scott Baldwin and Al Wolters show the term signifies a positive use of authority” (Schreiner 2005b:108). In 2004 Grudem essentially tried to compromise between his earlier view and that of Schreiner (and other complementarians), saying the term and “is primarily positive *or neutral*” (2004:317, emphasis mine). As it will be demonstrated in chapter five, both the positions of Grudem and Schreiner are incorrect.

Grudem's book is useful for all sides of the debate in assembling a substantial amount of bibliographical material. Even for what is lacking, Evangelical feminists have much to evaluate as they refine their arguments.

In a little irony of scholarship, the main publication of CBE scholars was released immediately following the release of Grudem's tome: *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy* (Pierce and Groothuis (ed.) - 2004, second edition 2005). The book (*DBE*) is essentially a parallel work to *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (1991), being roughly the same size, addressing the same topics, biblical texts, having similar (e.g., Evangelical professors) scholars, etc. The work represents the most polished form of Evangelical feminism, and just as the authors of *RBMW* are members of the CBMW, so the authors of *DBE* are (generally) members of the CBE. As far as arguments for women pastors are concerned, the book offers relatively little new information to the discussion. What *DBE* did demonstrate, however, is that Evangelical feminism is not a fad. Top-rate Evangelical and Reformed scholars are willing to defend an inclusive perspective on gender and women in ministry; Christian egalitarianism is here to stay (cf. Cochran 2005).

2.3 Recent Works: Relevant Works After 2004

Having come full circle in the Evangelical debate over women pastors, we now enter the more recent period: works written after *DBE* until the present day.

The years 2005 and 2006 mark a period of refinement for the landmark publications of the debate on women pastors. In 2005, the 2001 publication *Two Views of Women in Ministry* was revised and republished. *Discovering Biblical Equality* (Pierce and Groothuis) was also revised and republished. Finally, the 1995 publication *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* was revised and republished with the new subtitle *Women in the Church: An Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* and without H. Scott Baldwin as a co-editor.

Other scholars took advantage of these recent developments and solidifications of egalitarian scholarship. The Baptist professor Glen Scorgie wrote *The Journey Back to Eden: Restoring the Creator's Design for Women and Men*. The book is a popular, egalitarian work that gleans from the academic fruits produced in the last quarter-century.

In 2005 the textual scholar Eldon J. Epp finished the definitive work on Romans 16:7 and established, without any subsequent refutation, that Junia was in fact the first woman apostle. The question is thus posed towards those who forbid women pastors: if Paul could so easily lift up a woman as “outstanding among the apostles” in first century Christianity, would it really be characteristic of him to universally ban pastors of the church for all ages simply because they are women?

Additionally, the Canadian scholar John Stackhouse wrote *Finally Feminist: A Pragmatic Christian Understanding of Gender* (2005). Similar to Sumner, Stackhouse openly contrasts his views with both egalitarians and complementarians, and eventually falls closer to the egalitarian side on most of the key theological issues (e.g., women's ministry, mutuality in marriage, etc.).

Additionally, his argument resonates with Webb's 2001 work. He says, "Patriarchy is the rule, but exceptional movements and individuals keep emerging to remind us that patriarchy is a temporary condition and that women can indeed lead, teach, and do everything else a man can do in home and church: female prophets, learned nuns, powerful abbesses, influential authors, effective missionaries, successful evangelists, and, in our day, eminent pastors and theological scholars" (Stackhouse 2005:54-55). There is an "already" and "not yet" aspect to reading and applying the Scriptures. Stackhouse is convinced that, "If there is too little 'already' in the complementarian position, there is not enough 'not yet' in most egalitarian teaching" (Stackhouse 2005:42). In other words, complementarians are wrong to rigidly apply Scripture to today's situation while egalitarians are wrong to assert that egalitarianism is directly taught by Jesus and the rest of the NT authors (Stackhouse 2005:40-44). He says:

"We would all benefit from the full emancipation of women, and so we should all strive for it. But in many other cases throughout history, and even in some places in the world today, the social disruption of full-fledged feminism may come at too high a price....Freedom from gender discrimination is an important implication of the gospel. Yet we should at least sometimes forgo this particular liberty, among many others, in favor of the greater liberty given to us to do whatever is necessary to further the most fundamental message of the gospel: deliverance from sin and death, reconciliation to God, and enjoyment of eternal life" (Stackhouse 2005:48-49).

Thus, Stackhouse disagrees with those egalitarians who assert that Paul is simply egalitarian and against patriarchy, but also disagrees with complementarians who assert that Paul teaches a permanent form of patriarchy and subordinationism in marriage, family, and church. But having a "pragmatic" view makes his position a bit unique. So when one asks, "should women be pastors?" the answer may be yes and it may be no; some congregations may be ready for it, others may not be. In the end, Stackhouse makes the controversial argument that Christians today

should “be all things to all people” (1 Cor. 9) just as Paul and the early Christians did. In other words, we should accommodate in appropriate ways:

“When society was patriarchal, as it was in the New Testament context and as it has been everywhere in the world except in modern society in our day, the church avoided scandal by going along with it—fundamentally evil as patriarchy was and is. Now, however, that modern society is at least officially egalitarian, the scandal is that the church is *not* going along with society, not rejoicing in the unprecedented freedom to let women and men serve according to gift and call without an arbitrary gender line. This scandal impedes both evangelism of others and the edification—the retention and development of faith—of those already converted” (Stackhouse 2005:56).

Like Webb, Stackhouse then shows that this is precisely the case with slavery: it was an evil that was put up with at the time for the sake of not causing a stumbling block for people of that time and culture, but given the full implications of the gospel and the teachings of the New Testament it was an institution that is rightfully being dissolved (Stackhouse 2005:57-62). And like Bilezikian, Stackhouse asserts that, “The patriarchy of the Torah...is not to be understood by the church as a blueprint for Christian conduct. It is to be read as Scripture....But just *how* it is useful for us is a question of careful hermeneutics” (Stackhouse 2005:65).

Within a year of these releases, the complementarians circled the wagons in two notable ways. First, they (mostly *RBMW* authors) dedicated an entire edition of *The Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (JBMW)* to critiquing, chapter by chapter, *DBE* (Spring 2005). Second, the *CBMW* re-published *RBMW* with a new preface (2006). But these efforts may not have helped the complementarian cause since they both contain numerous cases of overstatement and unnecessary polemics.

For example, in the 2006 Preface to *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, the authors hold nothing back in their attack upon Christian egalitarianism. They say “Pagan ideas underlie evangelical egalitarianism,” and even go as far as to say that “egalitarianism must always lead to an eventual denial of the gospel” (Duncan and Stinson 2006:12). They argue that “egalitarianism is part of the disintegration of marriage in our culture,” and that, despite the painstaking exegetical studies done by Evangelical feminist scholars over the years, that egalitarians are really doing little more than capitulating “to the current ethical reordering” where “doctrinal unfaithfulness is certain to follow” (Duncan and Stinson 2006:11). For complementarians, the debate is as simple as asking, “Are we going to perform a hermeneutical twist when the Bible’s teaching makes us culturally uncomfortable, or are we going to let the lion loose, let God be God, and let his Word speak and rule in our lives?” (Duncan and Stinson 2006:13). The authors even claim that, “many of the evangelical feminist arguments have changed in the last decade whereas the complementarian defenses have not” (Duncan and Stinson 2006:13)—when this literary review alone has shown that both sides (and not just one side) have evolved in their argumentation. These sweeping claims do not add clarity; they only add fuel to the fire.

This conservative back-lash continued in Evangelical academic circles. Russell Moore, the dean of the School of Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, gave a talk at the Evangelical Theological Society which was later published in the Society’s journal entitled, “After Patriarchy, What? Why Egalitarians Are Winning the Evangelical Gender Debate” (2006). Moore’s basic argument was that complementarians have not pressed their arguments hard enough. In fact, complementarians should lose their title and be more frank about what they really believe: patriarchy isn’t evil, it’s good:

“...complementarian Christianity is collapsing around us because we have not addressed the root causes behind egalitarianism in the first place....If complementarians are to reclaim the debate, we must not fear making a claim that is disturbingly counter-cultural and yet strikingly biblical, a claim that the less-than-evangelical feminists understand increasingly: Christianity is undergirded by a vision of patriarchy.... Patriarchy is good for women, good for children, and good for families.... evangelicals should ask why patriarchy seems negative to those of us who serve the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God and Father of Jesus Christ. As liberationist scholar R. W. Connell explains, “The term ‘patriarchy’ came into widespread use around 1970 to describe this system of gender domination.” But it came into widespread use then only as a negative term. We must remember that “evangelical” is also a negative term in many contexts. We must allow the patriarchs and apostles themselves, not the editors of Playboy or Ms. Magazine, to define the grammar of our faith” (Moore 2006: 572, 573, 574, 576).

With such heightened activity in 2005-2006, it is no surprise that a year later the book *Women, Ministry and the Gospel: Exploring New Paradigms* (Husbands and Larsen 2007) was released.

The goal of the volume:

“...is to present new paradigms and fresh perspectives for evangelicals on an issue that often is prematurely settled with reference to well-entrenched, set-piece arguments....it is, we hope, a valuable counterpart to other works that take a more monolithic and predictable approach to this question” (Husbands and Larsen 2007:9).

The book contains a number of theological, exegetical, and ethical essays on the subject of women in ministry written by a variety of Evangelical scholars. As far as advancing the discussion goes, the book contributes little if one is looking for major breakthroughs in argumentation and general approaches to the subject, but the symposium is a helpful collection of scholarly essays. The two competing essays on 1 Timothy 2:12 (one by the complementarian James Hamilton Jr., and the other by the egalitarian I. Howard Marshall) rehashed the same issues regarding the verse—though fresh criticism of Grudem’s work did appear in Marshall’s essay. Nevertheless, Larsen’s essay “Women in Public Ministry: A Historic Evangelical Distinctive” is helpful in locating the debate in historical terms, and Sumner and George’s essays on forging unity between differing sides of the debate, adds a much needed reminder that

Christians should not be overly divided on the topic of women-pastors; as more seasoned leaders in Evangelicalism, their advice for how to re-orient Christians' perspective regarding this debate is particularly helpful. Cohick's essay on Deborah (2007) re-established the legitimacy of egalitarians' appeal to this OT example of a genuine women leader for God's people.

In 2008 a religious professor and ordained elder in the Free Methodist Church published what is essentially a contemporary theology of woman entitled *Liberating Tradition: Women's Identity and Vocation in Christian Perspective*. Kristina Lacelle-Peterson's approach resembles the approach of many books on this topic, beginning with a general outline of the theology of gender in Genesis 1-3, and moves on to "Women Characters in Scripture" (chapter two). Her book is unique in that it blends biblical theology with rigorous assessments of cultural values, theological application, and sociology—and most of these topics remain in their own, distinct chapters. But her approach addresses all of the major topics related to the gender debate and to women in ministry, having three general sections, the first theological, the second addressing marriage, and the third church history. It is not an argument for female elders, but it certainly critiques many of the core assumptions beneath the critic of female elders.

2009 witnessed another effort to loosen up the intense debate between egalitarians and complementarians. Derek Morphew's book *Different But Equal: Going Beyond the Complementarian/Egalitarian Debate* was released. Morphew says he cannot hold to either the CBMW or CBE. He says that "the term patriarchy is not helpful," but, says, "The appropriate biblical term is headship, or perhaps leadership responsibility"—neither of which (ironically) is in Scripture any more than patriarchy (2009:45). At any rate, he believes that "the new creation

transcends the first creation,” and that the kingdom of God “converts the effects of the fall, which certainly include patriarchal dominance” (2009:46). Thus, he labels his position “creation-based inaugurated equality” (Morphew 2009:47). In short, his book provides a solid analysis of the many arguments going on in the gender debates, including those regarding women elders.

Although his interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12 is essentially the same as egalitarians before him (e.g., Marshall, Keener, etc.), his application is somewhat unusual: “My conclusion is that a women-only and women-dominated church leadership is prohibited by Scripture (as per the local heresy). This does not mean that women, in the team with men, is prohibited by Scripture or that a woman cannot lead a local church” (Morphew 2009:127).

Regarding women’s submission, he notes (as Webb and others have) that the submissions texts (and “household codes”) are in the middle of other social-imperatives for such groups as slaves, etc. He says:

“The apostolic writers were therefore exhorting the church to live in a politically correct manner, in context....The priority is not to tarnish the reputation of the gospel by unnecessarily offending the surrounding culture: ‘Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us’ (2:12). Wives submit to unbelieving husbands ‘so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives’ (3:1). The obedience of Christian slaves is ‘so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive’ (Titus 2:10)” (Morphew 2009:131).

This could very well be the case, but, given what has already been observed above, it is a bit rash to conclude that in Ephesians 5 and other submission texts Paul “clearly meant ‘authority over’” (2009:134).

Regarding “Paul and the Genesis creation narrative,” Morphey says “it seems to me that egalitarians are on less certain ground and complementarians, particularly soft-patriarchalists, have the strongest case” (2009:135). One really wonders how Payne’s massive work on this subject (see below)—published several months after Morphey’s book—would have affected Morphey’s evaluation on this matter. This is an unfortunate aspect regarding Morphey’s volume—the timing of publication precluded it from implementing one of the most important works on the matter. In the end, Morphey’s analysis is a level-headed look at many of the arguments. He ultimately agrees with egalitarians on many key points (e.g. affirmation of women elders, condemnation of patriarchy, etc.). Originally coming from what he calls “liberal beginnings” and “secular humanistic assumptions” and converting to “conservative theology,” his tone and perspective may be refreshing to many readers.

Ronald Pierce also wrote an important essay entitled “1 Corinthians 7: Paul’s Neglected Treatise on Gender” (2009). The title speaks for itself. Pierce seeks to correct an imbalance with regard to the treatment of Pauline theology. 1 Corinthians 7 is highly egalitarian and has been overlooked by many in the ongoing debate about gender and the NT.

In 2009, Philip Payne released the definitive Evangelical study of Paul’s letters and the relationship between men and women, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters*. The work is essentially a compilation and revision of numerous scholarly essays that Payne had written throughout his academic career. The primary achievements of this tome are numerous.

First, it provides the most thorough exegetical discussion of 1 Timothy 2:12 from an egalitarian perspective to date. Payne spends a considerable amount of energy and scholarship into demonstrating that Paul is not, in fact, universally barring women from the office of pastor in the verse. Rather, as many other egalitarians have shown before, Paul is prohibiting a certain type of behavior and not banning generic ministries for women for all time. One of the more interesting discoveries in this work is that complementarians have been misquoting a scholar regarding the rendering of ἀθεντεῖν ever since the publication of George Knight's 1984 essay, "Authenteo Reference to Women in 1 Timothy 2:12" (1984:143-57). Knight originally misquoted the Presbyterian scholar John Werner on the text as if "exercise authority" was the rendering, when in fact Werner said "assume authority" (Payne 2009:361-298). This misquotation was repeated in Baldwin's study of 1995, in Grudem's work of 2004, and other studies. In addition to pointing out this error of scholarship, Payne also delivers a devastating critique of Knight's original 1984 essay and those who have sought to uphold its argument (Payne 2009:361-298). Since Knight's essay has become a central appeal for complementarian interpretations of the verse—even being labeled by ardent complementarians under the title "standard lexicographical works" (Wolters 2006:49, footnote 65)—Payne's critique is particularly weighty.

Second, in another thorough discussion Payne establishes that the "head covering" in 1 Corinthians 11 is talking about "effeminate hair" that resembles hair of first-century homosexuals. After giving fourteen reasons why this is the case, he revisits the common claims about the verses teaching woman's inherent subordination to man and finds them not to be teaching such a concept at all. He concludes:

"Men's effeminate hair attracted homosexual liaisons, and women's hair let down loose symbolized sexual freedom in the Dionysiac cult, which was influential in Corinth. Both

were disgraceful and undermined marriage. Consequently, Paul prohibits those leading in worship from either practice. Men ought to respect Christ, their source in creation, by not displaying effeminate hair. Women ought to exercise control over their heads by wearing their hair up in public worship to symbolize fidelity in marriage and respect to men, their source in creation” (Payne 2009:211).

This conclusion is significant because it is a much different interpretation than has been traditionally offered by both sides of the debate, and it is also an interpretation that avoids internal inconsistencies with the chapter.

Third, Payne gives 1 Corinthians 7 a chapter of its own and, without providing much in-depth discussion, simply “lets the text speak on its own terms,” as it were. The egalitarianism in this chapter squarely disagrees with complementarianism, and therefore challenges the subordinationist theology that is so central to their ban on women elders.

In the end, Payne reaffirms (against Stackhouse, Jewett, and others) that Paul is not wishy-washy when it comes to men and women; he was a full supporter of women and men’s equality; readers simply have to read him rightly. And against Williams’ earlier work on Paul, Payne argues against a structure of hierarchy instead of acknowledging and undermining it at the same time. Williams is cited twice in the book (2009:118, 422), though there is no real interaction with his material. Bristow is mentioned once in passing (2009:32). Webb and Stackhouse’s names do not appear in the name index. Indeed, it is assumed that a proper interpretation of the immediate texts is sufficient to show how Paul should be understood and applied. This may or may not be a fault with the book, depending on the reader’s assumptions. If one gives priority to the exegesis of Scripture and shares Payne’s assumptions about the inerrancy of Scripture, one will find his study very important.

In 2010, a variety of Evangelical pastors and scholars contributed to the book *How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership: Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals*. Although the book is not so much a theological study or argument, the sheer number and variety of contributors who all shared essentially the same story may prove to be a convincing turn for Christians who are “on the fence” regarding women pastors.

In the same year, Andreas Köstenberger released a second edition of his popular 2005 book *God, Marriage, and Family*. Like the first edition, Köstenberger rigorously argues for the complementarian position regarding women’s subordination and male authority in marriage, family, and church. Unlike other authors, Köstenberger does not shy away from referring to men taking “charge” over their wives and family (2010:29, 67, 86, 147, 244) and saying that husbands have “primary responsibility and ultimate authority” in marriage (2010:30). (As far as I know, no other author in this literature review has ever explicitly stated men’s roles as being in “ultimate authority”).

Also in 2010, James DeYoung published *Women in Ministry: Neither Egalitarian Nor Complementary: A New Approach to an Old Problem*. One might immediately wonder how different this work is than those before it with similar titles (e.g., Morphew). But De Young’s book makes step forward in flavor of Williams, Scanzoni/Hardesty, Stackhouse, and Webb’s train of thought. He argues that the new order in Christ (or “essential reality”) progresses beyond the previous, old, or inferior order (“existential reality”) through means of a third reality, which

is an effort at making the essential the existential. This informs his reading of the popular texts on this subject:

“...all three texts (1 Corinthians 11; 1 Corinthians 14; 1 Timothy 2) are basically parallel. All speak of cultural matters, not of transcultural or universal matters. All may actually concern the relationship of husbands and wives, not men and women in general. All of the texts support the cultural matters by appeals to universals (the creation, the Fall). Yet such an appeal does not make the behavior universal, as the parallel with the non-observance of the Sabbath in the New Testament shows....Two hermeneutical principles are present: relate the meaning of a text to the overarching concerns about actualizing essential reality; and the Spirit continues to teach the Church how both form and content may change. One’s hermeneutic is not static. Rather, one employs a hermeneutic derived from the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament. Such a hermeneutic finds richer meaning in the text—it actualizes the essential or deeper, Christological meaning behind the literal, historically limited (existential) meaning” (2010:100).

The point about how a biblical author’s appeal to a universal doesn’t universalize the command is a very important one, for critics of women elders have for decades made it a central argument in their reading of 1 Timothy 2:12 (see Reaoch below).

In 2011, *Reconsidering Gender: Evangelical Perspectives* was published. The work is edited by Myk Habets and Beulah Wood, two scholars from New Zealand. The book has a strong emphasis on gender and theology proper, but two particular essays directly address women in ministry. The first is by the complementarian Craig Blomberg entitled “Gender Roles in Marriage and Ministry: A Possible Relationship,” where he makes the same argument as in *Two Views of Women in Ministry*. His position is a minimalist complementarian perspective: women can do almost everything men can do in church except bear the title “pastor,” and this position is brought about by Blomberg’s own reading of 1 Timothy 2:12. Nicola Hoggard-Creegan responds with her own essay, “Why We Still Need Feminist Theology: A Response to Craig

Blomberg.” In this response, she essentially responds to Stackhouse’s argument for “pragmatism” on psychological and social grounds:

“The willingness to compromise does not mean that this is an ideal state of affairs....In the kingdom of God we obviously do not wish to argue that we should all be standing up for our rights all the time, or even most of the time...There is give and take in any relationship, in any institution....Yet self-sacrifice is always troubling for women because, as feminism has argued, women are required to sacrifice before they have a self to give away, and because the impetus for sacrifice is often external rather than internal....the balancing of proper human self-respect and self-reliance with the religious command to give up the self has always been a difficult one for all of humanity, but all the more so for women, because women have this tendency to give up the self, before they have a self, and the demands of child rearing then reinforce this tendency....Human love should aspire to mutuality” (2010:69, 72-73).

The rest of Creegan’s essay demonstrates that the full implications of complementarianism are problematic in more areas than the theological sphere.

In 2012 Benjamin Reaoch published *Women, Slaves, and the Gender Debate: A Complementarian Response to the Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic*, a revision of his doctoral thesis. The foreword is written by Thomas Schreiner, Reaoch’s doctoral advisor, and also bears endorsements from other prominent complementarians (e.g., Dorothy Patterson and Andreas Köstenberger). In summarizing the complementarian responses to Webb and others who implement the “redemptive-movement hermeneutic,” Reaoch says “if the New Testament simply regulates slavery and points towards its abolition, then the perceived need for the redemptive-movement hermeneutic evaporates” (2012:11). Again, he says:

“The complementarian position observes a fundamental distinction between the slavery issue and the issue of women’s roles. The Bible does not, in fact, condone slavery. Rather, it regulates it and points to its demise. Regarding women, on the other hand, we find instructions that are rooted in the creation order and therefore transcend culture....While we do not find a clear condemnation of slavery, neither do we find it commended” (Reaoch 2012:13, 155).

This approach may have serious problems. Perhaps, assuming a somewhat biblicist perspective on the Bible and hermeneutics, the Bible does not condone slavery, and it only “regulates it and points to its demise.” But is this not precisely what egalitarians have said the “Bible does” with women’s subordination and patriarchy—regulates it and points to its demise (e.g., Giles cited in Johnson 2006:27-28)? And while “we do not find a clear condemnation of slavery, neither do we find it commended,” is this not also what we find regarding hierarchy in marriage and permanent female subordinationism? This works against Reaach’s thesis since one of his central goals is to establish the fundamental differences between the two situations. But as it is clear, they may be more similar than it is acknowledged. Additionally, it is questionable whether the Bible does, in fact, establish universal “roles” for women that are based on “the creation order.” If alternative exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:12-15 and 1 Corinthians 11 can be offered, the core of Reaach’s argument encounters trouble.

Even if various commands in Scripture are based on “creation” (a “universal”), there is no necessary logical connection between the two. This is, in my assessment, the fatal flaw in Reaach’s entire argument. As De Young argued (2010, see above), just because a scriptural command is based on a universal (e.g., “creation order”), this does not require that the application of that principle or state of affairs be universal (cf. De Young 2010:64-69). This is obvious enough in that *all* moral and ethical commands in scripture are based on some higher, God-ordained universal order of love, justice, etc. If I said “go to Walmart and get some groceries; you were made to eat!” I am making a command based on the “creation order”—but it would be absurd to deduce from this that because I appealed to such a universal, all people who are made to eat must therefore get their groceries from Walmart. But this is exactly the heart of

Reaoch—and complementarians’—position. A biblical author’s appeal to creation crystalizes and universalizes for all time whatever the author is saying to his/her immediate audience.

By page 18, Reaoch also appears to confuse key arguments. He says, “The Bible points toward the demise of slavery but does not call for an end to role distinctions in marriage or the end of role distinctions in the parent/child relationship” (2012:18). Reaoch is apparently only responding to the most hardline forms of egalitarianism—which suggest that the Scriptures point towards the end of “role distinctions in marriage.” But many (perhaps most) egalitarians have never made such an argument. They argue that Scripture points to the end of *permanent, personal subordinationism and hierarchy* within marriage, not all “role distinctions in marriage.” One can easily affirm distinctions in marriage (e.g., the wife nurses her infant and husband does not) and deny hierarchy (e.g. husband controls direction of relationship and makes “final call” on all decisions) at the same time without being inconsistent. Reaoch’s complementarian lens is apparently so dominant that he automatically assumes that distinctions within marriage *must* mean subordinationism and hierarchalism. This is an elementary error that Yarbrough and Grudem made years earlier (Yarbrough 2005:141; Grudem 2004:433⁸; note Erickson 2009:186-188) and is unfortunately repeated in Reaoch’s dissertation.

It is also disconcerting to see a weak response to Webb’s argument regarding Evangelical Christians’ relativizing of certain Scriptural commands such as, “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (cf. Smith 2012:68). Both sides of the debate agree that there is a principle of fellowship and that a kiss is a particular, culturally-specific way of applying a principle (e.g. love,

⁸ Note that Grudem’s error there is primarily with regard to the hierarchy in the Trinity. But this is important to note since one of his central arguments for hierarchy between the sexes is that there is a hierarchy within the Godhead. (For a thorough critique of his position, see Giles 2002 and Erickson 2009).

fellowship). Webb argues that the same can be true regarding Paul's commands for women to be submissive. In response, Reaoch appeals to Grudem, saying: "it is a relatively simple point, and one that is easily understood, that in some cases like this we find a cultural component that can and should be adjusted, while the underlying principle is still binding" (Reaoch 2012:106). But this is a non-answer, a case of begging the question. One issue (a holy kiss) is "simple" for one group, while another issue (women's subordinationism and marriage hierarchy) for another group is a "simple" cultural application as well. In this discussion, Reaoch ends up summarizing by repeating his position instead of actually establishing it: "In society, in the workplace, in the local church, and in the home, God has ordained a certain structure and order," and that order means men are in charge (2012:110). "Headship" wins again, and is reiterated at almost every corner of Reaoch's discussion.

Reaoch attempts to hold Webb accountable when Webb's interpretations appear too abstract. In Reaoch's words, "Webb's method of deriving principles does not clearly capture the heart of the original commands" (2012:110). In other words, while both can agree on the cultural "husk" of the text, Reaoch believes the "kernel" or "principle" of certain texts is too small, obscure, or simply wrong. (One should note that this is not a critique of Webb's methodology in particular, but of any interpreter who is simply making a bad interpretation about what the principle behind a text really is.) Reaoch also addresses the tension between creation and redemption. As it was observed above, some egalitarian authors argue that the commands and instructions about gender in the New Testament transcend the realities of creation, so that redemption is not a restoration of creation but a kind of progress beyond it. Reaoch generally argues against this kind of

dichotomy, but he acknowledges some differences between the theological categories of creation and redemption:

“...redemption will be more than a restoration of creation, but it will not be less than that or something that is in tension with it. Therefore, the way in which redemption *goes beyond* creation will be consistent with the patterns of creation” (2012:138).

By this, he simply means that male headship and female subordinationism exist both in the New Covenant era as well as the eternal state. It is not clear how this “tension” is resolved with such passages as “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Mt 22:30). If marriage is a “pattern of creation” (which complementarians strongly argue is), and marriage is abolished in the final redemption of creation, how can one possibly say that “the way in which redemption *goes beyond* creation will be consistent with the patterns of creation”? In the end, it seems a bit convenient that an acceptable “tension” is when headship is being affirmed, but an *unacceptable* “tension” is when egalitarianism is being affirmed.

Reaoch delivers necessary criticism to egalitarians who have abused Galatians 3:28 (2012:141-151). He has left much room, however, for debate on what social implications can be derived from it. For example, he makes it clear that Bruce and other scholars who say all other NT texts should be interpreted through the lens of Galatians 3:28 are making an error, but he does not adequately address why, for example, Bilezikian is wrong to infer from the text that, for the sake of unity (perhaps Paul’s overarching goal in writing Galatians), Christians shouldn’t discriminate in the church on the basis of gender (Bilezikian 2006:95-96). As with much of Reaoch’s argumentation, he again resigns to repeating the complementarian mantra that “headship” (esp. as manifested in 1 Timothy 2) must not and cannot be contradicted—which does raise questions,

ironically, about consistently applying his own principles of hermeneutics that stress balance: “When we come to the gender debate, all the relevant passages should be incorporated into our discussion and each text should be studied in its context and brought alongside others” (2012:146). Reaoch may not notice it, but he pits 1 Timothy 2 against contrary views throughout the very chapter where he condemns such a practice of lifting up certain verses above others! If it is wrong to make Galatians 3:28 the standard initiatory go-to for (egalitarian) discussions on gender, why is it *not* wrong to make 1 Timothy 2 the standard initiatory go-to for (complementarian) discussions on gender? Reaoch can deny this point in principle, but as far as practice is concerned in his own work, it is clear that he is far from consistent: 1 Timothy 2 dominates the entire discussion and stands at the top of a hierarchy of complementarian-preferred texts.

In his conclusion, Reaoch says, “we observe that references to creation are absent from the slavery passages, which marks the crucial distinction between those passages and the passages dealing with gender” (2012:156). But this is misleading. There are a substantially greater number of “passages dealing with gender” than those dealing with slavery in the New Testament. It is also highly debatable which passages that refer to creation are actually being cited to enforce permanent gender roles for all contexts and all ages (this will become evident with 1 Timothy 2 in chapter five of this study). Thirdly, it is not at all agreed upon that “the crucial distinction” between the passages is their references to creation. Given the number of passages that refer to gender issues and slavery in the New Testament and given all of their differences, one could easily provide a myriad of distinctions between the passages other than their reference (or lack of reference) to creation—and this is especially important since it appears *most* of the passages

regarding gender in the NT (and OT for that matter) do *not* refer to creation (e.g., 1 Tim 3, 1 Cor 11, Col 3, 1 Cor 14, Acts 2:17, Titus 2, Eph 5, etc.). And, as it was already said, simply establishing an association between a command and creation is not a license to universalize the command.

In the same year, J. G. Brown released *An Historian Looks at 1 Timothy 2:11-14: The Authentic Traditional Interpretation and Why It Disappeared* (2012). Brown puts to rest the myth of a “traditional interpretation” of the text—which is *not* what complementarians have suggested it is. Instead, she demonstrates that Calvin, Luther, and other Reformed theologians understood creation ordinances (like male headship and female subordinationism) as being aspects of the temporal world and not the church. Thus, Brown brings the Lutheran/Reformed “Two Kingdom Theology” to bear on this particular and on the debate over women pastors. The book is highly insightful from a historical-exegetical perspective, and reminds Reformed theologians today that not only is Calvin’s interpretation of the text “non-traditional” (cf. Groothuis 1997b:218; note also Clouse and Clouse 1989:11), but Calvin was also apparently open to the possibility of women pastors in extraordinary circumstances (Brown 2012:14-73), at least in principle; male headship and female subordination falls under the category of the earthly kingdom, “external arrangement and political decorum” (Brown 2012:16), not the spiritual kingdom. Brown contends that Calvin “would regard today’s popular assignation to men of ‘spiritual headship’ as a strange co-mingling of spiritual and temporal kingdom principles. In accordance with common Protestant doctrine, Calvin says that the spiritual head of woman is Christ only; however, in the kingdom of this world she is subject to the man” (Brown 2012:16). In short, Brown strongly argues that the “traditional interpretation” of 1 Timothy 2:11-14 almost always involves a

distinction between the temporal/earthly and the eternal/spiritual, and since complementarians rarely (if ever) feature this distinction in their discussions of the text, they have no right over the label of “traditional interpretation.”

In 2013, a small three-volume series was released entitled *Fresh Perspectives on Women in Ministry*. Each book (less than 70 pages per volume) is written by a prominent Evangelical voice and argues their different perspectives on women in ministry. John Dickson authored *Hearing Her Voice: A Case for Women Giving Sermons* and Michael Bird authored *Bourgeois Babes, Bossy Wives, and Bobby Haircuts: A Case for Gender Equality in Ministry*.⁹ Both authors have moved from a complementarian perspective to a more egalitarian perspective. But they have different views. Dickson argues for women’s right and ability to preach in the local church, though he doesn’t argue for women’s ordination. Conversely, Bird believes women should be ordained but hesitates to permit women to be senior pastors and bishops. Bird also makes a distinction between authority in the home and authority in the church (he holds to a complementarian view of headship in the home). On the other hand, Kathy Keller (wife of complementarian author Timothy Keller) wrote the third leg of the series, *Jesus, Justice, and Gender Roles: A Case for Gender Roles in Ministry* (2013).

Due to the small size of the works, there is little in-depth discussion and relatively no major insights to the debate. But the very fact of the series highlights the continual interest in the subject.

2.4 Concluding Evaluations

⁹ This title is a play-off of the 1941 book by *John Rice Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives, and Women Preachers*.

For those who have found it difficult to follow the above literature review, below is a rough summary of major works and arguments. (I realize it is an oversimplification and that much has been excluded, but hopefully it might be helpful to some degree):

Arguments Against Women Elders	Arguments For Women Elders
	Scanzoni and Hardesty (1975): hierarchy may have been part of creation, but in the new era of Christ there is equality; 'problem passages' not so problematic.
Knight (1977/1985): NT texts support female subordinationism/'male headship' in marriage and church, and also forbid women from being pastors. In principle, women can do whatever doesn't violate 'male headship.'	Gundry (1977): Reassesses major 'problem passages'; critiques stereotypical presentations along the way.
	Williams (1977): Reassesses 'headship' and defines it as 'servanthood'; concedes that Paul was no egalitarian; follows (in a qualified sense) Scanzoni and Hardesty in that Christ doesn't merely bring restoration, but progress beyond 'creation order'; brings egalitarianism of 1 Cor 7 to bear on the subject.
Foh (1979): 1 Tim 2:12 in particular, forbids women from being elders; concedes on women deacons, but not women apostles; also rejects 1 Cor 7 as challenging male headship.	
Clark (1980), Hurley (1981), Neuer (1981): 1 Tim 2:12 forbids women elders; God-ordained hierarchy in marriage manifests itself in church leadership. These two principles establish the basis for the ban and form the grid for the whole discussion.	Jewett (1980): women not inherently unfit; God's nature poses no threat; Scripture provides general positive reasons to affirm.
Knight (1984): ἀθεντέω in 1 Tim 2:12 means neutral/generic "exercise authority over"; thus, women are indeed banned from being elders.	
	Bilezikian (1985): A canonical-theological reading of the Scriptures reveals an internal critique of patriarchy and female subordinationism; the New Covenant community is gender-inclusive; prohibition passages have been misinterpreted.
	Spencer (1985): The equality that existed at the beginning of creation inevitably and naturally extends into church ministry; 1 Tim 2:12 ban was 'temporary injunction'; women in the early church occupied the three main ministry positions of 1 Cor 12:28, opening door for what we now call 'pastors.'
	Spencer et. al. (1986): Johnston and Nicole make independent and strong hermeneutical challenges. Nicole also notably points out specific difficulties in interpreting 1 Tim. 2:12.
	Hull (1986): Reiterates a host of previous arguments (see above).
CBMW Danvers Statement (1987): male headship and female subordinationism is part of God's original design in creation, which is re-affirmed in OT and NT; men are	CBE Statement (1988): Hierarchy in marriage and society is the result of the fall, not creation; Spirit does not gift Christians according to gender, and both are called to use

inherently designed to 'lead' and women to 'affirm' such leadership via 'submission'; as such, 'some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men.'	their gifts (including teaching/governing); Scripture does not ultimately forbid women from being elders, but when properly interpreted—along with a canonical/thematic reading and theology, encourage them to be elders in appropriate cases.
	Bristow (1988): Paul supported women's liberation in ministry.
Culver and Foh (1989): Culver promotes a simplistic, fundamentalist argument; Foh rehashes her previous argument (see above).	Liefeld and Mickelsen (1989): Liefeld addresses first principles/hermeneutics problem and attempts to re-frame the debate a little. Mickelsen also makes broader strokes in canonical-theology.
	Van Leeuwen (1990): Argues against universal "headship" idea and points to its various origins and its hypocritical status.
	Witherington (1990): Direction of NT theology points to demise of patriarchy and to opening up of women's roles.
Piper and Grudem, et. al. (1991): Contains thorough defense of propositions presented in Danver's Statement; most formal and complete outworking of complementarian ideology.	
	Keener (1992): Brings cultural context to bear on Paul's view of women; concurs with Spencer that 1 Tim. 2:12 is temporary injunction (largely because women weren't very educated in the first century).
	Tucker (1992): Reiterates host of previous arguments.
	Kroegers (1992): Introduce new reading of 1 Tim 2:12; not well received, but sparked renewed interest in the text.
Köstenberger et. al. (1995): Responds to Kroegers and reaffirms conclusion of Knight on 1 Tim 2:12, though with deeper analysis.	Grenz and Kjesbo (1995): Address each topic of theology in a more analytic fashion.
	Groothuis (1997): A full, systematic critique of complementarianism as taught in <i>RBMW</i> (1991).
	Belleville (2000): Opens door for women elders by answering three key questions, each regarding women's roles according to (primarily) NT teaching; reframes discussion on 'authority', which should rest with 'God and Christ alone.'
	Webb (2001): Steps back from the debate and argues for a new kind of hermeneutic—one that supercedes the flat biblicist hermeneutic and offers a more dynamic, progressive one where the Bible as a whole is not viewed as a simple, ethical standard that functions as representing the ideal; parallels NT subordination of slaves to NT subordination of women to make the point.
Blomberg and Schreiner (2001): Reiterate argument against women elders on basis of male headship and 1 Tim 2:12; Blomberg is more flexible on women's roles than Schreiner.	Storkey (2001): Re-examines the ideological and sociological context of the modern debate.
Saucy and Tenelshof et. al. (2001): Aside from minor differences and slightly more lenient views towards women's roles, it is essentially a mirror-image of <i>RBMW</i> .	Belleville and Keener (2001): Reiterate arguments they've made in their previous publications.
	Baukham (2002): Establishes, contra-Wallace/Burer, that Junia (Rom 16:7) was a female apostle; revises traditional history of Christian women in the NT and reveals their more prominent role in proclaiming the gospel.
Doriani (2003): A relatively poor assessment with little contributions.	Sumner (2003): Similar to Groothuis in its rigorous critique of complementarian argumentation; specifically makes a case for the ambiguity of 1 Tim 2:12; combines

	exegesis with practical application of principles in the local church.
	Trull et. al. (2003): Baptist scholars present their various views; concerns Southern Baptist controversy.
Grudem (2004): Provides systematic critique of hundreds of Evangelical feminist claims.	Groothuis and Pierce et. al. (2004/2005): A mirror-image response of <i>RBMW</i> ; provides the most scholarly and complete defense of Evangelical feminism for its time.
CBMW et. al. (2005 and 2006): Provides anecdotal response to <i>DBE</i> ; reiterates legitimacy of position in new (and noticeably) alarmist preface to <i>RBMW</i> .	Epp (2005): The definitive case that Junia was a woman apostle.
	Stackhouse (2005): Similar to Webb in undermining flat, simplistic biblicist hermeneutic in both egalitarian and complementarian perspectives; Paul's letters were not favorable towards women in ministry; women may be pastors, depending on the particular situation.
	Payne (2009): Very similar to Keener (2004) in its purpose and scope, but even more thorough; argues that Paul was, in fact, a Christian egalitarian; makes numerous contributions to the study of 1 Tim 2:12 and limits its range of meanings, none of which forbid women elders.
	Brown (2012): Argues that modern day complementarian interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:12 is not "traditional," esp. when viewed through the lens of Reformers.

There are three major trends to be noted in the growing arguments for and against women elders.

First, the importance of the New Testament text 1 Timothy 2:12 must not be underestimated.

Given that most Evangelicals and Reformed Christians have a high view of Scripture and a hermeneutic that equates biblical text with divine speech, the prohibition in this text plays a key role. Any theological argument that seeks to establish the legitimacy of women elders must directly address this text in some way. Even for those who have a considerably different view of Scripture—such as Roman Catholics—the importance of the prohibitory texts is still central to the debate, as Pui-lan notes: “In the Roman Catholic Church...Paul’s injunctions that women should not speak in church (1 Cor. 14.34-35) nor exercise authority over men (1 Tim 2.11-15) are used repeatedly to reinforce women’s inferiority and to deny them their rightful participation” (Pui-lan 2000:100).

Second, there is a growing trend of those against women elders, namely, the prevalence of the theology of headship. This theological concept may or may not threaten an argument for women elders, depending on the relationship between spheres (e.g. church and marriage) and depending on what is meant by it. This leads to another trend.

Third, there is much variety over how to organize and assemble an Evangelical theological argument for women elders. There have been numerous attempts of all kinds (perhaps these might be thought of as the “old cases” for female elders). There is a “shotgun approach,” which seeks to demolish various objections of all kinds on matters that may or may not directly pertain to women in ministry. There are limiting approaches of multiple kinds, some that narrow the argument to a few questions, some to a few texts, others to a few theological concepts that function as an ultimate launch pad (e.g. “equality,”), and so on. What appears to be lacking is an argument for women elders that is (a) largely based off of Evangelical-Reformed mindset that also includes the following features; (b) avoids the implementation of unnecessary rebuttals to traditionalist and complementarian claims; (c) properly implements the logical relationships between broader gender concerns (e.g. marriage or “roles” in general, family, creation, etc.) and the specific concern of ecclesiastical affairs—and gives the appropriate amount of weight to each; (d) recognizes the necessity of fully interacting with the prohibitory texts (1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35); and also utilizes the latest scholarship. This is precisely the gap this study seeks to fill.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the method of this study. We will first begin by discussing the research method, and then move on to identifying the theological location of this study in theological encyclopedia. As it will become apparent, the subject of women elders touches many subjects in systematic theology, and (due to the scope and nature of this study) not all can receive equal treatment. Next, we will examine the approach of other comparable arguments for women elders and identify what aspects are useful and what aspects can be improved. Finally, the subject of hermeneutics will be discussed more deeply since the methodology of this study leans heavily on a proper interpretation of the New Testament Scriptures.

3.1 Research Method

Given the nature of this study, the design of the research is qualitative not quantitative. The primary data collected is theoretical, that is through the analysis of theological viewpoints from relevant literature.

One of the weaknesses of qualitative research is covering the *right* sources *adequately*. To address this concern, there are a number of aspects that one must consider, such as the relevance, scholarship, date, and influence (weight of contribution). In both the literature review and the

study itself, I have sought to use the most relevant literature (via local and online University libraries, bibliographies provided by other scholarly works, etc.) by seeking out the specific works that directly argue for or against women elders, and then proceeded to other works that directly bear on this matter without actually being written on the debate over women elders. Works that are peer-reviewed and published by respected publishers tend to ensure a degree of academic quality. Nevertheless, many so-called “self-published” works may attain equal academic quality (e.g., Winston and Winston 2003; also, a number of out-of-print works that were once published by high-standing publishers have reappeared in print-on-demand format). I have also sought out the most recent publications on the assumption that present-day scholarship builds on the scholarship of the past. This does not mean that “older works” (e.g., twenty years ago) are altogether ignored, for some works considered “old” have not been surpassed in content and influence. As far as “influence” is concerned, this is a more subjective judgment. One must measure all of the relevant factors, such as books sold, the reactions produced both in and outside the scholarly community, endorsements, how the book has been received by its target audience, popularity retention over time, etc. One of the best ways of curbing the weaknesses of research based on literature analysis is providing a thorough literature review, and hopefully Chapter Two has served to meet that need.

As indicated in the words “case” and “analytical” in the title, the structure of this study is one of theological argument. It is not, like many theses and research projects, an *exploration* of a topic. Rather, there is a clear set of premises that lead to a final conclusion (thus “analytical”), namely, that within the framework of Reformed and Evangelical assumptions, women should not be

prohibited from functioning or being recognized as pastors. The exact structure and rationale of the argument will be presented in conclusion to this chapter.

3.2 Theological Loci

3.2.1 Theological Loci in General

The location of this study may be debatable since scholars disagree over the precise organization and categories of theology in theological encyclopedia. But there are some general trends that may be readily identifiable.

Exegetical theology deals with the interpretation of specific texts and reading out of them what they have to say (“exegesis”). It deals with the more technical aspect of theology, involving consultation of original sources, the use of original languages, syntax, cultural background studies, and more. Two of the most common sub-categories of exegetical theology are New Testament theology and Old Testament theology. *Systematic theology* involves the logical synthesis of theological concepts and ideas originating from a variety of sources (e.g., Scripture, church tradition, philosophy, etc.). Thus, systematic theology in Protestant traditions tends to lean more heavily on exegetical theology than, for example, Roman Catholic theology (see “Roman Catholic Theology” in chapter four) since the Protestant tradition gives greater priority to Scriptural documents. Evangelical and Reformed systematic theologies also tend to adopt a “flat reading” of the Bible, giving all portions equality authority and, therefore, seeing systematic theology as simply gathering all the relevant verses and synthesizing a “biblical view” on a

particular matter. While such a view is popular and benefits from its apparent simplicity, it has substantial problems (see “Reformed” in previous chapter), and there are other approaches to systematic theology that can be considered.

Beyond these two categories, there are a plethora of other theologies, such as philosophical theology, practical (or “pastoral”) theology, apologetic theology, etc. One type of theological method that bears reiteration is *biblical theology*. Biblical theology is a more recent and controversial discipline that many Christians believe stands between exegetical and systematic theology. It examines the thematic development of certain theological concepts in the broader, chronological history of redemption. It is essentially synonymous with “canonical theology,” since it looks at a particular topic through the lens of *all* of the biblical canon.

It should be noted that egalitarian works tend to stress the importance of “canonical” or “biblical theology (e.g. themes of women liberation, patterns of exceptions to cultural norms throughout biblical history, the progress of women’s humanity and the decrease and/or redefinition of male authority, or authority in general, etc.) and its relationship to hermeneutics (Scorgie 2005:26-36; Nicole 2005:355-363; Keener 2004:xii-xviii; Fee 2005:364-381; Padgett 2011:15-30; cf. Long:98-123, Sumner 2003:98, 109-110; Bilezikian 2006; Haddad 2008:15-19). Great attention is given to the nature of God’s story and the unfolding progress of redemption—and thus the progress of restoring men and women to their rightful place in God’s kingdom (Van Leeuwen 1990:38-51; Webb 2005:382-400; Groothuis 1997b:31-39, 189-198; cf. Cohik 2007:83-90; cf. Grenz 2004:272-286). In contrast, complementarian works tend to stress the value of exegetical theology (Köstenberger and Schreiner 2005; Grudem and Piper 2006:x, 32-33, 408; cf.

Yarbrough 2005:121-148; some exceptions to the trend are Part One and Two of Saucy and Judith 2001, and to some extent—because it is primarily focused on women and not both men and women—Chapter Two of Doriani 2003), thus attempting, in some cases, to essentially “trump” whatever truths emerge (legitimately or non-legitimately) from biblical theology. Neither side completely neglects either exegetical or biblical theology. But there does seem to be a trend. As a case in point, the complementarian symposium *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* contains five sections, the lengthiest of which is section II: “Exegetical and Theological Studies.” The book contains no essay specifically addressing the hermeneutical challenges posed by Old and New Testament gender studies, nor any biblical-theological essay on gender (the closest exception is Schreiner’s essay “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership” 1991:209-224, but the study is limited in its scope and purpose). In contrast, *Discovering Biblical Equality*, the egalitarian response to *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, has over four essays related to biblical-theological categories relevant to gender studies or to hermeneutical issues. Biblical theology does not seem to be a determining role for complementarians when constructing a theology of gender, but it appears very important for egalitarians. Belleville goes as far as to accuse traditionalists of being “notably selective” and giving “little acknowledgement of the roles of women in Scripture as a whole” (Belleville 2005b:21).

This is evident again in the respective confessional statements from each position. *The Danver’s Statement* (written in 1987 by the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood) contains no mention of biblical theology or hermeneutics except to say that the authors are alarmed at “hermeneutical oddities,” and alarmed in that “the clarity of Scripture is jeopardized and the

accessibility of its meaning to ordinary people is withdrawn into the restricted realm of technical ingenuity” (CBMW 1987). Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE), on the other hand, responded in 1988 with their own statement, which prefaces with the following remarks (emphases mine):

“We believe that Scripture is to be *interpreted holistically and thematically*. We also recognize the necessity of making a distinction between inspiration and interpretation: inspiration relates to the divine impulse and control whereby the *whole canonical Scripture* is the Word of God; interpretation relates to the human activity whereby we seek to apprehend revealed truth in *harmony with the totality of Scripture* and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To be truly biblical, Christians must continually examine their faith and practice under the searchlight of Scripture” (CBE 1988:1).

Again, the trend between one side emphasizing exegesis and the other side biblical theology (and its hermeneutical ramifications) is evident. In a word, those favoring women elders tend to show more immediate awareness of their hermeneutical lens and more willingness to discuss the debate on that level than those against women elders. As it was shown in the Literature Review, this is evident not only in examining the articles published, but in the approaches of those in the *Fours Views* (1989) and *Two Views* (2005) books.

The relationship between the disciplines is also another relevant discussion. Exegetical theology, systematic theology, etc., do not exist in a vacuum isolated from the other disciplines. They are interdependent (or “interdisciplinary”). For example, the fruits of exegetical theology yield specific systematic-theological categories, and the content of systematic theology is often largely dependent on the fruits of exegetical theology. Much disagreement lies in just how the disciplines relate, and while it would be valuable to investigate, it is a topic beyond the scope of this study.

3.2.2 Theological Loci More Specifically

The subject of women elders overlaps a number of subcategories of systematic theology, such as creation, baptismal dignity and vocation of believers, theology of mission, divine revelation, ecclesiology and soteriology. Below is a brief summary of how some of these theological loci bear on the subject of this study.

Regarding creation, the implications of theological anthropology may have a bearing on the function of men and women in the church because of their fundamental nature. For example, if men and women are created equal (e.g., spiritually equal) as the images of God (*imago Dei*), there is little precedent for establishing males as being inherently spiritual leaders. Thus, some arguments for female elders (e.g., Spencer 1985) begin with an examination of Genesis 1-3 in establishing the fundamental dignity and vocation of all people. Neither males nor females are basically superior to each other, especially with regard to spiritual function. On this basis, some would argue, women ought to be elders in the church today.

Creation also addresses the more specific nature of human persons as sexual beings. In the debate between complementarians and egalitarians, there is a fundamental disagreement about what “complementation” and “equality” means. For one side, women are permanently functionally subordinate, and yet somehow equal in “being.” For the other side, function flows out of a person’s nature, so men and women have roles corresponding to their equal natures; differences within the sexes do not necessitate inferiority. This question about what exactly is “different” between the sexes is a matter of debate within all circles of theology. For example, as it will be shown in the next chapter (“Conceptual Framework”), the CBE Statement does not

stress the differences, much less identify what they are, between the sexes. Some (e.g., Stackhouse 2005:35) would suggest that one should not impose any “gender roles” other than the ones immediately necessary due to biological differences (e.g., reproduction, child-nursing, etc.). Others allow for more influence regarding biology (see Grenz 2003:96-98), such as the influence of sexuality upon psychology and self-image. Feminist theologians, like Evangelical feminists, also vary. Some build on a denial of a Freud’s maxim, “anatomy is destiny,” thus relegating function and roles to an anthropological area isolated from ontology. The historian Gerda Lerner argues that the changes of culture and civilization challenge the biologically determinist perspective, and that “What Freud should have said is that for women anatomy *once was* destiny” (Lerner cited in McCreight 2000:35). Some feminist theologians deny the legitimacy of the categories of male and female and suggest that such polarity is oppressive. According to W. Anne Joh, in *New Feminist Christianity* (2010:55), feminist theologians “today are arguing for anti-essentialist views: a person is not ‘born a female but becomes one.’” She says “the construction of genders along a binary division must be critiqued and problematized” (2010:55). Again, this is not the view of all feminist theologians. But these differences do go to show that differences in anthropology and creation doctrine trickle down into other areas—for if (for example) women are not “created” to be public teachers, or are not “created” to be as spiritual persons as much as males, then there are grounds for denying them a place in ecclesiological positions.

“Equality,” then, can mean a number of things and remains a point of contention. It is not inappropriate to object when one uncritically uses the term since it can have numerous referents. In an essay entitled “What is Equality?”, one Evangelical feminist defines it in terms of having

equal “responsibility,” saying, “As adult human beings, women and men have equal responsibility in the home, the church, and the larger society. The ministry and service a believer takes up is not restricted by race, gender, or by social status” (Padgett 2002:23). In a modern sense, this is little different than saying “all men are created equal” as the U. S. Declaration of Independence reads—which, according to Supreme Court Justice Andrew Napolitano, means that “no [person] has a mandate from God to rule over other [people]....no [person] is endowed with rights superior to anyone else” (2011:15). This is not the Marxist-Communist egalitarianism that levels the fields of property, income, etc., establishing uniformity in hopes of achieving unity (note Kuyper 1869 in Bratt 1998). Rather, it is an equality that, to put it crassly, asserts that no person, by virtue of being a certain kind of human being (e.g., white, male, etc.), is in the permanent, God-designed position to tell another person what to do. In that case, critics of women elders sometimes appear to waste energy trying to establish differences between the sexes (whether in nature or in role) since the Evangelical feminist sense of “equality” does not challenge such differences (Padgett 2002:22). Furthermore, in this sense of “equality,” it becomes clear that the complementarian and traditionalist paradigm *does not*, in fact, believe that men and women are equal precisely because men essentially have a mandate by God to rule over women (or minimally, husbands over wives). This is why Evangelical feminists often assert the equality of men and women and argue that the “equal in being unequal in role” promise is a string of empty words.

Some who support women elders also recognize the importance of the baptismal dignity of believers. Baptism is a covenant sign given to both men and women; both male and female partake in the formation of the church and proclamation of the gospel (Acts 2). This contrasts

with the Old Covenant where the sign (circumcision) was only given to male persons—and not necessarily those who were truly believers in God’s covenant community (e.g., Jacob vs. Esau; Ishmael vs. Isaac). If there are no sexual distinctions in the covenant community regarding the broader principles of salvation, one might ask why there must be such sexual distinctions (sexual discrimination, rather) regarding specific principles of church government and teaching/authority roles. The same question may be asked in the area of mission. Since the implications of Pentecost directly address women’s participation in the proclamation of the gospel to the world (Acts 2:17-21), one may ask why women may participate in virtually all aspects of church mission and evangelism except one (pastoral ministry). This is a subject in chapter seven of this study.

The subject of divine revelation is also an important topic. The mode and manner which divine truths come to human beings determines a great deal about how to approach the subject of women elders. Christians have generally held that God has been revealed through various ways in different periods of history, but has chiefly been revealed in the person of Christ, the Incarnation of God. Certain branches of Christianity have attributed revelatory status of the Scriptures with varying degrees and meanings of authority, while others (e.g., Neo-Orthodox) see Scripture as only a *witness to* revelation (Christ and God’s acts in history), not as revelation itself. Suffice to say, the nature of divine revelation is something continually under debate. This particular theological issue will be addressed in chapter four (“Conceptual Framework”), especially as it relates to Protestant and Roman Catholic theologies and the subject of biblical authority.

Christology is also a relevant category since, for many theologies, being a pastor/elder means representing Christ. Given that Christ was male, the task of those supporting female elders sometimes involves demonstrating how relevant Christ's maleness is, and why it does or does not speak to the subject of women elders. This subject is a watershed issue between Protestant and Catholic ecclesiology; Protestants hold to the "priesthood of all believers" (a doctrine typically associated with Martin Luther) while Roman Catholics often do not. The whole concept of "representing Christ," then, falls along larger theological divisions within Christian theology. Nevertheless, whether one is Reformed or Catholic, Christology plays some role in the debate over women elders. (Some specific models like organic Christology will be addressed in chapter four).

Ecclesiology in general is also relevant. Here the debate over the meaning of church and the tension between church as institution and church as organism comes to the fore. For example, is it even legitimate to speak of church "offices," and why? How does such a theology of "offices" relate to today's contemporary situation? Depending on how one answers, this question can determine the meaning and nature of "women elders" or "pastors." Church *government* (or "polity"), a subcategory of ecclesiology, also finds importance at this point. Those who focus on the church as institution (e.g., Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, certain Evangelical groups, etc.) tend to promote a hierarchical, top-down structure while those who focus on the church as organism (e.g., charismatic and Pentecostal, countless individual churches and organizations in various streams of Christian thought, etc.) tend to promote an organic, loose organization. Even for those Evangelicals and Reformed theologians who hold to *Sola Scriptura*, formulating a structure of ecclesiastical affairs can be challenging since the Scriptures do not appear to

promote (at least strictly) one form of church structure/government over another; one can find the assumption of what appear to be church officers (like deacons and elders in Phil 1:1 and 1 Tim 3), and also the teaching of freedom and Spirit-led structure (e.g., 1 Cor 12-14). This variation is due to the *developmental* nature of the early church; the “offices” of “elder” and “deacon” were not always tight categories in the minds of the early Christians (see Chapter Three in Hübner 2013a). Much of this topic is beyond the scope of this study, but some of these concerns will be addressed in chapters five and seven.

All of these particular areas may relate to the subject of female elders and contribute something towards the debate over the legitimacy of female elders. But a person’s theological presuppositions determine what location the subject of women elders has in the larger scheme of theological methodology as well as what weight should be given to such arguments in each theological topic. For example, those holding to the Protestant principle of *Sola Scriptura* will tend to give greater weight to theological arguments that are based upon scriptural exegesis, while those who give equal weight to church tradition and Scripture (e.g., Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, etc.) will not. To the Protestant, for instance, the doctrine of creation is important, but likely not as relevant as what certain Scriptures directly assert about women in pastoral ministry. Direct, exegetical arguments inherently have more weight than broader, indirect theological arguments. Similarly, Roman Catholic arguments for women in the priesthood will not only give weight to the arguments substantiated by Scripture and tradition, but will be entirely different since they ground the priesthood in representation of Christ (see “Roman Catholic Theology” in chapter four).

3.3 Hermeneutics

Having outlined some of the basic methodological concerns of this study, it is necessary to extend further into the subject of hermeneutics since biblical interpretation plays a central role in the Reformed-Evangelical debate over women elders.

3.3.1 Philosophy of Hermeneutics and the Hermeneutical “Spiral”

In discussions about hermeneutics (the science of interpretation), it is common to talk about the “hermeneutical circle” or “hermeneutical spiral.” In his book *Being and Time* (1927), the philosopher Martin Heidegger spoke of the interplay between the reader’s assumptions and the assertions of the text and the influence each one has on the other. To summarize in the historian Richard Muller’s words, “What is most important about this idea of a hermeneutical circle is that it recognizes that intimate involvement of the interpreter with the work of interpretation...the circle is, primarily, a description of the way in which the mind of the interpreter ought to approach the document” (1991:187). This raises the obvious question: how is interpretation possible at all, since absolute neutrality, from a reader’s perspective, is impossible? Many scholars from a wide variety of theological backgrounds have grappled with this topic since it forms one of the most central concerns of interpretation. For example, in their seminary textbook on hermeneutics, McCartney and Clayton say, “There is no ground for believing that one’s own interpretation at any specific point is absolutely correct. As individuals, we will always be on the hermeneutical spiral” (2002:77). In the introductory portions of his book *The New Testament and the People of God*, N. T. Wright talks about the process of interpretation as a “conversation, in

which misunderstanding is likely, perhaps even inevitable, but in which, through patient listening, real understanding (and real access to external reality) is actually possible and attainable” (1992:64).

But there is another sense that scholars speak of a “hermeneutical circle”: the relation of the parts to the whole, and vice versa. Jeannine Brown says in her book *Scripture as Communication* (2007):

“If we come to an interpretive decision as we study a text that does not agree with the main point we have discerned, it is time either to revise that interpretive decision or rethink the way we have framed the main point. In fact, the nature of the hermeneutical circle or spiral is just such a back-and-forth between a text’s main point, its subpoints, its implications, and so on. The circle moves from the parts to the whole and back again” (Brown 2007:85-86).

In the essay “The Hermeneutical Circle or the Hermeneutical Spiral?”, Mohammad Motahari presents this version of the hermeneutical circle (relating the whole to the parts) as one that predates the other understanding of the circle (the interplay between assumptions and the text), and says that Gadamer (one of Heidegger’s students) tried to connect the two (Motahari 2008:103). It is difficult to ascertain if the matter were this simple; it appears in the case with contemporary scholars (as observed with Brown above) that there simply is no one way to talk about the “hermeneutical circle.” Note, for example, how Reuther speaks about a “hermeneutical circle of past and present” (1993:13), and earlier how “human experience is the starting point and the ending point of the hermeneutical circle” (1993:12). Thus, it is probably more accurate to speak of hermeneutical *circles*, which may or may not be directly related (cf. Westphal 2012:72-74).

Nevertheless, both such “circles” point to uncertainty about obtaining a text’s meaning (or meanings) and the possibility of knowing the authorial intent. This has prompted a number of responses in recent decades. Osborne, for example, says in the first part of his book *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, “The major premise of this book is that biblical interpretation entails a ‘spiral’ from text to context, from its original meaning to its contextualization or significance in the church today” (2006:22). His theory is referred to as “meaning-significance format” (2006:24), and argues that there can be only one meaning in a particular text. A year later, Brown contended that hermeneutics is best understood as “conversation” or “communication.” Taking her cues from Hirsch and Ricoeur, she proposes a three-fold movement: (1) Readers’ engagement with the textually projected world; locution/illocutions, explicit/implicit meaning, etc.; (2) reader looking at the background-contextual assumptions and weighing the assumptions the author has of the reader; (3) reader asking “What is communicated through the implied author’s point of view?” (2007:50). The upshot of her argument is that “meaning” should be defined as “communicative intention” (and “author-derived”), that meaning is *determinate* (as opposed to indeterminate),¹ and determinacy does not require single meaning in any given text (2007:84-87). Because the reader’s world never stops changing, readers cannot stop reading; “the hermeneutical process is open-ended, never fully completed” (2007:74). “Yet the text’s meaning remains a stable reality with determinate meaning” (2007:88).

Brown posits the entire debate over hermeneutics in terms of theories that give differing degrees of attention to each of the three elements involved in textual interpretation—the author, the text,

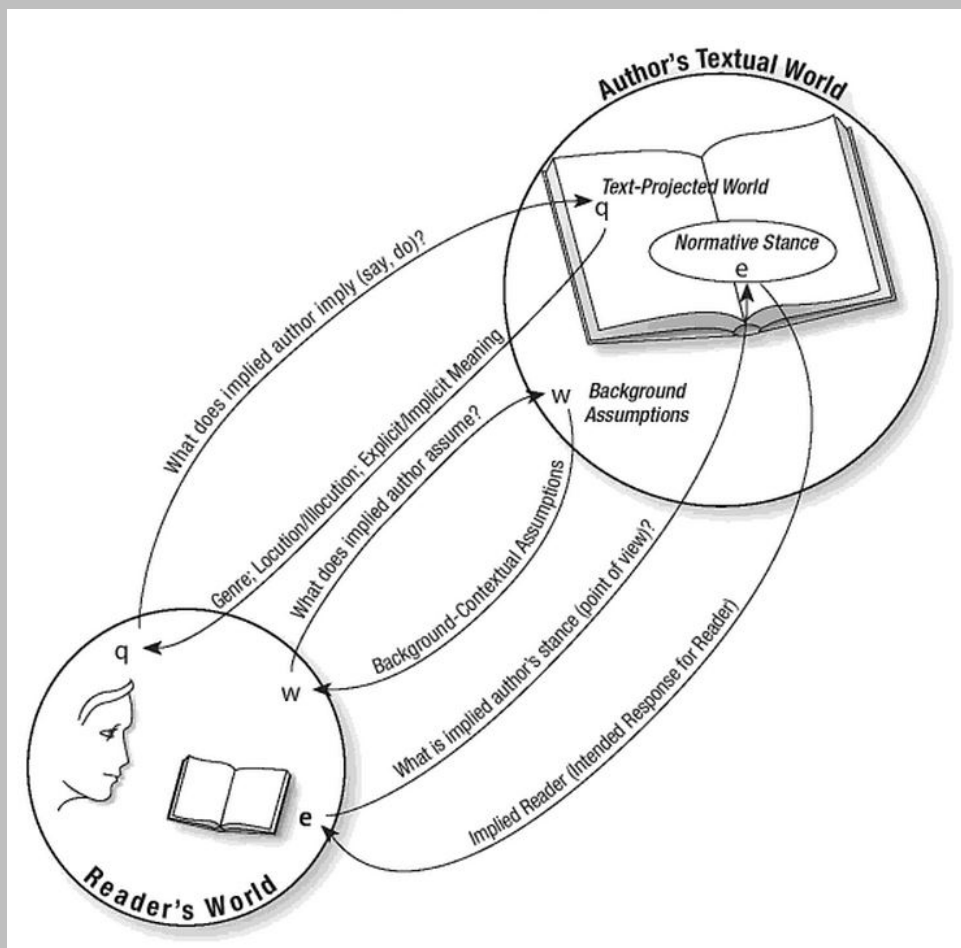
¹ “Determinacy means that interpretations can be weighed on the basis of their alignment and coherence with an author’s communication intention. It means that, in *interpretive theory*, we can describe and explore the limits of meaning (we can affirm its bounded nature). Yet determinacy does not mean that we will be able to exhaust the meaning of a text (especially on the book level) in *interpretive practice*” (2006:87).

and the reader. In her analysis (in very broad terms), Schleiermacher put the focus on the author and distinguished between the technical and psychological aspect; Dilthey went further and said the goal is to understand the author better than the author understands himself; Bultmann reacted and shifted the focus to the text, and the “New Criticism” led by Beardsley and Wimsatt taught that looking for the author’s intention beyond the text is doomed—the text is autonomous, divorced from its original author; Heidegger contrasted with this New Criticism by pointing out the inevitable assumptions of every reader; Gadamer argued that “understanding occurs in the fusion of the horizon of the text with the interpreter” (2006:66); Gunn and Fewell finally argued that hermeneutics is purely reader-oriented so as to create new meanings from unstable texts, for the author’s intention is generally irrelevant to hermeneutics (cf. the “Deconstructionism” of Foucault and Derrida, which Vanhoozer categorizes as “the death of the author,” (2009:69). Brown summarizes her own survey in terms of how each major theory of hermeneutics saw the text: (1) scholars first saw the text as a window (to see author’s intention); (2) then saw the text as a picture (to study and understand the content); (3) and finally saw the text as a mirror—the reader’s own reflection. Her proposal, of course, is that all of these theories are inadequate precisely because they focus on only one or two elements of the hermeneutical process at the expense of the other(s). A truly functional, accurate theory of hermeneutics requires that weight be given to all three elements of the process, for without doing so, the interpreter is hopelessly driven to an ultimately incoherent reductionism.

Brown’s ability to steer clear from the pitfalls in 19th and 20th century theories of hermeneutics, and to combine the legitimate findings of philosophy with real-life experience makes her theory a compelling option—and one that is able to encourage biblical exegesis. Biblical interpretation

requires a high degree of reader/text consciousness so that “communication” is able to occur (see Figure 3.1 below).

Figure 3.1



Like Vanhoozer and Ricouer, Brown demonstrates that “simply because one cannot interpret comprehensively or infallibly does not mean that one cannot rule out numerous errant interpretations of texts” (Blomberg 2009: xiv). This proves to be a key foundation for making a theological case for women elders within a Reformed-Evangelical framework, since high priority is given to the written text of Scripture; *there is* such thing as an “invalid interpretation,” and

consequently, such thing as a “valid interpretation”—one that gives justice to whatever can be known about authorial intent, context, and the other key elements of interpretation. Without the possibility of interpretation (or “communication”), a case for female elders from a “Reformed-Evangelical Perspective” would not be possible.

One can clearly see the contrast of Brown’s theory with other highly-influential theories. Take Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur’s philosophies, for example. Gadamer and Ricoeur “are agreed in privileging the ‘horizon’ or ‘intention’ of the text rather than the author, and in viewing the text as well as of *possible* meaning from which diverse readers draw different interpretations” (Vanhoozer 1998:106). In Vanhoozer’s words, both assert that “the text has a sense potential, but actual meaning is the result of an encounter with the reader” (1998:106). For Gadamer, this simply meant the fusing of “horizons.” One horizon is (perhaps drawing from his mentor Heidegger) the standpoint of the reader, with all of its presuppositions and prejudices. The other is the same kind of horizon—but for the author. Fusing these two horizons in an interplay between the reader and the horizon of the text results in meaning (which can be plural since it is the result of the text encountering the reader).

“All reading involves application, so that a person reading a text is himself part of the meaning he apprehends. He belongs to the text that he is reading.” (Gadamer 2004:340).²

For Ricoeur, on the other hand:

“...the text has autonomy and enjoys its own *sense*...[and] a text’s *structure* imposes certain limits on interpretation. The hermeneutical circle is not a vicious one, for the reader’s presuppositions can be ‘checked’ against the text’s formal features (e.g., style, syntax, structure)...[Nevertheless], It is one thing to dissect a text as though it were an

² “Horizons” are not the only thing that Gadamer seems to have “fused.” For example, notice his remarks on interpretation and understanding: “...the problems of verbal expression are themselves problems of understanding. All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of a language that allows the object to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter’s own language,” (2004:390).

inert object, scientifically exposing its grammatical parts and explaining its literary codes, and quite another to treat the text as a dynamic object that actually reaches out and transforms the reader.” (Vanhoozer 1998:107)

Brown, in contrast to both Gadamer and Ricoeur, does not find the locus of meaning in a fusion of horizons or in the event of a reader’s encounter with an autonomous text, but in the communicative act of the text, “weighed on the basis of [interpretations’] alignment and coherence with the author’s communicative intention” (Brown 2007:87). In other words, the original meaning intended by the author should be a central goal of hermeneutics. Consequently, we should be doing *exegesis* (reading out of the text what it has to say) instead of *eisegesis* (inserting foreign meanings into the text).

Nevertheless, Merold Westphal has forcefully argued that exegesis is not the same as interpretation, and our goal should not (and cannot) be limited to the former. Combining the philosophies of Derrida, Wolterstorff, and Gadamer, Westphal argues (2012:79) for a *double* hermeneutical movement: “The first hermeneutic asks, ‘What *did* the human author say to the original audience?’ The second hermeneutic asks, ‘What *is* God *saying* to us here and now through these words of Scripture?’ Exegesis is the crucial first step, and interpretation/application the second. To limit interpretation to exegesis is to reduce scripture “to an object to be mastered instead of voice to be heeded” (2012:164), or make the text “a cadaver handed over for autopsy” (Ricoeur cited in Westphal 2012:80). One of the provocative implications of this theory is that, while there are limits on interpretation, “a text...remains open to different meanings in different contexts unanticipated by the author” (2012:79). This is a point still debated between confessing Evangelicals and Reformed theologians, as demonstrated by the two books *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. Berding and Lunde

2008) and *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views* (ed. Porter and Stovell 2012). There is also varied responses to “speech-act theory,” since it tends to challenge certain doctrines of biblical inspiration and inerrancy, but it seems clear that the older, simpler paradigm of Evangelical and Reformed hermeneutics is losing its grip in favor of more robust theories (see Smith 2012; Walton and Sandy 2013; section 1.4 above).

Gadamer and Ricoeur’s theories—like many of the hermeneutical methods of the last century—have merit in bringing interpreters’ attention to a handful of key points, such as the role of presuppositions, reader-response, the limitations of language and text, etc. But they might also be limited by their inability to give full justice to the original author *and* the text *and* the reader in the hermeneutical process. Brown’s theory avoids “the tendency towards trichotomizing (dividing in three) that is prevalent in some discussions of textual interpretation, which seems to be rooted in the supposed distinction between literature and ordinary communication,” and also avoids the two extremes of “making readers into authors or claiming that readers reach complete objectivity in these interpretations” (Brown 2007:71, 73).

Even for those who reject feminist hermeneutics, egalitarianism, and female elders, there is substantial agreement with Evangelical feminists on the goal of hermeneutics. For example, in her thesis of critiquing feminist hermeneutics, Margaret Köstenberger, a Calvinist Baptist seminary professor, summarizes her view:

“The objective of hermeneutics according to this writer is to come as close as possible to *the actual meaning of the text*, that is, to the meaning *intended by the biblical writers* (Hirsch 1967; Osburne 1991; Erickson 1993; Vanhoozer 1998; for a good summary of hermeneutics used in the present dissertation see Klein 1998:319-35; and more fully Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 1993). As Hirsch (1967:126) notes, ‘Validity requires a norm—a meaning that is stable and determinate no matter how broad its range of

implication and application. A stable and determinate meaning requires an author's determining will...All valid interpretation of every sort is founded on the re-cognition of what an author meant.' Klein (1988:325) likewise equates "the *meaning of the text*" with "the *meaning of the text that the biblical writers or editors intended their readers to understand*" (emphasis original). As Klein (1998:326) explains, "the *meaning of the texts themselves*," in turn, is "the meaning the people at the time of texts' composition would have been most likely to accept' (emphasis original)" (Köstenberger 2006:60).

This view is essentially the same as Brown, and it is also generally the view espoused in this study—a study that argues *for* women elders and supports Evangelical feminism. The obvious differences between those who hold to this hermeneutic and forbid women elders and those who support women elders is on the level of the "first hermeneutic" (Westphal): what *was originally said* in certain texts (exegesis). For that reason, exegetical studies will play a central role an Evangelical case for women elders.

3.3.2 Feminist Hermeneutics

Feminist hermeneutics flow directly from feminist theology's core concerns: the problem/sinfulness of androcentricism and patriarchy, and the importance of women's experience (see "Feminist Theology" in chapter four). But due to the disagreement regarding what Scripture is (e.g., a human product or a divine product), feminist theologians do not agree on how to interpret it (note Tribble 1995:7).

For example, for the radical feminist theologian who does not acknowledge the inspiration of Scripture and the existence of the Triune God of Scripture, there is no separating of patriarchal elements of Scripture (a result of sin) from the truths asserted through Scriptural authors (a product of the Holy Spirit). Scripture must ultimately be discarded since it only amounts to the

demonstration of a male religion oriented around a male God in a male-written and male-biased Scripture that has no ultimate redeeming qualities. Thus, Mary Daly has said “If God is male, then male is God,” and consequently she left the Christian faith (McCreight 2000:28-29).

However, in a Reformist feminist position, Scripture may possess a taint of patriarchalism, and the incarnation of God may actually be Jesus (a male human), but this does not undermine the gospel that is found in Christ as revealed in the Old and New Testament Scriptures, nor undermine the overall inspiration of the Scriptures. In fact, many Scriptures may actually contain a sufficient basis from which to *critique* its elements that have been stained by patriarchalism (note McCreight 2000:31; cf. Rensburg 2002:744-745). This is Rosemary Reuther’s argument in the first half of *Sexism and God-Talk* (1993). She says, “both Testaments contain resources for the critique of patriarchy and of the religious sanctifications of patriarchy” (1993:22; Cf. Tribble 1991:25-26; 1995:5-7). However, in her view, the stain is so deep that “many aspects of the Bible are to be firmly set aside and rejected” (1993:23; cf. Kwok (1993:103). Schüssler Fiorenza makes a similar remark: “Christian Scripture and tradition are not only a source of truth, but also untruth, repression, and domination” (2013:51-52). As such, “the Bible no longer functions as authoritative but as a multi-faceted resource for women’s struggle for liberation” (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:81). This view resonates with those feminists who reject Scripture altogether—“post biblical feminists” in the words of Schussler Fiorenza:

“Post biblical feminists do not challenge just certain passages and statements of the Bible; they reject the Bible as a whole as irredeemable for feminists...Revisionist interpretations are at best a waste of time and at worst co-optation of feminism to patriarchal biblical religion” (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:77).

Evangelical feminists still acknowledge the taint of patriarchy and androcentrism on Scripture, which is why, for example, they firmly support gender-inclusive translations such as the NRSV,

TNIV, and NLT. But, like all Evangelicals and Reformed Christians, they hold to some version of an inspired and infallible Bible—something that Shelly Matthews says will make “feminist scriptural studies...a territory that will be continually contested” (2010:107).

In the view of CBE, feminist theologians like Daly, Reuther, Schüssler Fiorenza, and others, have done a service to the Christian faith by revealing male-centered aspects of our world and revisiting the interpretation of biblical texts. But Evangelical feminists also see such feminist theologians as having compromised an important aspect of the Christian faith (the truthfulness or “infallibility” of Scripture) by too quickly dismissing and criticizing some parts of Scripture before adequate interpretation. According to Evangelical standards, when the truthfulness of Scripture is compromised (at least to some degree), there is, despite the fact of interpretational ambiguity, no telling where a feminist theology (or any theology for that matter) will end up since there is no fixed, objective point of reference by which to measure and discern human thought. Indeed, it is fair to say that the feminist enterprise has reversed the traditional role of Scripture and human opinion:

“Whereas traditionally the biblical narrative served as the lens through which one interpreted the world, for feminist theological reading of the Bible, the interpretive lens is feminist consciousness itself and, more specifically, women’s experience of oppression under the conditions of patriarchy” (McCreight 2000:42).

It is important to notice the last sentence of the CBE quotation on Scripture: “To be truly biblical, Christians must continually examine their faith and practice under the searchlight of Scripture” (1988:1). This statement coalesces with the hermeneutic proposed by Brown: the process of hermeneutics is ongoing (2007:74). There will never be any point in history where the church will have finally and exhaustively discovered the ultimate meaning(s) of every text in the Scriptures. Contrary to many feminists, there *is* always room for revision and improvement

(Trible 1995:9); it is not “at best a waste of time.” In fact, the CBE’s view of hermeneutics may legitimize the very enterprise of feminist theology, for the hermeneutic of feminist theology is inherently corrective. To throw out Scripture as a whole may be throwing out a powerful tool in establishing women’s equality—especially given that some portions seem to be in existence for that very purpose (e.g., Acts 2; Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 7). Even if one does not acknowledge Scripture’s divine status or hold to an Evangelical/Reformed doctrine of the Bible, one cannot ignore its global and historical influence (Milne 1995:47), and exegetical theology therefore still has a place in the debate.

One’s view of Scripture also affects the task of hermeneutics in other subtle ways. As a case in point, Reuther contends that Ephesians was not written by Paul (1993:141), which means that even if she held to an internally consistent canon (which she does not), she would not naturally be compelled to spend great energy exegeting the meaning of women’s “submission” in Ephesians 5, since Ephesians isn’t even a part of “Scripture.” Especially since she does not believe in an internally consistent canon, and thus sees Christian texts as on the same plane as other religious texts (1993:21; cf. Pui-lan 2000:67; Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:15), the value of Scriptural exegetical theology is all the more subordinated in the larger feminist-theological task.

There are, however, aspects of feminist hermeneutics that are not so easily determined by one’s view of the Scriptures. Take for example, the Christological debate. Reuther and the Evangelical feminists have very different views of Scripture, and yet they both agree that Jesus’ maleness is not something contrary to the overall feminist agenda (see “Feminist Theology” in chapter four below).

Another aspect of feminist hermeneutics that merits attention is that some feminist theologians often do not see Scripture as determinative in various theological debates since it is not seen as any period of God's "special revelation." In contrast to Protestant Christianity, God has not simply spoken, God is *speaking*. Note the words of Reuther and Schüssler Fiorenza:

"God did not just speak once upon a time to a privileged group of males in one part of the world, making us ever after dependent on the codification of their experience. On the contrary, God is alive and with us. The Holy Spirit continues to speak, and we are mandated to continue the dialogue" (Reuther 1993:xiv; cf. Pui-lan 2000:67).

"Inspiration is a much broader concept than canonical authority insofar as it is not restricted to the canon but holds that throughout the centuries the whole church has been inspired and empowered by the Spirit" (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:118).

This approach might also minimize the priority of the written text of Scripture and lend more weight on tradition, experience, and other sources of the theological task. If nothing else, this approach simply catalyzes further debate regarding the extent of "Scripture" itself.

3.3.3 An Evaluation of Feminist Hermeneutics

The results of feminist hermeneutics are numerous. One important result is new interpretations of Scripture. In her chapter on hermeneutics in *The Feminist Reader*, Tribble outlines how Genesis 1-3 may easily be read *not* to support patriarchy and women's subordination (Tribble 1991:26; cf. 1995:9-12). Countless other examples have been provided in feminist scholarship. Given the influence (and, depending on one's views, *nature*) of the Christian Scriptures, new biblical interpretations offer powerful ways of changing theology—including ecclesiology and church government. For those who hold to a higher view of Scripture (e.g., Reformed and Evangelical

Protestants), new interpretations of texts like 1 Timothy 2:12 may prove decisive in allowing women elders in local churches.

In contrast to reader-centered theories of hermeneutics, Tribble is right to avoid a possible misunderstanding by saying:

“Reinterpretation does not mean making the Bible say whatever the reader wants it to say. It does not hold that there are no limits to interpretation and that the text can, in effect, be rewritten. But reinterpretation does recognize the polyvalency of the text: that any text is open to multiple interpretations, that between those who adamantly hold fast to only one meaning and those who breezily claim that the text can be manipulated to say anything in a wide spectrum of legitimate meanings. Some of these meanings assert themselves boldly, and others have to be teased out” (Tribble 1995:8).

Another result of feminist hermeneutics is highlighted in the 2010 publication *New Feminist Christianity*:

“Thanks to the endeavors of feminist biblical scholars, especially over the past thirty years, we have access to many more interpretive tools and a significantly broader textual base from which feminist work can proceed...” (Matthews 2010:108).

Matthews then goes on to offer more specific results of feminist biblical studies, such as “Prescriptive language should not be read as descriptive language,” and “Biblical texts are rhetorical texts, constructed with an aim to persuade” (2010:109). In short, feminist studies in interpretation have spurred new findings in the scholar’s task.

Another useful product of feminist theology is bringing further awareness to gender in translation and interpretation. Something as simple as a new Bible translation in gender-inclusive language may prove to be a tremendously influential and beneficial accomplishment for the Christian church—which is consistently being tempted to think in male-oriented and male-

dominating terms. Feminist hermeneutics simply points out the truth that androcentrism may be present in the text via the language and in the original author's perspective.

Despite these tremendous benefits from feminist hermeneutics, there are also substantial problems. First of all, the diversity of feminist hermeneutics poses a challenge. Note how, for example, Pui-lan mentions Schüssler Fiorenza, Reuther, and Tribble as feminist theologians and then says:

“It was assumed that these scholars would tell us what the Bible meant and that their findings could be correlated with Asian women's experiences. But Asian feminist theologians had become more aware that all feminist interpretations are context-bound. There is no ‘value-neutral’ feminist interpretation that is applicable to all contexts, and Asian feminists have to find their own principles of interpretations” (Puilan 2000:46).

As if feminist hermeneutics wasn't diverse enough, Pui-lan's proposal suggests (in essence) that there needs to be a hermeneutic for specific genders *and specific ethnicities and peoples*. If this principle is true across the board and true consistently, the end result is overwhelming. There would be a dizzying amount of different *methodologies* (not merely *interpretations*)—all under the rubric of “feminist hermeneutics” and yet all different in their approach. There would need to be feminist hermeneutical methods by the Norwegian, South American, Australian, European, Middle-Eastern etc.—all offering, presumably, different interpretations and different flavors of exegesis. More problematic, however, is discerning a criterion to assess which hermeneutical method is to be preferred when these highly diverse methods and interpretations do not harmonize, and discerning how beneficial diversity truly. To put it in other terms, Pui-lan poses a legitimate challenge to traditional feminist hermeneutics: she is in effect saying, “Why stop with *women's* methodology? Not all women's experience is the same.” I am unaware if this challenge has been satisfactorily answered; feminist theologians do need to delineate what experience and

perspectives *are adequate* for an assessment of truth and facts. Until then, Pui-lan may have revealed that the feminist hermeneutical enterprise could be spinning its wheels.

But the above assertion by Pui-lan has a problem as well. She says, “Asian feminists have to find their own principles of interpretations,” as if it is possible to just create principles of interpretation according to contextual experience. But one must ask whether an ancient text (or any text for that matter) is so easily moldable to contemporary concerns. Pui-lan seems to be assuming a reader-oriented hermeneutic and must ultimately deal with the challenges created by it (note Vanhoozer 2009; Brown 2007). In short, it seems a bit of a stretch to suggest that just because of one’s ethnicity, a different set of rules of interpretation must be invented, especially since it seems inarguable that some hermeneutical rules for interpreting written texts remain true across ethnic boundaries (such as grammar, syntax, and the need to understand the meaning of words in their original historical and cultural context).

Another problem of feminist hermeneutics is one that was already mentioned: the undervaluing of Scriptural exegesis. For “post-biblical feminists,” as Schüssler Fiorenza pointed out, “Revisionist interpretations are at best a waste of time and at worst co-optation of feminism to patriarchal biblical religion” (2013:77). There is no point in spending great energy exegeting biblical texts since the Bible is (generally) of no use to the radical feminist anyway. But it is precisely this attitude (cf. Milne 1995) that hurts certain feminist theologies—throwing away valuable traditions (in this case, arguably the most influential corpus of writings in human history; note Milne 1995:47) simply because they are deemed incompatible with feminist presuppositions. If Reuther and Tribble are right that the Bible contains a critique of patriarchy to

some degree, then the Bible certainly has *some degree of use* for the feminist theologian. And if the Evangelical feminists are right that the Bible is in some sense “God’s Word,” and that gender equality is supported in it (whether in broad narratives or in specific propositions, whether directly or indirectly), then the Scriptures should be of even more importance to the feminist theologian.

Another problem with feminist hermeneutics is simply poor interpretations produced by the various methods. If feminist theologians are incorrect regarding, for example, the authorship of certain NT books, their dating, their purpose, etc., this inevitably skews the interpretation and application of such texts. Even if they *are* correct about these attributes of various biblical writings, many feminist theologians still err in their interpretations because of their feminist bias. For example, Schüssler Fiorenza says “According to Paul, the order of creation is hierarchical: God-Christ-Man-Woman (v. 3),” speaking of 1 Corinthians 11 (2013:34). But, as many scholars have shown, the text actually presents the order as Christ-man, man-woman, then Christ-God (11:3). It appears that Schüssler Fiorenza is so suspicious of patriarchy in the Scripture that she has trouble with correctly reading the text (it is somewhat ironic that a *feminist* would read patriarchy *into* the Bible!). As scholars have shown, Paul is not establishing a hierarchy in this text, but is more likely presenting a chronological order of head/source relationships (see Payne 2009; Groothuis 1997b). This is one of the texts where gender hierarchy has traditionally been maintained in Christian theology, but in reality, Paul is probably being misread.

One other example is worth evaluating. Pui-lan notes that an Evangelical approach

“...has strong appeal for those Asian Christian women who regard the Bible as the Word of God and who have been brought up to read the Bible quite literally. The Bible is not

seen as a problem for women. Its message is basically liberating if we do not read it from a biased male perspective” (2005:53).

But then she says:

“The difficulty with this approach is that the roles of women in the Bible played were often circumscribed by the male-dominated society. Many of these women were associated with male heroes. For example, Miriam played an auxiliary role to Moses and Aaron, and Hannah was finally able to produce a male heir to continue the patrilineal heritage. The cataloguing of strong women in the Bible has been done with a remedial agenda, without fully integrating these women into the patriarchal history and culture. Moreover, in trying to rescue the Bible, this approach fails to pay sufficient attention to the pervasive portrayal of women as property, as whores and as victims of society. Some writers emphasize Jesus’ liberating attitudes toward women in contrast to the Jewish customs of the time. Such an interpretation has been criticized as serving the apologetic interests of Christians, which might contribute to anti-Semitism” (Pui-lan 2000:53).

Pui-lan’s overarching point may be legitimate. But there are numerous logical and hermeneutical problems here. First, an association of women with male heroes does not necessarily demean the value of the women being discussed. Since she later argues for “partnership” in ministry between men and women (2000:105), it is odd that she seems to suggest that a woman *independent of men* is necessary to constitute a theological point in favor of feminist principles. Second, Pui-lan argues that the Evangelical approach “fails to pay sufficient attention to the pervasive portrayal of women as property, as whores,” etc. This is possible, but it is questionable why the mere record of women’s oppression in the Bible favors her point. Shelly Matthews’ third point in her essay “The Future of Feminist Scripture Studies”—“Prescriptive language should not be read as descriptive language” (Matthews 2010:109) may have been relevant at this juncture. Pui-lan also ignores the redemptive-historical context of the scriptural phenomena. Do the phenomena she mentions fall under Creation, Fall, Redemption, or Consummation? This might make a difference in her assessment. One must remember the possibility that Genesis 3:16 promised men’s domination over women as a result of sin; “women as property, as whores” and so on is

precisely what we would expect to read about in post-fall narratives. In brief, then, Scripture may not be quite as problematic as it was originally thought out to be.

Another case study of the “hermeneutic of suspicion” gone awry is in Schüssler Fiorenza’s comments about the Gospel of Mark. She says that in the resurrection account, the Gospel “stresses that the women ‘said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid’ (Mark 16:8)” and that this is proof that the Gospels disclose androcentricity (2013:33). But, this is not necessarily true. It is possible that Mark is simply recording what historically happened and how he experienced it as a person and has nothing to do with his views of sex/gender or the sex/gender of the people he is speaking about. If Schüssler Fiorenza is proposing a hermeneutic that requires every pejorative remark about women in the Bible to be the direct result of androcentricity, her hermeneutic is certainly invalid from the start. Androcentricity is a *sufficient*, but not a *necessary* condition for seeing women and writing about them in a negative and/or oppressive manner. Thus, it is *possible* that androcentricity led Mark to downplay the role of women in his writings, but it is not *necessary* that this be the case. Consider, for example, how such a hermeneutic would apply to the writings of a female historian writing about English history: the historian *must* be automatically assumed to have an androcentric bias because she said negative things about Queen Mary Tudor (“Bloody Mary”) in the 1500s. This would be absurd. Indeed, as other examples from her work demonstrate, Schüssler Fiorenza appears to adopt not simply a “hermeneutic of suspicion,” but a “hermeneutic of guilty until proven innocent.” The feminist theologian in these cases is *overplaying* the androcentricity of authors in an attempt to reveal how the authors of Scripture downplay the role of women; the feminist ends up distorting the

meaning of particular texts in the pursuit of trying to demonstrate that the male author is distorting the story.

Other problems with feminist hermeneutics include specific misunderstandings about what the Bible actually is and presents itself to be, especially as a historically constructed document. Reuther presents the biblical canon as the product of asserting a “correct interpretation of the original divine revelation” and the suppression of all texts that disagree with this body of writings (1993:14). While there may have been an effort to suppress false teaching in the early church (something that might actually have been beneficial, in contrast to Reuther’s assumptions), and while I personally do not hold to the traditional Protestant view that the biblical books have a binary status (inspired/uninspired) and number exactly sixty-six, the situation of canon formation is far more complex than presented in Reuther’s narrative (see; Kruger 2012 and 2013; Evans and Tov et. al. 2008; cf. Comfort et. al. 2012; Bruce 1988).

Feminist responses to the Reformed doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* are varied. Some simply point to the diversity in views in an attempt to discredit the Protestant position (though it should be noted that the mere diversity of views does not necessarily indicate the validity or invalidity of any particular position). For example, Schüssler Fiorenza (2013:14) says:

“Particularly Protestant the*logical interpretation, with its emphasis on *Sola Scriptura*, faces this problem of how to articulate the authority of Scripture. As Mary Ann Tolbert has pointed out: ‘For Protestants, the central and unavoidable problematic posed by the role of scripture is its *authority*, but exactly what that authority entails varies from denomination to denomination and indeed is often a hotly contested issue within denominations...Scripture, then, for Protestants becomes the primary medium of communication with G*d’.”

Oddly, Schüssler Fiorenza doesn't actually say what the "problem" of the authority of Scripture is. She simply mentions that it is "written by human hand...elite men" (2013:15); it is not clear how this poses any problem for *Sola Scriptura* or the authority of Scripture. Nevertheless, she is right that adherence to a more narrow doctrine of Scripture simply has not yielded promised results (Smith 2012).

Some feminist theologians try to relate *Sola Scriptura* and the aspirations of feminist theology, but in giving priority to feminism, undermine the essence of scriptural authority as historically understood. For example, Dawn Devries in *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics* concludes her essay on feminism and *Sola Scriptura* with the following words:

"I hope I have shown sufficiently, within the limits of this chapter, that the Reformed theologian's appeal to the Word of God as the criterion for reform in no way entails uncritical acceptance of the words of the Bible as the Word of God. On this point, too, feminist and Reformed theologians can agree: sometimes the words of the Bible themselves need to be criticized or even rejected. The doctrine of Scripture outlined above attempts to take account of the fact that Scripture as such has both oppressive and liberating power. When consecrated to a special use through the power of the Spirit, the Bible can be the regular and ordinary means through which God is revealed. But the Word is never enclosed within the words in such a way that it could be a human possession. Quoting Bible passages as 'proofs' in theological arguments may not, and often does not, have anything at all to do with the Word of God" (Devries 2006:57).

It is nothing short of bizarre to read the statement: "Reformed theologians can agree: sometimes the words of the Bible themselves need to be criticized or even rejected" (2006:57; for a discussion on this topic, see McCreight 2000:36f), unless she is only referring the progressive Reformed theology of her own constituency. The simple fact is, Reformed theology from the 1500s until the present day is specifically known for its *critique* of this very position. Luther and Calvin were certainly not one of the "Reformed theologians" that are being spoken of here (see Hannah et. al. 1984), nor do any of the Reformed creeds (for a list, refer back to the WRF

statement in chapter one) side with Devries' assertion. Historically speaking, no Reformer or Reformed document ever describes Scripture as being "oppressive." Rather, Reformed theology has always been characterized by a high view of the Scriptures—a document with divine origin that is internally consistent and liberating.

3.3.4 The Hermeneutics Debate Within the Reformed and Evangelical Church

Having outlined some of the broader hermeneutical concerns, it is time to focus on the methodology of hermeneutics employed by those for and against women elders within the theological tradition broadly assumed in this study.

Evangelical Christians are not exempt from the historical influences that gave rise to larger movements of feminism, and feminist hermeneutics. The end of slavery and the growth of feminism in the past century and a half brought the subject of biblical hermeneutics to the fore.

Stephen Knapp accentuates this point as follows:

"Theology (and exegesis) is inevitably influenced by the ideological, cultural, and socio-political values and commitments of the interpreter/theologian. Standard evangelical textbooks on hermeneutics have been next to silent on this critical dimension of interpretation. The emergence of the 'theology of liberation' and other distinctive theological and interpretative approaches from the Third World as well as from women, Blacks, and other oppressed groups in the U.S. forces, it seems to me, something approaching a major adjustment in standard hermeneutical approaches. It exposes the myth of objective exegesis and the tendency to equate any fruit of exegesis or any theological construction with revelation itself. For evangelicals, who have traditionally found in the doctrine of inerrancy a final refuge against theological relativism, this new development would appear to have significant implications and could signal the beginning of a new phase in the discussion of Scripture" (Knapp 1977:18).

Some Evangelicals today are skeptical whether answers can be found in biblical scholarship at all. Note Stackhouse's attitude towards the interpretation debate over 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:12 in his 2005 publication *Finally Feminist*:

“...this marshaling of technical textual and historical scholarship raises the question of the providence of God. Why would God allow such confusion to continue in the church's reading of these passages for two thousand years, only to have it resolved in our own day—and then only by considerable exegetical heavy-lifting?” (Stackhouse 2005:52, footnote 13).

However, some Evangelical scholars hang all the weight on biblical exegesis—and often of a few select texts. Thomas Schreiner, for example, says this was the reason he stayed a complementarian:

“I desired to believe that there are no limitations for women in ministry and that every ministry position is open to them. As a student, I read many articles on the question, hoping that I could be exegetically convinced that all ministry offices should be opened to women. Upon reading the articles, though, I remained intellectually and exegetically unconvinced of the plausibility of the ‘new’ interpretations of the controversial passages....I remain intellectually and exegetically unconvinced that the egalitarian position is untenable” (2005a:86).

Others tend to step away from the narrow scholarship of biblical studies and, while not excluding exegesis, argue more broadly for a theology that pays attention to the whole of Scripture (e.g., Bilezikian 2006; Webb 2001).

Whatever the case, due to their fundamental assumptions, biblical studies will always remain a crucial part of the debate over women elders for Evangelicals and Reformed Christians. Disagreements in the realm of scriptural interpretation have resulted in differing views of women in ministry. This is particularly clear in the dispute over women elders, and it is still evident in specific branches of Evangelicalism such as Reformed theology. Some Reformed denominations

approve of women elders (e.g., PCUSA, EPC, RCA, CRC, etc.), and others do not (PCA, OPC, URC, etc.).³ Some Reformed scholars approve of women elders (Douglas Groothuis, Roger Nicole, John Armstrong, Jeffrey Davis, Nicholas Wolterstorff, etc.), and others do not (R. C. Sproul, John Piper, Wayne Grudem, Vern Poythress, Mark Dever, John Frame, etc.).

Nevertheless, given the high-view of Scripture ascribed to Evangelicals, both sides of the debate on women in ministry also have much in common regarding hermeneutics. Both can be found affirming (1) the need for careful exegesis (e.g., Johnston 1986; Haddad 2008:15-19; Schreiner 2005a; Payne 2009), which rejects the imposition of artificial categories on the text, attempts to respect and understand the authorial intent, and involves cultural studies, contextual studies, linguistic studies, etc.; (2) the need to interpret more difficult and disputed passages in light of the less difficult and less disputed passages (e.g., Schreiner 2005b:269; Johnston 1989:31-32; Nicole 1986:48); (3) the affirmation of ruling out erroneous interpretations even though “one cannot interpret comprehensively or infallibly” (Blomberg 2009:xiv), thus rejecting Post-Modern “deconstructionism” (Morphew 2009:17-18; Vanhoozer 2009; cf. Storkey 2001:58ff.; McCreight 2000:36-54); and (4) the need to cogently harmonize the theology of biblical authors, of the NT, and of the entire Scriptures (e.g., Haddad 2008:16; Bilezikian 2006:13-15; Belleville 2005b:21-22; Köstenberger and Patterson 2011), though the extent of harmonization is disputable, depending on views of Scripture and what one considers “artificial” harmonization within systematic theology.

³ The churches mentioned here are as follows: Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA), Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), Reformed Church of America (RCA), Christian Reformed Church (CRC), Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), and United Reformed Church (URC).

Beyond these basic “ground rules” (all of which are generally implemented in this study as a part of its theoretical framework), there is much disagreement.

Several remarks by Christian egalitarians over the years have led complementarians to accuse egalitarians of having a poor hermeneutic. “Poor,” however, is being too generous. In an article for the *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, the complementarian scholar Mark Dever went as far as to say that:

“Of course there are issues more central to the gospel than gender issues. However, *there may be no way the authority of Scripture is being undermined more quickly or more thoroughly in our day than through the hermeneutics of egalitarian readings of the Bible*. And when the authority of Scripture is undermined, the gospel will not long be acknowledged. Therefore, love for God, the gospel, and future generations, demands the careful presentation and pressing of the complementarian position” (Dever 2008:24, emphasis mine).

What led Dever to so harshly attack the hermeneutic of those who affirm women elders? It is hard to tell from the immediate context since the essay is so short and does not cite any author or publication. But, given the literature review from chapter two and given what can be known from this particular issue, perhaps three case studies will suffice to demonstrate the potentially poor hermeneutical system Dever may be talking about.

The first two case studies to mention are ones that have already been examined in the literature review (see chapter two above). One is William Webb’s “redemptive-movement hermeneutic” (Webb 2001). While much of what Webb asserted was not new to the subject of hermeneutics (see references cited in Moo 2008:378, fn. 44), two of the controversial and possibly erroneous claims made in the work were that the Bible simply “endorses” slavery and that the best or “ultimate” ethic is not necessarily one contained in Scripture, but in an ethic that Scripture points

to (“beyond” Scripture). For Evangelicals like Dever, this appeared to blur the meaning of Scripture and perhaps even undermine the sufficiency and clarity of Scripture—though not all of Webb’s method could be criticized. In the words of Douglas Moo:

“We [complementarians] think that Webb tends too easily to assume what an ‘ideal ethic’ might be, sometimes appearing to adapt the ethic of modern liberal democracies without sufficient critique. We also believe that he fails adequately to recognize the degree to which the NT itself might qualify how far the “redemptive movement” should go and what its limitations might be (particularly in his application of his method to the issue of the roles of women). Nevertheless, we also think that Webb’s proposal has some merit as a way to explain the silence of the NT on issues such as slave ownership” (2008:378).

Grudem is much harsher:

“The implications of [Webb’s proposal] for Christian morality are extremely serious. It means that our ultimate authority is no longer the Bible but Webb’s system” (2004:352; cf. 2005:96-118).

Webb’s proposal had much to commend from both sides of the debate—since it is often easy to get caught up in the reader’s perspective and neglect the larger issues of methodology when doing theology. *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals* is a wake-up call to many Evangelicals who tend to treat the Bible as a static, “wooden” text that can always be immediately conflated with contemporary situations. But, although it is fairly systematic and straight-forward, the implications of Webb’s proposal have not been fully worked out. This calls for at least some degree of hermeneutical caution (in addition to Moo above, see Yarbrough 2005)—though not an artificially protectionist attitude that prevents all paradigm shifts.

The other example already mentioned is committing exegetical fallacies, such as the odd renderings of “ἀθηνάτω” in 1 Timothy 2:12 espoused by Katherine and Clark Kroeger. This error is concisely documented in Köstenberger and Patterson’s 2011 book *Invitation to Biblical*

Interpretation. Under “Fallacy #3: Appeal to Unknown or Unlikely Meanings or Background Material,” they state:

“The appeal to unknown or unlikely meanings or background material is one of the most common fallacies in biblical interpretation and preaching. One of the most serious negative consequences of this practice is that the actual explicit message of the text is set aside in favor of an alleged construal of background or word meaning, which substitutes the message intended by the given interpreter for that intended by the biblical author and ultimately God himself as the author of Scripture....Perhaps one of the most egregious examples of the present fallacy in biblical scholarship of which I am aware is the argument by Catherine and Richard Kroeger that the term ἀθεντέω...commonly translated ‘to have authority,’ in 1 Timothy 2:12 should be translated as “to proclaim oneself the author of a man.” The Kroegers posited this previously unknown meaning on the basis of an alleged teaching in Ephesus at the time of writing, according to which women claimed that God created the woman first, and then the man, rather than the other way around....The problem with this interpretation is that it lacks complete textual support, which is why few, if any, scholars have adopted this rendering” (Köstenberger and Patterson 2011:635-636).

A third and equally important case study is egalitarian’s handling of Galatians 3:28. In his commentary on Galatians, the renown NT scholar F. F. Bruce said, “Paul states the basic principle here; if restrictions on it are found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus....they are to be understood in relation to Galatians 3:28 and not vice versa” (Bruce 1982:190). This comment has been strongly criticized by complementarian scholars (e.g., Schreiner 2005b:275; Johnson 2006:159; cf. Yarbrough 2005:136-139). Some egalitarians are willing to concede that this verse has been overplayed (Grenz 1995:107). The error committed in Bruce’s methodology is doing systematic theology on the basis of structuring biblical verses in a hierarchy that’s built upon an unclear and unjustified methodology. Texts like Galatians 3:28, then, function as a kind of “trump card,” or ultimate presupposition whereby all other texts relating to the subject of gender are evaluated.

Of course, complementarians may be guilty of committing this same error. This was evident in the literature review (see chapter two above) and the complementarian use of 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 1 Timothy functions as the threshold for which women's behavior in church can be limited as well as a lens to limit the range of meanings in other relevant texts. The same phenomenon may be occurring when complementarians argue that Ephesians 5:22 ("wives submit to your husbands") establishes a permanent, personal structure of authority in marriage, when the previous verse ("submit to one another") appears to contradict the complementarian assertion; verse 22 is, oddly, given priority over verse 21. In addition to the previous evaluation of *RBMW* and Knight's book *Role Relationships of Men and Women*, there is another example worth briefly mentioning. It is found in Bruce Waltke's response to Gordon D. Fee in the 1996 *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. Waltke asserts that there is "universal consensus that 1 Timothy 2:9-15 can be used as a manual governing the relationship of men and women—perhaps better, husbands and wives" (Waltke 1996). It is highly problematic to raise the especially specific and contextualized prohibitions of 1 Timothy 2 to the level of "a manual" for marriage—and at the same time assert that this understanding of the text enjoys "universal consensus" through the history of the church (see Brown 2012). The obvious implication is that if 1 Timothy 2 qualifies as a "manual," some NT instruction is not as fortunate to reach that higher level on what shouldn't exist in the first place—a hierarchy of texts (cf. Spencer 1985:19 and the use of Genesis 1 and 2).

Whatever the case, since Scripture itself does not clearly identify what texts ought to be raised to a more regulative, governing position (if doing this methodology is even legitimate), the task of giving weight and priority to certain biblical texts must be debated on hermeneutical,

methodological, and theological grounds. One must ask, for example, how a reader can even arrive at a position to where he/she can formally declare that verse A is the lens through which to view verse B, C, and so on, and what criteria should be used in such an endeavor. Schreiner summarizes it best:

“I do not believe the issue relates to which texts are “more fundamental” or which texts “control the discussion.” Such a view assumes that one set of texts functions as a prism by which the other set of texts is viewed. All of us are prone, of course, to read the Scripture through a particular grid, and none of us escape such a tendency completely. But this way of framing the issue assumes that the decision on women’s ordination is arrived at by deciding which set of texts is more fundamental” (Schreiner 2005b:269; Blomberg 1989:44.).

It makes more sense, then, to interpret Scripture in light of other Scripture and abandon a methodology that assumes that some verses in Scripture are just more authoritative or important than others (or like many feminist theologians, assume that some verses are simply irredeemable while others are liberating). Generally speaking, doing theology on a larger-scale (e.g., a NT theology on a certain topic versus a single assertion mentioned by a single author) is more of an organic process of synthesis than a linear exercise of deduction or enacting pre-conceived hermeneutical formulas. This doesn’t mean that the reader should flatten all biblical texts so as to ignore distinctions between them (e.g., between New and Old Covenant, between Peter’s writings and Paul’s writings, between genres, etc.). Rather, the interpreter should simply avoid playing “favorites,” as much as it is possible for an interpreter to do so.

In conclusion, then, these are possible errors that have legitimately led complementarians to question “egalitarian hermeneutics.” However, since no side of any theological debate possess absolute perfection in biblical interpretation, one must also not fall into the error of judging the theological and exegetical conclusions of the majority on the basis of examining the errors of the

minority in the same group; the fact that a scholar makes hermeneutical errors does not in and of itself demonstrate the overall legitimacy of the theology espoused by that particular scholar. Balance is essential.

Waltke's language about certain portions of the NT being a "manual" should also raise a red flag, since it is doubtful that the Scripture as whole or in part is meant to be treated as a manual (cf. Smith 2012). This again demonstrates that what one considers the Bible to be directly affects how one interprets it.

3.3.5 Köstenberger's Critique of Feminist Hermeneutics

Before moving on to the final portion of this chapter, it is necessary to briefly interact with a study of particular interest. Margaret Köstenberger (wife of Andreas Köstenberger) wrote a doctoral thesis for the University of South Africa in 2006 entitled "A Critique of Feminist and Egalitarian Hermeneutics and Exegesis: With Special Focus on Jesus' Approach to Women" (DTh. in Systematic Theology). It is not surprising to find much agreement with Köstenberger since we are both professors that come from very similar theological backgrounds (Baptist, Evangelical, Reformed). Köstenberger makes a number of similar arguments as those in the section above "An Evaluation of Feminist Hermeneutics." She points out various inconsistencies and problems related to feminist hermeneutics and to Evangelical feminist (egalitarian) hermeneutics, which puts this study in her line of fire to one degree or another.

In the evaluation of egalitarian hermeneutics section, it appears Köstenberger's general goal is to provide brief refutations of egalitarian biblical interpretations, hoping to accumulate so large a number of errors on the part of Evangelical feminist literature that readers will doubt the overall conclusions of feminists (cf. the approach of Grudem 2004). It would not be unfair to say that much of this critique is anecdotal. This is particularly evident in how briefly she treats entire books (many of them in three pages or less), what is contained in those brief treatments (often the weakest of egalitarian interpretations), and substantial absences, such as criticism of two of the best essays on the subject of Jesus and women—Douglas Groothuis's essay "What Jesus Thought About Women" (2002)⁴ and Rikk Watts' essay "Women in the Gospels and in Acts" (2003). If one is looking for this—a list of poor interpretations made by feminists of all kinds—Köstenberger's work is a feast. But many egalitarian Christians will find her study wanting.

Three examples will suffice to illustrate the ineffectiveness of her critique of Christian egalitarian hermeneutics in particular. At one point Köstenberger addresses Witherington's *Women in the Ministry of Jesus* (1994) in a two page assessment. She argues that, despite many benefits to his study, "Witherington goes beyond the clear teaching of certain biblical passages in an effort to underscore women's equal status to men" (Köstenberger 2006:187). She goes on to offer an example:

"A case in point is Witherington's assertion that 'the community of Jesus, both before and after Easter, granted women *together* with men...an equal right to participate fully in the family of faith" (1984:127). At the very least, 'equal right' and 'participate fully' need careful definition. 'Equal rights terminology improperly retrojects post-Enlightenment concerns into first-century Judaism" (Köstenberger 2006:187).

⁴ Köstenberger mentions this essay but only in passing. She does say, however, "The article 'What Jesus Thought about Women' by Douglas Groothuis does not provide thorough exegesis or original argumentation" (2006:237), which may or may not be considered criticism.

This isn't necessarily true. Although Witherington may have benefited by not using loaded terms, one can easily use the terms "equal rights" without specifically referring to specific concepts of post-Enlightenment (or Enlightenment) philosophy. If a mother tells her two children, "You can both use the toaster for bagels," it would mean no different to tell them "You both have equal rights over the toaster for your bagels." The basic concept of "rights" is the point, and it is a concept that goes back far before the time of Christ (see Clark 1994:214; Wolterstorff 2010).

All of this being the case, Witherington is not in error if he is finding that topic being addressed during Jesus' period or any other. Having an "equal right to participate fully" could be speaking of the same concept as all Christians having the right to pray to God, or Paul asking "Do we not have the right to eat and drink?" (1 Cor 9:4; cf. 7:3; 9:5, 15; Jn 1:12; Rev 22:14). The only way Köstenberger would have a point is if she can demonstrate one of two things: (1) that Witherington is specifically addressing the post-Enlightenment philosophy of "equal rights," or (2) the concept and meaning of what Witherington is speaking about cannot be found in the first century. In my view, neither of these can be accomplished. In fact, in the aforementioned reference by Wolterstorff (*Justice: Rights and Wrongs* 2010), this very argument that Köstenberger is making has been compellingly refuted.

In critiquing R. T. France's *Women in the Church's Ministry*, Köstenberger says:

"An instance of special pleading is France's insistence that Jesus' inner circle 'was not sharply distinguished' from the wider group of Jesus' followers among whom women were prominent. It is not clear from Luke 8:1-3 that the women supporting Jesus and the apostles, though they were traveling with them, went beyond supportive roles to become equal participants in Jesus' mission alongside the Twelve" (Köstenberger 2006:215).

This simply is not the case; France is *not* “special pleading” here. Even if female disciples of Jesus did not go “beyond supportive roles,” this does not establish that there is a sharp distinction between the inner and wider circles of Jesus’ followers (see Bauckham 2002:112-114). Furthermore, as it will be demonstrated in chapter six of this study, it is the *complementarian*, not the egalitarian, who must plead with the text of Luke-Acts to relegate the women in the early church to only supportive roles.

Finally, as a third case in point, Köstenberger critiques Stanley Grenz’s *Women in the Church* (1995) by making the following charge:

“[Grenz’s] explanation as to why Jesus only chose men as apostles is not adequate for the following reasons. First, his point that the ‘new creation vision consists of the renewal and completion of creation’ and that the ‘call for full participation of men and women in the church is the fulfillment of God’s egalitarian intention from the beginning’ fails to recognize several important pieces of scriptural evidence that question the notion that God’s intention was ‘egalitarian...from the beginning.’ While a critique of this point is beyond the scope of the present dissertation, it should be pointed out that Grenz here takes a different approach than Longenecker, another egalitarian already critiqued. Longenecker, in arguing for a ‘developmental hermeneutic,’ acknowledges that God’s creation entails male headship and female submission but argues that redemption in Christ trumps creation. Grenz, by contrast, claims God’s intention was ‘egalitarian...from the beginning,’ so that redemption does not supersede creation but rather renews and completes it. Grenz’s argument that the notion of the priesthood of the believer necessarily requires egalitarianism likewise fails to convince, as do his contentions that gifting must be the sole determinant of the exercise of spiritual gifts and that a hierarchical view of church leadership must be replaced with an egalitarian one” (2006:218).

It is unclear why Köstenberger says “First” since there is no “second.” In any case, notice that there actually is not much of an *argument* (premises that somehow lead to a conclusion), but mainly assertion. What is the argument for why one should reject Grenz’s view of the male apostolate? We are only told that it “fails to recognize several important pieces of scriptural

evidence”—what evidence we are not told, nor where we can find it. Then we are told that Grenz’s view is not the same as other egalitarians (which is not a “second” reason to reject Grenz’s view on why Jesus’ chose male apostles). Then, Köstenberger switches gears altogether and claims that Grenz’s other argument regarding the priesthood of all believers “fails to convince”—for reasons unknown—“as do his” other contentions (again without evidence or citation), and then moves on to an assessment of the whole chapter section. This is all of her critique of *Women in Ministry*.

It should be obvious that simply saying an argument “fails to convince” (or similar assertion) in the absence of any compelling evidence fails to convince the readers of her study. Indeed, these are only three of many cases of anecdotal argumentation, poor argumentation, and assertions disguised in the form of an argument. In the end, a great portion of Köstenberger’s critique of egalitarian hermeneutics amounts to little more than throwing pebbles at the egalitarian enterprise.

My biggest complaint of Köstenberger’s thesis is that Johnston’s essay on biblical authority and hermeneutics in *Women, Authority, and the Bible* (1986) is entirely absent. A search of “Johnston” does not produce a single result in the 281 page work. In a doctoral study critiquing feminist hermeneutics, one would expect at least a cursory evaluation of the eleven principles of Bible interpretation that Johnston presents since, as it was mentioned in the literature review of this study, the publication is somewhat of a milestone in the history of egalitarian hermeneutics and interpretation. Even better would have been a point-by-point response to each of the eleven principles, and a response to his brief section on a “New Hermeneutic” (1986:36ff).

In any case, Köstenberger's work is valuable in documenting genuinely failed attempts at interpreting Scripture. All theologians interested in the ancient text and its interpretation can benefit in that regard.

3.4 Constructing a Case for Women Elders

In this final portion, we will distill the above observations in the answer of a specific question: How exactly should one go about making a theological argument for women elders within a Reformed-Evangelical framework?

Perhaps the best way of going about this analysis is by first examining a number of contemporary “cases” for women elders. This will help to gauge judgments about what constitutes a more cogent construction of theological argumentation as opposed to a less effective, persuasive one. This examination of argument strategies and methodologies is not exhaustive and only aims to analyze the general contours of recent scholarship—especially for those theologians who have been intentional about forming a more analytic theological argument for women elders. Therefore, this portion of our study will summarize two general categories of arguments: general arguments and targeted arguments.

3.4.1 “General Arguments”

“General arguments” for women elders are essentially those efforts that attempt to establish a Christian-egalitarian perspective of gender, and one of the many implications of this theology is the liberation of women to pursue any venue of Christian ministry that they are called to and qualified for. Publications that fall under this category include *All We’re Meant to Be* (Scanzoni and Hardesty 1974), *Man as Male and Female* (Jewett 1974), *Women Be Free* (Gundry 1977), *Beyond Sex Roles* (Bilezikian 1985), *Women, Authority, and the Bible* (Mickelsen 1986), *Equal to Serve* (Hull 1987), *Women in the Maze* (Tucker 1992), *Good News for Women* (Groothuis 1997), *Men and Women in Ministry* (Sumner 2003), *Discovering Biblical Equality* (Groothuis and Pierce 2005), *Liberating Tradition* (2008), and others. The general trend of these types of works is to respond to a host of gender-related issues that relate to women’s oppression and faulty theological reasoning based on patriarchal, androcentric perspectives. This includes such matters as God and gender (including language of God), marriage, family, society, science, sociology, hermeneutics, and more. It is typical to find such reasoning as:

- a. The traditional models of gender have problems, so egalitarianism should be seriously considered—including egalitarian views of pastoral ministry.
- b. The traditional models lack all biblical and exegetical support, while egalitarianism does have credible, positive support, and thus should be believed.
- c. Patriarchy and women’s subordination is the result of sin, and Christ came to restore a proper relationship between man and woman—and this egalitarian relationship manifests itself in every sphere of society (including church).
- d. Based on Jesus’ life and ministry and Galatians 3:28, ministry in the New Covenant is based on Spirit-enabling and spiritual gifts, not permanent gender roles.

As one can see, such reasoning ranges from modest to more confrontational forms of argumentation. Usually interspersed with such arguments is a claim that 1 Timothy 2:12 does not forbid women from pastoral ministry. But the placement of such studies is not consistent throughout these Evangelical feminist arguments. In short, these “general arguments” are a kind of “shotgun” approach, which means the evidence and force of argumentation are often scattered.

3.4.2 “Targeted Arguments”

The other major category is “Targeted Arguments,” which are more carefully constructed cases aimed specifically at legitimizing women’s full activity in Christian ministry. While there are many of these, we shall limit our discussion to four: (1) Wright’s argument; (2) Giles’ argument; (3-4) the two arguments in *Two Views of Women in Ministry* (2005).

3.4.2.1 Wright’s Argument

Although an Anglican Bishop, the scholar N. T. Wright is a member of CBE, and therefore holds to basic Evangelical convictions and an Evangelical feminist perspective on women in ministry. He presented a conference paper for the symposium, “Men, Women and the Church” at Saint John’s College, Durham, on September 4, 2004. This presentation was republished in *Priscilla Papers* in 2006. Wright’s approach can be summarized as follows.

First, Wright enters a discussion of “Key New Testament Texts on Women’s Service in the Church,” and begins with Galatians 3:28. Apparently Wright is unfazed by complementarian criticism regarding egalitarians’ use of the text; it appears he wants to provide a proper interpretation of this popular verse. He begins by essentially distancing himself from those who have misused the text saying that:

“Galatians 3 is not about ministry, nor is it the only word Paul says about being male and female. Instead of arranging texts in a hierarchy, for instance by quoting this verse and then saying that it trumps every other verse in a kind of fight to be the senior bull in the herd (what a very masculine way of approaching exegesis, by the way!), we need to do justice to what Paul is actually saying here” (2006:5).

After a brief cultural and contextual discussion, Wright concludes that ‘What Paul seems to do in this passage, then, is rule out any attempt to perpetuate male privilege in Abraham’s family by an appeal to Genesis 1, as though someone were to say ‘But of course the male line is what matters, and of course male circumcision is what counts, because God made male and female.’ No, says Paul, none of that counts when it comes to membership in the renewed people of Abraham” (2006:6).

Having addressed a key Pauline concern, Wright then moves on to the Gospels and Acts where he highlights Jesus’ radically counter-cultural behaviors regarding women in society. He also notes the odd fact that women were targeted alongside men in early persecutions of the church, suggesting that women were, in fact, in some kind of leadership (or at least influential) position in the early church (Wright 2006:7; cf. Bristow 1988:55)—otherwise they would not have been worth targeting.

In discussing 1 Corinthians 14, Wright opts for Bailey’s perspective (2011; cf. Keener 2004:70-100) that the main problem was women being disruptive and chatting, not simply speaking in church. After discussing chapter 11, he concludes, “When we apply this to the question of women’s ministry, it seems to me that we should certainly stress equality in the role of women but should be very careful about implying sameness. We need both men and women to be themselves in their ministries, rather than for one to try to become a clone of the other” (Wright 2006:9). Regarding 1 Timothy 2:12, Wright believes the primary emphasis should be on women’s learning, so that the text can actually be read as saying, “They must be allowed to study undisturbed, in full submission to God. I’m not saying that women should teach men, or try to dictate to them; they should be left undisturbed” (Wright 2006:10). Wright then concludes:

“I believe we have seriously misread the New Testament passages addressed in this essay. These misreadings are undoubtedly due to a combination of assumptions, traditions, and all kinds of post-biblical and sub-biblical attitudes that have crept in to Christianity. We need to change our understanding of what the Bible says about how men and women are to relate to one another within the church” (2006:10).

It appears that Wright’s argument is largely defensive and, as a NT scholar, addresses each key area of NT studies—Paul, Jesus, and other select case studies. His approach seeks to gently open the door to women in ministry by calling us back to properly read the New Testament. (In passing, since Wright is one of the foremost NT scholars in modern scholarship, his encouragement of exegetical—and historical—revisionism should not be taken lightly; too often it appears that NT scholars dismiss the possibility that Paul may have been actively “pro-woman.”)

3.4.2.2 Giles’ Argument

Another Anglican scholar and a member of the CBE constructed another argument for women in ministry in the CBE periodical *Priscilla Papers*. The essay is entitled “The Biblical Case for Women in Leadership” (2003). It is much more systematic than Wright’s argument, consisting primarily of eleven theological points. Below is a brief commentary on each of these highly nuanced assertions.

“1. In Creation, God made man and woman equal in dignity and status, giving authority and dominion over creation to both (Gen. 1:27-28). They are male and female, differentiated by divine act, yet equal in essence/nature/being and in authority” (Giles 2003:24).

The detail here is in the phrase “and in authority.” Although all complementarians affirm that men and women were created to have authority over creation (see “Danvers Statement” in chapter one), all complementarians deny that men and women have *equal authority*. As the Reformed scholar R. C. Sproul plainly put it, “The man and woman are equal in every respect except one—authority” (2003:44). Giles, in contrast, directly contradicts this claim on the basis of God’s creative act. He sees a correspondence between the authority given to Adam and Eve in the garden over creation and their authority in a general sense. The implication here, then, is that men do not simply have authority in the church by virtue of being men, since women and men share in such authority on a fundamental, creational level.

“2. Genesis chapter 2 seeks to picturesquely elaborate on the polarity of the sexes. The solitary Adam on his own is helpless, incomplete. No animal can meet his need for companionship. God’s solution is to make woman, an equal partner, for the solitary Adam. Only when the woman stands at his side does Adam/man become man distinct from woman just as Eve/woman is woman distinct from man. Nothing in Genesis chapters 2 and 3 suggests that woman is subordinated to man before the Fall. Yet, even if a hint of this could be found in some minute detail in the story, it would not be of any theological consequence. The original creation is not depicted as perfect. Sin was possible and the devil was present in the Garden of Eden. The Bible is characterized by a forward-looking eschatology that sees perfection in the future, in the consummated new creation” (Giles 2003:24).

Again, in going beyond some of the claims made in the CBE Statement on Equality and in undermining complementarianism, Giles makes a one-two punch. First, like all Evangelical feminists, Giles asserts that subordination of women to men is a result of the fall, not a part of the good, original creation. But, second, he distinguishes himself from (some) Christian egalitarians in saying that creation wasn't perfect anyways, and that God's plan of redemption is progressive; Christians today look forward to something better than the Garden (presumably, the New Jerusalem). Obviously, Giles' argument for women in ministry at this point depends on a strong egalitarian theology featured by the New Covenant and the final consummation of creation.

“3. The hierarchical ordering of the sexes is a consequence of the willful disobedience of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:16). Man's superordination and woman's subordination reflect the fallen order, not the creation order.

4. Nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus ever speak of the subordination of women or the “headship” of men. In fact, he says and does much to deny this. This is amazing since Jesus lived in a thoroughly patriarchal culture. It is true that the twelve apostles were all men, but this is a moot historical detail and of no surprise in that cultural context. However, no teaching is based on this fact. In any case, it would seem the twelve had to be men if they were to be recognized as the founding fathers of the new Israel, the counterpart of the twelve male patriarchs. They also needed to be men because their main work was to be “witnesses” of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus (cf. Acts 1:21-22). As a general rule women could not be witnesses in Jewish society at that time” (Giles 2003:24).

At this point Giles' approach turns particularly defensive, since there are no real positive arguments for women elders provided. He appears to try and undermine some more of the common objections raised against women elders (e.g., male headship; the twelve male apostles).

“5. In Acts, Luke makes chapter 2 programmatic for the new age that dawned with the gift of the Holy Spirit to all believers. In the new Spirit-endowed community, Luke quoting Joel says, “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,” and then he repeats the point (Acts 2:17-18). When the Spirit is present, men and women may proclaim the word

of the Lord in power. For Luke, prophecy is a term that can cover all Spirit-inspired speech, including teaching” (Giles 2003:24).

Since Giles previously set himself up (in point number two) to justify the egalitarian nature of the New Covenant community in God’s progressive plan of redemption, he now provides that justification. He argues that Peter’s speech on the Day of Pentecost marks the entrance of Spirit-inspired evangelism where both men and women are involved. He makes it a point to say that “prophecy is a term than can cover all Spirit-inspired speech, including teaching.” But this point may not placate the obvious difficulty Giles faces: in the immediate context of Acts 2, Peter cites Joel 2 and the words about men and women prophesying as referring to a fulfillment of the tongues that were being spoken after the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2:1-12. While Luke may use the term (προφητεύω) in different ways in his writing, in Acts 2 it immediately refers to speaking in tongues and not (as far as context is concerned), preaching to a local congregation. Despite this possible exegetical weakness, it is clear that Luke does make it a point to associate the gender-equality of this Spirit-work with this fulfillment of the prophecy—which speaks to the New Covenant era. And it still may even be fair to infer, as Giles does, that the Spirit has come to bring equality with regard to the proclamation of the gospel—especially since this particular point is (as it will be demonstrated in chapter six) largely uncontested with regard to the rest of the early church and NT theology.

“6. Paul’s teaching on the ministry of the body of Christ presupposes that the Spirit can bestow the same gifts of ministry on men and women. These gifts of ministry given to both sexes are to be exercised in the congregation (1 Cor. 12-14, Rom. 12:3-8, Eph. 4:11-12). His practice matches his theology. He speaks positively of women prophesying, leading house churches, and ministering in other undefined ways. He even commends a woman apostle (Rom. 16:7). She is to be understood not as one of the twelve but as one of the larger number of missionary apostles, who were raised up by the Holy Spirit and said to be “first in the church” (1 Cor. 12:28, cf. Eph.4:11-12). These examples of women leaders in this patriarchal cultural context are significant. They show that wherever

possible, Paul put his non-discriminatory theology of ministry into practice” (Giles 2003:24).

This argument appears to be a strong one. Whatever theologian may suggest that Paul is against women elders on the basis of the few “prohibition texts” must come to grips with how Paul actually behaves and interacts with Christian women in the first century—and his behavior and interaction with such women is very positive.

Giles also argues that the gifts of the Spirit are given without discrimination, and this is a point made by egalitarians that has never really been refuted. Of course, the point about the Spirit’s distribution of gifts in and of itself does not legitimize women elders, and perhaps that is the reason it has not undergone a severe critique. It does, however, put complementarians in the increasingly awkward position of having to say that God gives gifts (e.g., administration, teaching, leadership, etc.) only to have them muted under regular, typical circumstances in the Christian life (i.e., at church with men). This topic will be explored in chapter six of this study.

In the next several points, Giles offers specific instruction regarding the disputed texts:

“7. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul insists that men and women are to be differentiated when they lead in church prayer and prophecy by what they have or do not have on their head. Paul’s primary reason for penning these words was to insist that when women lead in the congregation in prophesying or praying, they do so as women, and men do so as men. Individual comments in this passage taken in isolation could suggest Paul accepted the subordination of women, but for every comment that might suggest this, there is a matching comment that excludes this idea. That Paul endorses the public verbal ministry of men and women in the congregation is highly significant. Paul judges prophecy to be the second most important ministry given by Christ to the church, behind apostleship and before teaching (1 Cor. 12:28)” (Giles 2003:24).

Giles first neutralizes the complementarian interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11, and then goes on to lift up prophecy to its rightful place according to Paul's own instruction. This latter point is important since oppositions to women elders on this point attempt to make the fine distinction between OT prophecy and NT prophecy, as well as between teaching and prophecy in the NT. Giles remains strong on this point precisely because in the attitude of the Apostle Paul, apostleship and prophecy are ranked first and second of what "God has appointed" (1 Cor 12:28)—and it is precisely these two positions (if one can legitimately summarize in this way) that women occupied in the early church (Junia the apostle in Rom 16:7 and prophetesses in 1 Cor 11, Lk 2:36, and Acts 21:9).

"8. In Eph. 5:23, Paul calls the husband the "head" of the wife, using the Greek word *kephale* in the sense of leader, or even "boss." The word, however, is given new content. To be the "head" of one's wife, he explains, involves not rule but sacrificial self-giving, agape-love. Jesus exemplifies this kind of leadership in his self-giving on the cross. Not one word is said in this passage about who makes the final decision on important matters, or about family management. In 5:21ff., Paul is seeking to transform patriarchy within his patriarchal cultural setting, not endorse it. In its original historical context, this was a liberating text. It should be read this way today" (Giles 2003:24).

At this point, grace must be given to Giles' language since it is poorly used. Giles' point is clear enough: to be the "head" of one's wife in the first-century is to be her "leader" or "boss," but Paul is using the term differently so that "headship" does not involve rule but love. This is a fair point, but the way Giles actually says this forms a direct contradiction: Paul means "head" in the sense of "boss," and Paul doesn't mean "head" in the sense of "boss." Whatever the case, the overall point is made clearer when Giles speaks about Paul transforming patriarchy, and not endorsing it. Paul is *not* simply "going with the flow." He is intentionally contradicting the cultural norm.

“9. The apostolic exhortations to wives to be subordinate that parallel the exhortations to slaves to be subordinate are not to be distinguished in character or purpose. In both cases, practical advice is given to people living in the first century where patriarchy and slavery were social norms. Nothing suggests that the exhortations to women alone are timeless, transcultural precepts. They are not grounded on an appeal to the creation stories. In Ephesians, the only time Genesis is quoted is to affirm that in marriage husband and wife are one (Gen. 2:24, Eph. 5:31)” (Giles 2003:24-25).

At this point, Giles re-affirms Webb’s argument and the argument of many other egalitarians: our ban on slavery must take into consideration the instruction Paul gives to other people in (apparently similar) situations in the exact same texts. Is there really a legitimate basis for affirming the submission texts for women but denying the submission texts for slaves? This is a fair question, and it remains, generally, a legitimate point in the ongoing debate—especially since the hermeneutic of complementarians resembles the flat and simplistic hermeneutic of those Christians who affirmed slavery centuries ago.

However, Giles may be oversimplifying the matter. First of all, complementarians would affirm that the slavery texts should be upheld—if we had slaves and we lived in the first century. Second, it may be an overstatement to simply say the parallel between slaves and wives is “not to be distinguished in character or purpose,” precisely because even Paul makes it clear that the relationship of wife to husband is not the same as slave to master. For example, Paul never commands slave-owners to “love” their slaves, but simply to “treat your slaves justly and fairly” (Col 4:1). The purpose and character of marriage is *greatly* different from the purpose and character of slavery—especially by the standards of the NT authors.

Nevertheless, Giles’ may be right that Paul is going along with patriarchy (to perhaps avoid revolution or maintain social propriety, see Keener 2004)—and yet *not* going along with it at the

same time, planting seeds for its destruction, as it were, just as he does for slavery in Philemon 1:16 (“no longer as a slave, but as a brother...”). Paul, then, may be accommodating to both patriarchy and slavery, and yet transforming them from the inside out by telling each part in the relationship to be like Christ—albeit in different ways appropriate for the situation. If *this* is Giles’ point, then he is making a fair argument, and one ought to question the flat-reading and immediate application of the “submission” texts proposed by complementarians.

Giles does not make it clear, but presumably this argument has bearing on women in ministry because of the fundamental nature of marriage; subordination and leadership in marriage extends into other spheres of creation (e.g., church). But, again, this is not explicitly stated.

“10. The call to silence in 1 Cor. 14:34-35, some scholars argue, is to be seen as a later non-Pauline addition to the text. If it is genuine, Paul only asks wives to desist from asking questions in church. Paul’s advice is, ‘If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home’ (1 Cor. 11:35)” (Giles 2003:25).

Giles diverts the traditional weight of this prohibition text by questioning its authenticity and summarizing its basic purpose. Although, it leaves the reader wanting and uncertain of where to go from here.

Finally, in the last point, Giles addresses 1 Timothy 2:

“11. In 1 Tim. 2:11-12, the prohibition against women exercising authority and teaching in church is addressed to a particular situation. This text is to be understood against the backdrop of false teaching that had erupted in Ephesus, teaching that had led both men and women astray. Women had been allowed to teach in church since Paul first founded the church, but now he forbids them from doing so. He changes his policy to meet the specific challenge facing the church. What the women had been teaching deceived many. The reasons he gives for this exceptional command in verses 13 and 14 reflect the exceptional problem addressed, although we do not know exactly what it was. Women are not to teach as if they are first in the church, for Adam was created first, and they are

to remember that it was Eve who was deceived. These are ad hominem arguments that were telling and applicable to the problems found in that church at that time. They were meant to counter the arrogance of some women and their opportunities to give false teaching. Elsewhere in more theological passages, Paul insists that ‘in Christ there is a new creation, the old has passed away’ (2 Cor. 5:17), and that Adam is responsible for sin (Rom. 5:12 ff.). In 1 Cor. 11:3 ff., Paul uses similar ad hominem arguments based on the creation stories to establish a case for women covering their heads when leading in prayer and prophecy in the church and for men leaving their heads uncovered, a cultural practice virtually no one thinks is binding today” (Giles 2003:25).

As it was already observed in the previous two chapters of this study, this is the interpretation of many egalitarians—though not all of them, for good reasons: this is not the only plausible interpretation of the text. Giles is right that false teaching fits the broader concerns of 1 Timothy, but the complementarian objections to this particular take on the text must be adequately answered. As it will be shown in the next chapter, the immediate context gives clear direction for interpreting the text more than theories about trying to circumvent false teaching by issuing a temporary blanket prohibition on one sex—although it is still possible that this is what Paul was doing. At that point in the essay, Giles concludes by making six brief comments that need no explaining here.

In summary, Giles’ “Biblical Case for Women in Leadership” contains both good arguments and weak arguments. It contains both positive and defensive arguments of various kinds. As it was observed above, he is somewhat simplistic in his summarizing of key texts. He does not clearly show the theological or logical relationship between certain points. Some of his exegetical conclusions are not altogether accurate. Some of his theological arguments are in need of more refining. However, he addresses some of the most important issues in the debate: what Paul is really doing in some of his instructions, what Paul’s attitude towards women really was, and what changes took place with the entrance of the New Covenant era.

3.4.2.3 Keener and Belleville in *Two Views*

Two Evangelical feminists make their case for women in ministry in the book *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (2005). This section will examine these arguments put forth by Craig Keener and Linda Belleville.

Belleville is first to make her case in the volume. She contends that the debate can be summarized by asking four questions:

“Does the Bible teach hierarchical structuring of male and female relationships? Do we find women in leadership positions in the Bible? Do women in the Bible assume the same leadership roles as men? Does the Bible limit women from filling certain leadership roles?” (2005b:24).

Belleville then goes on to answer these questions in this order, answering each questions with “no,” “yes,” “yes,” and “no” respectively. Her conclusion, then, is that women should be pastors if they are qualified.

Belleville’s essay is a healthy mix of biblical studies and theology, and she covers all of the central debates. The order of the argument, however, is somewhat disjointed. As it is clear from the quote of questions above, she first begins by a critique (of hierarchy), then follows with two positive arguments for women in ministry, and then reverts back to a negative argument regarding limitations of women’s roles in ministry/church leadership. This doesn’t mean her overall argument is hard to follow, but only that the argument is more of a cumulative case than a linear, analytic argument. The idea—similar to Giles and Wright—is to essentially argue on a

number of fronts and accumulate evidence to the point of convincing readers that her position is more likely than the alternative. This is beneficial because of the number of case studies that can be included in such a presentation.

But this type of argument has weaknesses in that, again, there is no clear set of premises, a clear relationship between each premise to each other and ultimately their relationship to the conclusion. The answers that Belleville gives to each of the four questions may be correct, but do they *necessarily entail* her conclusion—and in a way that is rationally compelling? Perhaps not—at least if one is to give primacy to the questions and their immediate answers. Does it necessarily follow (for example) that if women leaders can be found in Scripture and that there lacks a teaching of hierarchy between male/female roles in Scripture, that women can and should be pastors? Not necessarily. There is plenty of room for other theological and biblical arguments to the contrary.

Belleville does have a number of sub-arguments and sub-premises that she addresses in answering each question, so these areas of weakness are bolstered. For example, the question “Do we find women in leadership positions in the Bible?” is only threatening to the complementarian position if there is good reason to believe these leadership positions are identical or significantly similar to that of pastoral leadership. This is something Belleville does address (2005b:35-64), and her argument is strengthened in that respect.

As far as other possible weaknesses are concerned, Belleville could possibly exclude her arguments regarding the relative nature of “church offices”—as it was pointed out in the

literature review (see chapter two)—since these arguments tend to only mud the waters. Additionally, 1 Corinthians 7 possibly could have played a larger role in her argument since much of it is concerned with overturning a subordinationist and hierarchical understanding of male-female relationships. This chapter is mostly just mentioned in passing (e.g., pp. 63, 74, 102). In any case, these weaknesses should not overshadow what is a relatively good defense of women elders. But there is room for improvement.

Keener's argument takes on the following form. First, he starts "with the passages that appear to support women's involvement in various forms of ministry" (Keener 2005b:207). Then, he critiques evidence "possibly against women's ministry" (2005b:224). Thirdly, he addresses "other considerations," which include male headship in the home (2005b:241), history of interpretation, and Jesus' interaction with women. Thus, Keener's argument is slightly more logical in structure than Belleville's by giving weight to the two major areas of positive evidence and negative evidence. He also does not see hierarchy and headship as necessarily being the first topic that should be addressed. Keener probably takes wise steps in identifying what is more important in the debate: the theology of women in ministry, as opposed to giving equal weight to discussions on marriage, Jesus' attitude towards women, etc. But there are still major points of change that must be considered (see below).

3.5.1 Shaping the Argument

Having evaluated a number of cases for women elders, we can identify some of the key features of a more compelling, Reformed-Evangelical case.

First, at the very least, a Reformed-Evangelical argument for women elders must include a comprehensive study of the prohibition passages (1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Tim. 2:12). The commitment to *Sola Scriptura* places great weight on the proper interpretation of biblical texts. Indeed, the primary methodology of this study is properly interpreting those texts which have been historically used to keep women from full ministry participation. As it has already been indicated, mainstream feminist theologians like Schussler-Fiorenza and Rosemary Radford Reuther have made substantial contributions to the debate by offering credible, alternative interpretations of various biblical texts. But, at the same time, their particular hermeneutic is too critical to fit within a Reformed-Evangelical framework, and thus their argument is not *wholly* compelling to those with differing presuppositions (see “Feminist Theology” in the next chapter).

This critique of the traditional/complementarian interpretation of prohibition passages might best be placed in the beginning. As it was demonstrated above, it is not characteristic of Christian egalitarians to begin an argument for women elders by criticism. Rather, it is typically seen as being most useful that a positive argument is given first, and then answering objections second. Perhaps the reason for this approach is to avoid sounding too negative, or to open the eyes of Christians with regard to how much of a role women really did play at various turns in the biblical narrative, and then question the traditional lens with regard to the prohibition passages. But this approach may suffer from not accomplishing the thing it hopes to accomplish: open the ideological doors to women in ministry. Why so? Precisely because the prohibition passages may be the greatest reason why Evangelicals and Reformed Christians have not changed their

theology on this matter. Until one realizes that such texts as 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 are *not* saying what they think it is saying, it is exceedingly possible that no positive evidence will be seen in the proper light. A rhetorically persuasive case, then, should probably begin by clearing the table by addressing the most controversial and relevant topics (for Evangelical and Reformed Christians).

A second feature is giving proper weight to the proclamation of the gospel—precisely because it is the central, unifying goal of Evangelicals and Reformed Christians, and it is the goal that is directly undermined by banning women elders from all churches. The Great Commission established by Christ (Mt 28; Lk 24) and the outpouring of the Spirit from Acts 2 onward is not simply a side-line topic of the New Testament. The spreading of the “good news” and its unfolding in the Middle-East and the rest of the world is central to New Testament theology. A universal ban of women to preach the gospel in their own churches must be shown to be a contradiction to both the spirit/attitude of the New Testament church and thought.

At this point, one could go any number of directions. Perhaps a beneficial third feature might revisit new angles of ground already covered—such as an examination of hermeneutical ambiguities and their implications to the debate. That is, is the supposed ban on women elders in 1 Timothy 2:12 so clear that it should be dogmatically enforced by the church? Or is the text subject to enough uncertainty that one should not enforce a (potential) ban on women elders on the whole church? Plenty has been done to undermine the hermeneutical philosophy of those in the Reformed and Evangelical community in general, but little has been done to show

hermeneutical problems within such a conceptual framework, especially regarding the Reformed and Evangelical teaching of the “clarity of Scripture.”

A fourth feature would finally discuss the nature of marriage and its implications for ecclesiology. Can “headship” (or any concept of marriage) be carried over into the church? If so, what does this do to the argument for women elders?

Finally, a fifth feature would involve remaining, strong positive evidences/arguments for women elders. This involves the implications and theological significance of women apostles, deacons, teachers, etc. in the NT period. These “confirming arguments” must be placed within an analytical framework of the argument to show just how they are connected with the final conclusion.

3.6 The Proposed Argument

In light of all that has been said so far, below is the proposed case for women elders in an analytical outline:

1. Primary Argument (chapter five)
 - a. (Primary Premise) Scripture (1 Timothy 2:11-14 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 in particular) does not prohibit women from being elders of the church (whether “functional” or “official”).
2. Secondary Argument (chapter six)
 - a. (Secondary Premise) A complementarian reading(s) and applications of 1 Timothy 2:11-14 contradicts (among other things) the New Testament teaching regarding the primacy of the Spirit-driven proclamation of the gospel.
3. Confirming Arguments: (chapter seven)

- a. (Confirming Argument A) Even if 1 Timothy 2:11-14 really amounted to being/supporting a universal ban of female elders (which it does not), the ambiguity of the text precludes dogmatism regarding the ban; weight should be given towards a text and its interpretation in proportion to how certain the meaning and application of that text really is. In fact, it would be better to err on the side of permitting female elders than to err on the side of prohibiting them because of the obscurity of 1 Timothy 2:12 and the importance of Christian ministry.
 - b. (Confirming Argument B) The (good) relationship between husband and wife is (properly) not a simple, permanent hierarchy of a superordinate and a subordinate, but a dynamic relationship of mutual Christ-like love. To whatever degree that this marital relationship extends into the realm of church leadership, this only supports women elders since marriage is fundamentally egalitarian.
 - c. (Confirming Argument C) It is reasonable, not unreasonable, to affirm female elders given that there were women teachers, prophets, apostles, and deacons in the early church. To relegate “eldership” or “the pastoral office” to a separate, special category from these other functions—such that one sex could be automatically, universally, and permanently excluded from it and yet fulfill all the other functions—betrays the inherent sexual equality of Christian ministry as well as the fluidity and developmental nature of church functions and “offices.”
4. (Final Conclusion) Therefore, the truthfulness of conclusions drawn from the primary and secondary arguments are reaffirmed by various aspects of NT theology; affirming women elders is biblically and theologically consistent. (chapter eight)

Notice that there is a clear delineation between “primary” and “confirming” arguments. This is to show where the primary weight and where the function of each premise are. Primary arguments establish the general conclusion of the objective of this study: women should not be prohibited from being elders simply because they are women. These will be undertaken first. Confirming arguments go on to confirm this conclusion by offering positive evidence, and they are all contained in chapter seven of this study.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has identified the methodology of this study and a number of relevant topics associated with it. We have identified basic theological categories and the challenge and purpose of hermeneutics. We have also addressed the nature of theological arguments in favor of women elders, and revealed some of the weaknesses of current Evangelical arguments. While not being exhaustive, it has been generally established how one is to go about the task of constructing this (“new”) case for female elders that avoids the weaknesses of other such cases and avoids bad argumentation altogether.

The next chapter will conclude the prolegomena section of this study by examining more closely the conceptual framework behind the debate over women elders, giving attention to the contemporary debate between complementarianism and egalitarianism, feminist theology, and Roman Catholic theology.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

4. Introduction

There are many concepts and theologies involved in the debate over women elders. Some are more relevant and important than others, and some are easier to identify than others. The point of this chapter is to sort out major concepts and theologies and evaluate them systematically. We will begin with the most relevant theologies—complementarianism and egalitarianism—and then move to a section on feminist theology and Roman Catholic theology, which will function primarily as an external critique.

As it will be demonstrated, many of the central premises of complementarianism lack theological consistency. Egalitarianism (of certain kinds) has its own problems, but they are far less weighty than those of complementarianism. Feminist theology has many promising contributions, especially in the realm of hermeneutics, but it, too, suffers from theological consistency in tremendous ways. In official statements on women priests, Roman Catholic theology appears to give most of its attention to what have been traditionally weak arguments for male elders (e.g., male apostolate, male physical representation), and so do not generally contribute much insight to the Reformed-Evangelical discussion. Nevertheless, some strands of Roman Catholic theology share the same concerns as Evangelical feminists.

4.1 Complementarianism and Egalitarianism

Perhaps the most efficient way of summarizing the conceptual framework underlying the contemporary debate over women elders in today's Reformed and Evangelical circles is by expositing the two competing documents, "The CBE Statement on Men, Women, and Biblical Equality" (1988) and "The Danvers Statement" (1987). These documents still represent the beliefs of the organizations Christians for Biblical Equality and the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood today.

4.1.1 *The Danvers Statement and the Emergence of "Complementarianism"*

There is no question that *The Danvers Statement* (<http://cbmw.org/core-beliefs/>, accessed November 11, 2013) is a reaction to the contemporary development of Evangelical feminism. The opening line to the document says, "We have been moved in our purpose by the following contemporary developments which we observe with deep concern" (CBMW 1988:1). It then goes on to summarize the basic concerns of the Council:

1. The widespread uncertainty and confusion in our culture regarding the complementary differences between masculinity and femininity;
2. the tragic effects of this confusion in unraveling the fabric of marriage woven by God out of the beautiful and diverse strands of manhood and womanhood;" (CBMW 1988:1).

The larger concerns of the Council are not merely theological and ecclesiastical, but social. It is natural for the more fundamentalist wing of Evangelicalism to be perturbed by uncertainties since it may have tended to thrive on certainty (Marsden 1990:82, 105, 113; cf. Smith 2012). The document speaks of the "complementary differences between masculinity and femininity." The term "complementarianism" stems from this assertion—though it is debatable how accurate the term is since it depends on a particular understanding of these "differences," and for the authors

of *The Danvers Statement*, such an understanding includes a personal and permanent subordination of woman to man (or, at least, wives to husbands, depending on the brand of complementarianism).

The document goes on:

- “3. the increasing promotion given to feminist egalitarianism with accompanying distortions or neglect of the glad harmony portrayed in Scripture between the loving, humble leadership of redeemed husbands and the intelligent, willing support of that leadership by redeemed wives;
- 4. the widespread ambivalence regarding the values of motherhood, vocational homemaking, and the many ministries historically performed by women;” (CBMW 1988:1).

In other words, what concerns the Council is that male primacy and female subordinationism within marriage is being questioned. The “glad harmony” of Scriptural marriage is defined as male leadership and female support of male leadership. “Feminist egalitarianism” (which, is somewhat of a misnomer—e.g., there generally isn’t such thing as “chauvinist egalitarianism” or “traditionalist egalitarianism”), on the other hand, is said to be “increasing” and is presented as the antithesis of biblical marriage.

The next point addresses another uncertainty: the traditional roles of women. What is somewhat odd about this paragraph is the fact that “ambivalence” of “the many ministries historically performed by women” is a concern. One may surmise that what the Council means by these “ministries” is the approval of women elders. But this is odd because both the Council and the Evangelical feminists of the time (1980s) generally agree on what the church “ministries historically performed by women” were. Virtually none of the Evangelical feminist voices during the time of *The Danvers Statement* proposed a revised history where women elders

appeared regularly in church history, or anything similar to that claim. Perhaps this is just a poorly constructed paragraph, or perhaps “ministries” is not referring to spiritual or church matters at all.

“5. the growing claims of legitimacy for sexual relationships which have Biblically and historically been considered illicit or perverse, and the increase in pornographic portrayal of human sexuality;

6. the upsurge of physical and emotional abuse in the family;” (CBMW 1988:1)

This concern is broader than the previous points and does not appear to have an immediate connection with egalitarianism or female eldership in the church. But, the Council may disagree. In their perspective, promoting the equality of the sexes in marriage and in church is the cause of (or at least is linked to) sexual perversions and the disintegration of the family (cf. Scanzoni 2010:67). This was made clear in the 2006 preface to the book *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Piper and Grudem 1991, 2006), the landmark publication for the Council:

“...egalitarianism devalues God’s creation design and redemptive calling of women. It fails to do justice to the distinctions that exist between the sexes and wrongly equates any acknowledgement of role distinctions with inequality and discrimination....We must promote heterosexual, monogamous marriages. In order for this to happen, the church must make biblical application to contemporary marriage. Teaching and learning the biblical distinctions in our mutual marital responsibilities and ways of relating is essential. Contrarily, egalitarianism is part of the disintegration of marriage in our culture, whether explicit or implicit, witting or unwitting....When God-given distinctives are denied, altered, or ignored, disaster occurred in marriages, families, and churches. Blurring spousal roles can lead not only to marital failure but also to gender confusion in children” (Duncan and Stinson 2006:5-6).

One potential problem with this assertion is the possibility that patriarchal views of gender might be used as means to justify spousal abuse more than egalitarianism (Bilezikian 2010:49-59; cf. Hogard-Creegan 2011:63). This is for obvious reasons: when men (who are typically more physically strong than most women) are given more power and authority than women in marriage, women tend to bear the brunt of abuses of that power and authority. Indeed, it seems

somewhat unfounded to suggest that “physical and emotional abuse in the family” (CBMW 1988:1) may be a greater concern for complementarians than egalitarians, or that such abuse is more likely caused by egalitarianism than the patriarchalism. The fact is that (to my knowledge) there are no large scale studies to demonstrate an increase in domestic violence either way, so we must, as Van Leeuwen concludes on this matter, “stay tuned” (2007:194-195).

“7. the emergence of roles for men and women in church leadership that do not conform to Biblical teaching but backfire in the crippling of Biblically faithful witness;” (CBMWa:1).

Women elders, in other words, are said not to be biblical and may actually harm a “faithful witness.” This claim will be discussed in full in chapter five. Also, the emphasis on being “Biblical” (capital B) is noticeable, and is expected coming from a more fundamentalist, biblicist methodology. Although egalitarians may not disagree with this approach and terminology, it may be worth asking what would be wrong with “Christ’s teaching” or “Christian witness” as alternatives, since it is arguable that the larger goal of Christianity and the church primarily involves Christ and what it means to be Christian—where biblicality is subordinate to (because it exists to serve) to these goals and categories.

The next two claims address Scripture:

“8. the increasing prevalence and acceptance of hermeneutical oddities devised to reinterpret apparently plain meanings of Biblical texts;

9. the consequent threat to Biblical authority as the clarity of Scripture is jeopardized and the accessibility of its meaning to ordinary people is withdrawn into the restricted realm of technical ingenuity;” (CBMW 1988:1).

In chapter five and seven of this study, concern number eight will be fully shown to be a problem of the Council as much as (or more than) the Evangelical feminists. The subjectivity in the Council’s wording is obvious: “apparently plain meanings of Biblical texts” (i.e., what

constitutes “plain meanings”?). This is true for the next paragraph in speaking of the “clarity of Scripture” (i.e., what is “clarity”?). One can refer back to chapter three for a more thorough discussion on hermeneutics.

The final concern of the Council is the following:

“10. and behind all this the apparent accommodation of some within the church to the spirit of the age at the expense of winsome, radical Biblical authenticity which in the power of the Holy Spirit may reform rather than reflect our ailing culture” (CBMW 1988:1).

In other words, the Council sees Evangelical feminism as little more than a product of its time that has no “Biblical” character. It is asserted that Evangelical feminism is an “accommodation...to the spirit of the age.”

Evangelicals could agree that accommodations that involve a compromise of sound theology and an authentic witness are not good accommodations. But some accommodations certainly can (and should) be made—for that is precisely a “Biblical” approach. This is the argument undertaken in Stackhouse’s book *Finally Feminist* (2005). Stackhouse notes the various accommodations the Scriptural authors make in biblical ethics, whether that involved voluntary circumcision (Acts 16:3), regulations about slavery (Col 3; Eph 6:5; Tit 2:9), or any other number of case studies—all for the purposes of furthering the gospel and the proclamation of God’s Kingdom (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:20-22). What, then, does such accommodations look like in the 21st century? Stackhouse puts it this way:

“My fundamental practical question therefore is this: What are Christians supposed to do when society itself shifts to egalitarianism? There is no longer a rationale for the woman to remain in the culturally expected role of dependence and submission, just as there is no rationale for the grown-up child to act as if he requires his parents’ direction as he did

when he was young. When, under the providence of God and the ongoing, spreading influence of kingdom values, society opens up to the abolition of slavery or the emancipation of women, then Christians can rejoice and be in the vanguard of such change—as we have been in both causes. The irony remains precisely in Christians lagging behind society...” (Stackhouse 2005:72).

A similar point was made in Webb’s 2001 publication *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals* (2001)—that Scripture is contextual and must be treated as such; neither the OT nor the NT has a “static” ethic that can simply be lifted out of the ancient world and transposed into the 21st century. And Christians today ought to make such appropriate accommodations as Paul did.

Though this general point of hermeneutics is uncontested between egalitarians and complementarians, it has been repudiated by complementarians many times when it comes to gender issues, namely, the permanent subordination of women to men and the superiority of men at church (e.g., Grudem 2004; 2005; Schreiner 2002).

At this point in *The Danvers Statement*, the basic purposes are listed which is then followed by a list of affirmations and denials. It is in this section that the clearest theological position of the Council is unfolded. It begins with the relatively uncontroversial assertion:

“1. Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Genesis 1:26-27, 2:18)” (CBMW 1988:2).

As it is clear, the nature of this “equality” and the distinctions in “manhood and womanhood” are undefined. But the meaning of these terms becomes more apparent as the document progresses:

“2. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Genesis 2:18, 21-24; I Corinthians 11:7-9; I Timothy 2:12-14)” (CBMW 1988:2).

It later becomes clear that these ordained “roles” are the basis for the complementarian exclusion of female elders. This “role” theology, therefore, becomes very important in understanding the complementarian paradigm (and its eventual rejection of women elders).

What is unclear is not merely what these “roles” are (the next points answer this question in the document), but is what is meant by the roles being “ordained by God as part of the created order.” In the doctrine of creation in Evangelical and Reformed theology, the purpose and nature of a creature (having its ultimate origin in God) give rise to their functions and capacities, and the creature’s function and capacities largely (though not exhaustively and absolutely) give rise to the creature’s “role” and responsibilities in a given situation. For example, God created birds with a specific purpose and to have a specific nature. They have wings (function, capacity), and therefore fly (role) to live, move, reproduce, protect their young, etc., as they “ought” (responsibility). The vital point that must be stressed is that: (a) it makes little sense to talk about how a creature “ought” to do something if it does not have the capacity to do so, and (b) it also does not make sense to talk about a “role” that does not originate out of a creature’s nature and purpose.

Strangely, it is precisely this doctrine of creation that Evangelical feminists affirm and complementarians deny. Complementarians assert that creatures sometimes ought to do things with which they are not functionally capable of, and that “roles” do not necessarily originate out of the nature of a creature. Two vivid examples will suffice to demonstrate these two points.

The first example comes from an article in the November, 2007 edition of *World* magazine. John Piper, an ardent complementarian, wrote an essay entitled “Combat and Cowardice: Men Were Not Wired to Follow Women Into Danger.” In the article, Piper presents a scenario where a man and woman are walking home from a restaurant and get jumped by a man with a knife. The woman in this case has training in self-defense “and could probably disarm the assailant better than he could.” Piper then says,

“Should he step back and tell her to do it? No. he should step in front of her and be ready to lay down his life to protect her, *irrespective of competency*. It is written on his soul” (Piper 2007:43, italics original).

In other words, the actual way that God created the man does not matter. The traditional doctrine of creation is irrelevant when it comes to defining ethical decisions related to gender; function and capacity, which derives from a creature’s nature, does not determine that person’s role. Some abstract concept of masculinity (and indeed, subjective *feeling*; see Sumner 2003:58-112) determines what is morally acceptable.

A second example is the complementarian doctrine of hierarchy and subordinationism. In his *Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem teaches that men and women are fundamentally equal in being (nature), but unequal in role—so much that women are automatically relegated to a permanent subordinate role in marriage, family, and church life (Grudem 2000a:454-467; cf. Schreiner 2006b:135-6). Yet, this subordinate role supposedly arises from woman’s nature (Piper 2006:31-59; Piper and Grudem 2006:60). This doctrine of creation has been shown by evangelical feminists to be a glaring inconsistency time and time again (see Groothuis 1997b; 2005:301-333; Omelianchuk 2006; 2008; 2011; Birkey 2001). It is a simple contradiction to say

that women are *by nature* equal and *by nature* subordinate (cf. Winston and Winston 2003). This paragraph in *The Danvers Statement*, then, is fraught with serious difficulties.

The Danvers Statement then defines what exactly is meant by these roles and distinctions:

“3. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin (Genesis 2:16-18, 21-24; 3:1-13; I Corinthians 11:7-9).

4. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Genesis 3:1-7, 12, 16).

– In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.

– In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries” (CBMW 1988:2).

It is not immediately clear what “headship” means in this context or in the context of the Scriptures cited. But other works by the Council essentially assert that “headship,” particularly as it is found in Ephesians 5:21, is essentially male-primacy and female subordinationism (Piper and Grudem 2006; Knight 2006:165-178). What the Council is asserting, then, is that male-primacy and female subordinationism, the hierarchical “chain of command” as it were, is “not a result of sin.” It is God’s intention, according to the Council, that men have a direct authority over women—especially in marriage. This is made clear in the next paragraph, which defines the husband’s role as “humble headship” and the woman’s role as “willing submission.”

Sin, then, and not the gifting and purposes of God, is behind the claim for female elders according to complementarianism. The Council is less blunt about this assertion and instead says sin “in church...inclines women to resist limitations on their roles.” Once again, it is unfortunate that little is said about the connection between nature, function, and roles.

In the fifth point, the Council reasserts the principle of male headship in the context of the OT:

“5. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women (Genesis 1:21-27, 2:18; Galatians 3:28). Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (Genesis 2:18; Ephesians 5:21-33; Colossians 3:18-19; I Timothy 2:11-15)” (CBMW 1988:2).

All of this once again assumes a certain kind of hermeneutic that has potential problems (see chapter four and seven, cf. Storkey 2001:100-105).

The next paragraph moves from OT to NT theology:

“6. Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.
 – In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Ephesians 5:21-33; Colossians 3:18-19; Titus 2:2-5; I Peter 3:1-7).
 – In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Galatians 3:28; I Corinthians 11:2-16; I Timothy 2:11-15)” (CBMW 1988:2).

All that Christ's restoration amounts to, then, is a re-assertion of what complementarians believe is present at creation: male primacy and female subordinationism.

There are many unfortunate exclusions and errors in this paragraph that should be noted. Most importantly, the more distinctive elements of NT theology that address gender relationships are excluded. The reference to Galatians 3:28 is cited in order to show that “redemption gives men and women equal share in the blessings of salvation.” But, theologically and historically speaking, this concept is nothing new to redemptive history— and yet Paul presents the text as if

it *is* something new (hence the contrast in verse 25: “but now that faith has come”). Thus, complementarians have tended to downplay the significance of this text (though some egalitarians have overplayed the text as well). Since both women and men took part in God’s redemptive purposes prior to Christ, the complementarian interpretation (as here espoused in *The Danvers Statement*) cannot be fully adequate (Fee 2005:172-185; Belleville 2005b:330; Payne 2009:79-104). At the very least, there must be *ecclesiastical implications* to the verse since (a) all three couplets involve problematic/tense relationships that are challenging the unity of the Galatian church, (b) restoring this unity within the church is Paul’s overarching concern in the letter (Hailey 1995:161-166), and (c) the parallel texts more clearly indicate that church affairs are being addressed (Col 3 and 1 Cor 12:13). Bilezikian summarizes it this way: “[Gal 3:26-29] stand against the formulation of value judgments about persons and against the attribution of worth, rank, role, office, or participation on the basis of race, class or gender” (Bilezikian 2006:96).

Second, Jesus’ own behavior and interaction with women evidently plays no part in the essentials of complementarianism (as represented by *The Danvers Statement*). No references are given to Christ’s counter-cultural interaction with, for example, the woman at the well in John 4, nor his instruction about women learning in Luke 10. This is surely detrimental to any theology that seeks to fully understand the nature of man and woman—especially for a theology that plainly admits (see point seven), “In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission-domestic, religious, or civil, ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin (Dan 3:10-18; Acts 4:19-20, 5:27-29; 1 Pet 3:1-2)” (CBMW 1988:2).

Third, one of the most substantial and lengthy sections on gender in the entire canon is excluded from reference: 1 Corinthians 7. The reason for this is probably because 1 Corinthians 7 is thoroughly egalitarian (see Pierce 2009; Payne 2009:105-108; cf. Storkey 2001:103) and (as chapter seven will demonstrate) is simply not compatible with the tenants of complementarianism.

Fourth, Ephesians 5:21 is cited in support of female subordinationism, but verse 21 begins by some concept of mutual submission: “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” This verse evidently has little bearing on the hierarchical system of complementarianism, and can, in fact, somehow be cited *in support* of such a hierarchical system where male persons stand at the top. This leaves readers wondering just how a person can so easily proof-text verses when they appear to stand in contradiction with what’s being asserted.

Fifth, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is cited in support of the assertion that “some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men.” But the text does not appear to support this either. Rather, it addresses prophecy and appropriate head coverings, not which gender can govern or teach the church. It is also surprising that 14:35 (“for it is improper for a woman to speak in church”) does not appear in the citation list—for it is as strong a prohibition about women in the church as 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

Sixth, similarly, 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is cited as if it is addressing the generic ministries of teaching and exercising authority. On the contrary, the immediate context makes it clear that

Paul is addressing the way in which women are to learn when being taught by men, not simply universally banning all women for all times, places, and churches from being elders. (See chapter five for a full discussion on this text, and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35).

The next points on the document are:

“7. In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission—domestic, religious, or civil— ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin (Daniel 3:10-18; Acts 4:19-20, 5:27-29; I Peter 3:1-2).

8. In both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside Biblical criteria for particular ministries (I Timothy 2:11-15, 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). Rather, Biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will” (CBMW 1988:2).

The point of number seven is to address situations where there is a conflict of authority. The basic implication is that women are not obligated to sin if their husbands tell them to. God's authority is greater than any human being's authority.

The problem is that the full implications of the initial assertion (“Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women”) may not be consistently carried out in the complementarian paradigm. That is, *how* is “Christ” “the supreme authority and guide for men and women”? Because if Christ's life is one of humility, servanthood, and submission, then this undermines the document's previous teaching about headship and authority in Ephesians 5. If husbands (“head”) are to love their wives as Christ (“head”) loved the church, and this love is not simply an exercise of authority but a demonstration of servanthood and submission, then the simple hierarchy so central to the complementarian model begins to breakdown (Padgett 2011). “Headship” cannot so easily be assumed to mean “authority” or “male-primacy.” In fact, being the “head” of a woman may actually challenge what complementarianism asserts that it does.

The purpose of point eight is particularly noteworthy since its purpose is to directly undermine female elders by pitting “a heartfelt sense of call to ministry” against Scripture. But as it will be demonstrated in this study, this contradiction is a false dichotomy. Not only does the Christian God give desires that match revealed, biblical will, but God does not forbid women from functioning as elders in the first place (see chapter five).

The document unfortunately does not address what could easily be a more pressing problem for this matter: women’s capacities, not merely their desires. It is one thing for a Christian woman to have a feeling and subjective “sense” that she should be a pastor or preach and teach in a church, and it is another thing for a Christian woman to *have that ability*. What the document doesn’t address, in other words, are situations where women are fully capable of doing certain ministries that might typically be “pastoral.” As chapter five and seven will demonstrate, it is still a challenge for complementarians to address this problem today just as it was when *The Danvers Statement* was written.

The last two points of *The Danvers Statement* are the following:

“9. With half the world's population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have heard the gospel; with the stresses and miseries of sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, aging, addiction, crime, incarceration, neuroses, and loneliness, no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without a fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world (I Corinthians 12:7-21).

10. We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large” (CBMW 1988:2).

The point of paragraph nine is probably to placate women who desire and have the ability to be elders by essentially saying, “there are plenty of other things to be doing than pastoral ministry.” Evangelical feminists may assert that they do not feel that they have a fulfilling ministry if they are prohibited from being elders, and this paragraph is saying that this is impossible. No man or woman “need ever live without a fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world.”

There may be some truth in this statement insofar as that all Christians can be Christ-like and ethical persons wherever they are. But this still does not address the underlying objection provided by egalitarians: banning women to do things they are capable of doing undermines the proclamation of the gospel. The Kingdom of God is not furthered when spiritual gifts are stifled and limited to private settings. This has been the plea of Evangelical feminists all along (e.g., Wolterstorff 1986:288).

4.1.2 The Evangelical Feminist Response to the CBMW and *The Danvers Statement*

Before going on to exposit the CBE essay “Men, Women, and Biblical Equality” (1988, <http://www.cbeinternational.org/?q=content/men-women-and-biblical-equality>, accessed November 12, 2013), it is appropriate to summarize in broad historical terms what exactly this “biblical feminist” group stands for. Elaine Storkey does a particularly good job in summarizing the Christian egalitarian/biblical feminist position in context to other feminist theologies, and she is worth quoting at length:

“Biblical feminists accept that the Bible is passed down through the centuries is canonical—God’s revelation to us. Yet, they insist that it has something to say to them

personally as women, not just as adjuncts to men. Culturally formed gender differences are no hindrance to God, for God searches out and speaks to women as they are. Strictly speaking, however, biblical feminism is not part of a modernist reaction. Certainly it rejects the reductionism of premodernity gender roles. It discards the essentialist assumptions that are often brought to the Bible and believes that Scripture supports a retelling of the story of God's relationship with women, which cuts through most of the patriarchy of the past. Biblical feminists subject the Bible to a rigorous study so they can understand its origins, culture, and the nuances evident in its human authors. They do not deny that the Bible also contains stories that can never be encouraging to women, those "texts of terror," such as the gang rape in Judges 19, which Phyllis Tribble says cannot bring anything but sorrow for women....Biblical feminism acknowledges all these as crucial issues for women, but by doing so, it incurs the wrath of many theological traditionalists who see biblical feminism as the enemy, with little understanding of its crucial work. At the same time, biblical feminists are at odds epistemologically with much of the rest of feminist theology, for they reject the primacy of women's experience as the interpretive framework with which to approach the Bible. For them, although experience is crucially important, it cannot be the standpoint from which we understand reality....Women's experience cannot have the last word, for experience itself has to be examined and understood" (Storkey 2001:111-112).

McCreight in *Feminist Reconstructions of Theology* puts the matter even simpler: "The distinguishing factor between biblical feminists and other theologians is their strong doctrine of Scripture" (2000:38). Both Storkey and McCreight's assertions will prove to be true in the following discussion below.

The document "Men, Women, and Biblical Equality," produced by Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE), is an excellent theological representation of biblical feminism in addition to functioning as a response to the recent development of "complementarianism." It opens with the following paragraph:

"The Bible teaches the full equality of men and women in Creation and in Redemption (Gen 1:26-28, 2:23, 5:1-2; I Cor 11:11-12; Gal 3:13, 28, 5:1). The Bible teaches that God has revealed Himself in the totality of Scripture, the authoritative Word of God (Matt 5:18; John 10:35; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21). We believe that Scripture is to be interpreted holistically and thematically. We also recognize the necessity of making a

distinction between inspiration and interpretation: inspiration relates to the divine impulse and control whereby the whole canonical Scripture is the Word of God; interpretation relates to the human activity whereby we seek to apprehend revealed truth in harmony with the totality of Scripture and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To be truly biblical, Christians must continually examine their faith and practice under the searchlight of Scripture” (CBE 1989:1).

Rather than beginning with a list of contemporary concerns like *The Danvers Statement*, the CBE statement asserts the broader concepts of equality from the outset. The next sentence asserts two important things that may be distinguished from complementarianism.

First, the Statement asserts that God has revealed Himself “in the totality of Scripture” and then that “Scripture is to be interpreted holistically and thematically.” The suggestion is that a true biblical theology of gender must give full attention to the specific discipline of biblical theology—which stands between systematic and exegetical theology in the encyclopedia of theology (Vos 1948:5; Scobie 1992:5-6; Carson 2008:90-91). Read as a larger story and grand narrative, Evangelical feminists argue (as it was shown in chapter one of this study) that there is movement towards more and more equality and that neither Testament has an “ultimate ethic” that defines permanent gender roles once and for all (Webb 2001; 2005). One must not simply exegete a few controversial passages and build a theology in isolation from the rest of Scripture. This is asserted again in the phrase “the whole canonical Scripture is the Word of God.” Three times, then, the document stresses the totality of Scripture. And given that such works as *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (2008) and the expanding *New Studies in Biblical Theology* series exclude “gender” and “masculinity” and “femininity” as biblical-theological categories, perhaps the CBE statement’s stress on whole-Bible biblical theology is warranted.

The second assertion worth noting is the reference to Scripture as “the authoritative Word of God.” The authors of the document align themselves with the same Evangelical assumptions about Scripture as complementarians. Contrary to the often-asserted claim that all Christian feminists sacrifice the divine nature of Scripture, the CBE document claims that not only is egalitarianism theologically compatible with a high view of Scripture, but it is the result of such views of Scripture (Nicole 2006c; 1986; cf. Payne 2009:27-29). From a historical perspective, this seems to have proven itself many times since the late 1980s in the simple membership of Evangelical feminists in the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS)—which requires all members to subscribe to the inerrancy of Scripture. In fact, numerous past Presidents of the ETS have been openly egalitarian (Alan F. Johnson in 1982; Stanley Gundry in 1978; Walter Kaiser Jr. in 1977; Vernon Grounds in 1963; Roger Nicole in 1956). The President of CBE since 2001, Mimi Haddad, is also part of a study group in the ETS. Furthermore, some of the most prominent Evangelical scholars who have defended the authority and inspiration of Scripture have been Christian egalitarians (e.g., Nicole, Bruce).

The CBE Statement then unfolds what it means by upholding the authority of Scripture by drawing the distinction between “inspiration and interpretation” (CBE 1989:1). The point is to correct those who have wrongly asserted that egalitarians have compromised the doctrine of Scripture via their interpretations. Just because a Christian or group of believers may disagree with a particular feminist interpretation of Scripture does not automatically mean that the truthfulness and inspiration of the Scripture has been compromised.

Nevertheless, the complementarian objection behind these phrases in the CBE Statement are not without warrant. In the 1975 publication *Man as Male and Female*, the egalitarian Paul Jewett made the controversial assertion (for the Evangelical community) that the Apostle Paul essentially taught contradictory teachings regarding gender (cf. Mollenkott in Conn 1984:106). At some points in the NT letters, we read from Paul the traditionalist rabbinic scholar who asserted the subordinate position of women (e.g., 1 Cor 11; 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:11-12), and at other times we read from Paul the New Covenant counter-culture feminist who asserted equality between the sexes (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 7, etc.) (Jewett 1975). For Jewett, then, the issue isn't a matter of different interpretations or differing methods of hermeneutics. Paul was simply inconsistent. This assertion disturbed Evangelicals who had a higher view of Scripture and more stringent standards regarding its truthfulness and consistency—especially since Jewett went on to write the highly influential work *The Ordination of Women* in 1980, which repeated the claims about Paul. As it was observed above in the previous section, such compromises on the doctrine of Scripture led the Reformed scholar James Hurley to say the following a year later in *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*: “The authority of Scripture is the issue which is finally under debate” (Hurley 1981: 204). Hurley, then, saw the debate over female elders and the theology of gender in the 1970s as merely symptomatic of more fundamental disagreements (e.g., doctrine of Scripture).

Despite the vital distinctions in the opening paragraph of the CBE Statement, and despite the historical facts observed above, complementarians continue to make broad-brushed assertions about Evangelical feminists compromising the authority and inerrancy of Scripture (e.g., Duncan

and Stinson 2006:4-12; Grudem 2004:20; 2006a). Evidently, this is an area of debate that will not be settled easily.

At the next point in the CBE Statement, a series of teachings are affirmed, beginning with creation:

“Creation

1. The Bible teaches that both man and woman were created in God’s image, had a direct relationship with God, and shared jointly the responsibilities of bearing and rearing children and having dominion over the created order (Gen 1:26-28)” (CBE 1989:1).

The authors go beyond *The Danvers Statement* in merely affirming the equality and image-bearing status of man and woman. Three assertions stemming from the Genesis narrative (and elsewhere in Scripture) draw a distinction from complementarianism.

The first is that man and woman “had a direct relationship with God.” The purpose of this assertion is probably to contrast with the complementarian suggestion that men more or less function as mediators between God and women, which is one of the many implications of the husband being the chief “spiritual leader” or “priest” of the home (see Groothuis 2005:312-328, in contrast with, e.g., Waldron 2011). Women do not have an “indirect” relationship to God, then, which requires male representation in every sphere of church life (and beyond), but a “direct relationship to God.” Such an assertion is substantiated in the Genesis narrative chiefly by their united creation in Genesis 1:26-28, as well as the separate discussions God has with Adam and Eve and the separate punishments given to each respectively (Gen 3).

Second, Adam and Eve are said to have joint responsibility in fulfilling the “creation mandate.” This is perhaps to contrast with complementarian stereotypes about what a godly household is like—where childrearing (of all ages) is more of a feminine, motherly activity and where man leaves the home to work most of the day (see Groothuis 1997a; cf. Van Leeuwen 2002). Third, the CBE statement points out that the command to dominate over creation is given to men and women alike. Although this is not acknowledged in *The Danvers Statement*, complementarians do openly concede on this point when discussing Genesis (e.g., Ortlund 2006; Finley 2001:54; Hurley 1981:32; Foh 1979:52, 187-188).

The next two paragraphs are:

“2. The Bible teaches that woman and man were created for full and equal partnership. The word “helper” (*ezer*) used to designate woman in Genesis 2:18 refers to God in most instances of Old Testament usage (e.g. I Sam 7:12; Ps 121:1-2). Consequently the word conveys no implication whatsoever of female subordination or inferiority.

3. The Bible teaches that the forming of woman from man demonstrates the fundamental unity and equality of human beings (Gen 2:21-23). In Genesis 2:18, 20 the word “suitable” (*kenegdo*) denotes equality and adequacy” (CBE 1989:1).

Point two seeks to undermine the traditional understanding that women’s subordination in creation is proved in her being a “helper” (עֹזֵר). Complementarians, again, eventually began openly conceding this point in their literature as time went on (e.g., Piper and Grudem 2006:87; Köstenberger 1994:262), though they do not concede that female subordination and a simple hierarchy is absent from Genesis 1-2 (Ortlund 2006; Grudem 2004).

Point three goes further into the details and asserts that woman’s origination from man does not demonstrate any kind of superiority of man over woman, but is meant to demonstrate the exact opposite: that woman is fundamentally equal in nature and being with man, sharing in the

essence of humanity with man. And, again, as CBE argues, the origin of woman from man, specifically as the text uses the term “suitable,” demonstrates “equality and adequacy.”

- “4. The Bible teaches that man and woman were co-participants in the Fall: Adam was no less culpable than Eve (Gen 3:6; Rom 5:12-21; I Cor 15:21-22).
5. The Bible teaches that the rulership of Adam over Eve resulted from the Fall and was therefore not a part of the original created order. Genesis 3:16 is a prediction of the effects of the Fall rather than a prescription of God’s ideal order” (CBE 1989:1).

Point four and five make historical-theological corrections. Famous early church theologians have blamed Eve for the fall (e.g., Tertullian in *On the Apparel of Women*). In contrast, the CBE asserts that man is just as responsible for the fall as woman. Paul, for example, sometimes puts emphasis on Eve’s sin (1 Tim 2:13-15), but he also puts emphasis on Adam’s sin (Rom 5:11-15; 1 Cor 15:21-22) without even referring to Eve. Additionally, some theologians also taught that man’s authority over woman and the subjection of woman to the man was a part of the created order—and that this was substantiated by Genesis 3:16: “To the woman He said, ‘I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you’,” (ESV). However, the Statement claims (as complementarians concur) that this phrase “he will rule over you” is a description of what *will* happen because of the fall into sin, not a prescription of what *should* take place.

“Redemption

6. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ came to redeem women as well as men. Through faith in Christ we all become children of God, one in Christ, and heirs to the blessings of salvation without reference to racial, social, or gender distinctives (John 1:12-13; Rom 8:14-17; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 3:26-28)” (CBE 1989:1).

This assertion is less controversial in terms of the contemporary debate; both egalitarians and complementarians agree that salvation in Christ does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, etc.

“Community

7. The Bible teaches that at Pentecost the Holy Spirit came on men and women alike. Without distinction, the Holy Spirit indwells women and men, and sovereignly distributes gifts without preference as to gender (Acts 2:1-21; 1 Cor 12:7, 11, 14:31)” (CBE 1989:1).

This is one of the theological claims of the CBE Statement that has a direct bearing on the question of female elders. While the paragraph is not a direct argument for female elders, it is certainly an indirect one. By establishing the biblical truth that women are given gifts of teaching/pastoring as much as men, the burden of proof then lies with the one who says such gifts are actually prohibited in church simply because of a person’s sex—especially since these gifts and abilities originate in God’s own creative act. *The Danvers Statement* does not address this matter—nor most of the contents in this section of the CBE Statement.

The next paragraph elaborates on the previous point about gifts:

“8. The Bible teaches that both women and men are called to develop their spiritual gifts and to use them as stewards of the grace of God (1 Peter 4:10-11). Both men and women are divinely gifted and empowered to minister to the whole Body of Christ, under His authority (Acts 1:14, 18:26, 21:9; Rom 16:1-7, 12-13, 15; Phil 4:2-3; Col 4:15; see also Mark 15:40-41, 16:1-7; Luke 8:1-3; John 20:17-18; compare also Old Testament examples: Judges 4:4-14, 5:7; 2 Chron 34:22-28; Prov 31:30-31; Micah 6:4)” (CBE 1989:1).

The logical progression of this paragraph is evident from the previous paragraph. Not only does God distribute spiritual gifts without gender discrimination, but God calls Christians to use them “as stewards of the grace of God” and “to minister to the whole Body of Christ.” God, in other words, does not give abilities to the church only to forbid their use. This is clearly an argument for female elders—and it resembles some of the argumentation in chapter seven of this study.

“9. The Bible teaches that, in the New Testament economy, women as well as men exercise the prophetic, priestly and royal functions (Acts 2:17-18, 21:9; 1 Cor 11:5; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Rev 1:6, 5:10). Therefore, the few isolated texts that appear to restrict the full redemptive freedom of women must not be interpreted simplistically and in

contradiction to the rest of Scripture, but their interpretation must take into account their relation to the broader teaching of Scripture and their total context (1 Cor 11:2-16, 14:33-36; 1 Tim 2:9-15).

10. The Bible defines the function of leadership as the empowerment of others for service rather than as the exercise of power over them (Matt 20:25-28, 23:8; Mark 10:42-45; John 13:13-17; Gal 5:13; 1 Peter 5:2-3)" (CBE 1989:1).

Paragraph nine continues the more argumentative stance as it attempts to lay more foundations for gender equality in church functions. The first assertion concerns the reality of the New Covenant community, and that women in the New Testament fulfill the fundamental "offices" of prophet, priest, and king. One cannot simply assume that these offices are an inherently masculine function (as, for example, Poythress appears to do in 2006b:154-156 and Waldron 2011). The discontinuity between the Testaments is brought into focus for the obvious purpose of nullifying any argument that wishes to draw a straight line from the Old Testament priesthood (which required males only) and the New Testament equivalent of eldership (if such an equivalency is even legitimate; see cf. Hübner 2013a:13-26), which would automatically prohibit women from being elders. But if the Council's understanding of the New Covenant is accurate and there is a priesthood of all believers, the argument against female elders in the New Covenant era due to the male priesthood in the Old Covenant era does seem unsubstantiated. Grenz demonstrated this in 1995 and 2005, and the complementarian Justin Taylor attempted to refute the argument in late 2005—or at least show that Grenz's argument does not necessitate the egalitarian conclusion of female elders.

The paragraph goes on to assert that the supposed ban on women elders and limitations placed on women in church ministry are in contradiction to the rest of New Testament theology. This is the argument of chapter six in this work.

Paragraph ten specifically defines what leadership in ministry entails: servanthood. Being an elder of the church is not simply exercising authority over other people; it is submitting to and serving others (Padgett 2011). This important clarification contradicts the simplicity of complementarianism, where leadership is essentially exercising authority at the top of a hierarchy.

The final section of the document addresses the family:

“11. The Bible teaches that husbands and wives are heirs together of the grace of life and that they are bound together in a relationship of mutual submission and responsibility (1 Cor 7:3-5; Eph 5:21; 1 Peter 3:1-7; Gen 21:12). The husband’s function as “head” (*kephale*) is to be understood as self-giving love and service within this relationship of mutual submission (Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7).

12. The Bible teaches that both mothers and fathers are to exercise leadership in the nurture, training, discipline and teaching of their children (Ex 20:12; Lev 19:3; Deut 6:6-9, 21:18-21, 27:16; Prov 1:8, 6:20; Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:20; 2 Tim 1:5; see also Luke 2:51)” (CBE 1989:1).

Again, there is a stress on equality and mutuality. There is also clarification regarding the husband as “head,” which was already discussed above; “headship,” according to the Council, does not simply mean “top of the hierarchy.” The final paragraph challenges two major stereotypes and/or complementarian beliefs, where (a) only women are to be the nurturers and primary teachers of children, and (b) where women do not have leadership in the home.

What the document doesn’t address, and few Evangelical feminists have stressed, is that the mutual relationship that exists in marriage naturally extends out from the home and into the church. This type of argument has been more thoroughly argued by complementarians (e.g., Poythress 2006a; cf. Madsen 2010:234)—though obviously to show how the hierarchy (not

equality) between man and woman in marriage should exist in the church. But if marriage is essentially egalitarian, then this argument works against the complementarian thesis (Padgett 2011). This is one of the arguments found in chapter seven of this study.

The last half of the CBE Statement summarizes the application of these doctrines in the community and in the family. The most relevant paragraph in this small section is the following:

“2. In the church, public recognition is to be given to both women and men who exercise ministries of service and leadership. In so doing, the church will model the unity and harmony that should characterize the community of believers. In a world fractured by discrimination and segregation, the church will dissociate itself from worldly or pagan devices designed to make women feel inferior for being female. It will help prevent their departure from the church or their rejection of the Christian faith” (CBE 1989:2).

This, of course, is the conclusion of our study.

While I generally favor the CBE Statement over *The Danvers Statement*, the CBE Statement could be improved in several ways. The first was already mentioned: a connection could be drawn between the sphere of the home and the sphere of the church. The Statement also does not explore the purpose of gender itself in the theology of creation, nor draws possible implications about the differences (e.g., biological) between man and woman (see Piper and Grudem 2006:416). This is important to note since radical egalitarianism (a kind that sees male/female distinction as oppressive and abhors all forms of hierarchy) may actually be counter-productive for the cause of justice (note Storkey 2001:55-56). This fortunately is not generally the kind of egalitarianism espoused by CBE, but without clear affirmations regarding the goodness and purpose of sexual differences, it might be easy for one to err in this way. Of course, it is possible

that the lack of these points were excluded simply for the sake of keeping the small document concise. But it is worth noting in any case.

4.2 Feminist Theology

It is inadequate to speak of “feminist theology” in the singular since it is such a diverse method of theology. Indeed, there are feminist *theologies*, and in a seemingly endless variety. Despite the various sub-categories that may be attributed to feminist theology, it is possible to accurately outline and analyze some of the major themes. We will use the works of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rosemary Reuther as a general guide.

4.2.1 Contours of Feminist Theology: Exposing Patriarchy and Androcentricity

Central to the enterprise of feminist theology is exposing the male-centeredness of the world in which all people live. The two terms “patriarchy” and “androcentrism” summarize this key theme. *Patriarchy* (or revised in some circles as “kyriarchy,” see Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:7, cf. 19, 60) refers to a social relationship of hierarchy (oppressed and oppressor; often males as the oppressor and females as the oppressed), whereas *androcentrism* refers to a pattern of thought where man/male represents the generic human (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:60). So for example, in language, “he” may include “she,” but “she” never includes “he.” The “default,” as it were, is male. Feminist theology seeks to correct this cosmological imbalance by first revealing this male-bias, and then instigating methods of reform. In Reuther’s words, “feminist theology systematically corrects the androcentrism of each category of Christianity” (1993:38). In

Schüssler Fiorenza's words, "Feminist studies in religion and the*logy seek to correct the one-sided vision of G*d and the world and to articulate a different the*-ethical optics and religious imagination" (2011:15). The ultimate goal is the full recognition of women as human beings: "The critical principle of feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity of women" (Reuther 1993:18). Women, in contrast to historical opinion, "are not beasts of burden, sex-objects, temptresses, or goddesses. Rather, all wo/men without any exceptions are fully entitled citizens in society and religion who should have equal power, rights, and responsibilities" (Schüssler Fiorenza 2011:25).

Many feminist theologians attribute patriarchy and androcentrism to the theological concept of sin. Reuther says:

"Not sex, but sexism—the distortion of gender (as well as other differences between human groups) into structures of unjust domination and subordination—is central to the origin and transmission of this alienated, fallen condition. Feminism, far from rejecting concepts of the Fall, can rediscover its meaning in a radically new way" (Reuther 1993:37).

Schüssler Fiorenza states, "A critical feminist theology of liberation has always worked with the notion of structural sin" (2011:50). By "structural sin," Schüssler Fiorenza distinguishes from the traditional concept of sin (alienation of the creature from God and disobedience to God's law), though it should be noted that historic Christian theology does not exclude "structural sin." Pui-lan discusses a similar point in discussing Asian feminist theology:

"Asian feminist theologians find that they have to reinterpret sin and redemption anew in the contemporary context. The traditional emphasis on the individual and spiritual dimension of sin proves to be less than helpful for women. Women are not just sinners; they are the sinned against too" (Pui-lan 2000:80).

Pui-lan also redefines sin, though she gives emphasis to the environmental side of evil: “Sin is not so much human depravity and disobedience, but the breaking down of the interconnectedness of all things...Sin is the systematic and structural evil that allows a tiny minority of the human race to use up the resources that exist for all” (Pui-lan 2000:93). Other Asian feminist theologians do not find such a redefinition of sin necessary, and speak of sin as the thing that people are liberated from (as opposed to being liberated from patriarchy): “The Church must look upon itself as a community of people who have been *liberated from sin*, a redeemed people” (Tan 1989:276, cited in Pui-lan 2000:102, emphasis mine).

Feminist theologians are forceful in pointing out the pervasiveness of patriarchy and androcentrism. The influence and extent of these social structures and ideas is incalculable. Schüssler Fiorenza goes as far as to say that, due to the impact of patriarchy and androcentrism, the world people live in today is merely a projection of the male:

“As long as they live in a patriarchal world of oppression, women are never fully ‘liberated.’ However, this does not lead feminists to argue that historical agency and knowledge of the world are not possible. Western science, philosophy, and theology have not known the world as it is. Rather, they have created it in their interest and likeness as they wished it to be. Therefore, feminists/womanists insist that it is possible for liberatory discourses to articulate a different historical knowledge and vision of the world” (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:106).

Scripture, understood as God’s word in human words, is no exception; it has a patriarchal stamp. Patriarchy and androcentrism has stained the Old and New Testaments—and to a critical point where it may or may not be useful to the feminist (see chapter three).

As it has been demonstrated in the literature review, Evangelical feminists agree with feminist theologians that patriarchy and androcentrism are the result of the fall, and that Scripture

embodies this particular taint. But they deny that this necessitates a rejection of a wholly inspired, authoritative, and unreliable Bible (see CBE 1988). Evangelical feminists also agree that there are “structural evils” (or “structural sin”), such as various hierarchies of oppressed/oppressor; the Old Testament prophets, in particular, bear out this theme. However, there is debate about what qualifies as a structure of domination and evil. For example, Evangelical feminists see heterosexuality as God’s norm for creation, while Schüssler Fiorenza believes “heteronormativity” is one of several “structures of domination” (2011:8). On another topic, Groothuis has persuasively argued that pro-abortion policies in societies act as a catalyst for male domination, female subordination, and women’s oppression (1997a:78-87). Schüssler Fiorenza believes the opposite: “the ongoing struggle around the right to birth control and the termination of pregnancy document that women still have a struggle for their full citizenship and decision making democratic rights” (2011:18). In short, there is much debate within feminist theology over some of its most basic tenets.

Nevertheless, there remains some agreement. All versions of feminism (to my knowledge) support women’s place in pastoral ministry/ordination, but there is disagreement over *why* women should be elders, priests, bishops, etc. Some feminist theologians see Christian Scriptures as the greatest supporter of women’s ministry, while others see it as the greatest obstacle. These disagreements can largely be explained by differing views of Scripture and hermeneutics (see “Hermeneutics” above).

4.2.2 Contours of Feminist Theology: Women’s Experience and Liberation

The “other side of the coin” of feminist theology is an emphasis on women’s experience. Since world history has largely been dominated by maleness, male influence, and male perspectives, the female counterpart to all of these aspects of creation has been lacking. The importance of women’s experience in the theological task is amplified since our knowledge of the divine is analogical—depending directly upon metaphors, symbols, etc. that are derived from human experience. Reuther explains:

“Human experience is the starting point and the ending point of the hermeneutical circle....The uniqueness of feminist theology lies not in its use of the criterion of experience but rather in its use of *women’s* experience, which has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the past. The use of *women’s* experience in feminist theology, therefore, explodes as a critical force, exposing classical theology, including its codified traditions, as based on *male* experience rather than on universal human experience” (Reuther 1993:13; cf. Pui-lan 2000:39).

Schüssler Fiorenza refines this core objective, giving emphasis to *which* experience is central in shaping feminist theology—particularly *feminist hermeneutics*:

“The hermeneutical starting point of critical feminist interpretation is not simply the experience of wo/men. Rather it is wo/men’s experiences of injustice that has been critically explored with a hermeneutics of suspicion in the process of ‘conscientization’” (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:13).

Elsewhere she states:

“Only when the unique hermeneutical viewpoint of multiple-oppressed wo/men comes into focus will the ‘darkened eye’ be restored. Only then can feminist studies in religion begin to ‘see a circle rather than just a segment’” (2011:16).

Indeed, feminist theology may be properly seen as a subset of “liberation theology.” Liberation theology seeks to uncover the theme of the oppressor and oppressed in Scripture, the social implications of the Christian gospel and message, and the structures of injustice that enslave women, people of certain ethnicities, and the poor (see Gutierrez 1988:1-39; 83-161). Liberation theologians argue that Jesus and in fact, the God of the Bible has a particular concern for the

poor and the oppressed, and to miss this message for today, is to miss the key to great social change in the church and in the world.

Thus, the works of Reuther, Schüssler Fiorenza, and other feminist theologians are saturated with assertions about “liberation”—for liberation (from patriarchy and androcentrism), is the ultimate goal:

“Feminism claims that *women too* are among those oppressed whom God comes to vindicate and liberate” (Reuther 1993:24).

“Feminist theology makes explicit what was overlooked in male advocacy of the poor and oppressed: that liberation must start with the oppressed of the oppressed, namely, *women* of the oppressed. This means that the critique of hierarchy must become explicitly a critique of patriarchy. All the liberating prophetic visions must be deepened and transformed to include what was not included: women” (Reuther 1993:32).

“As long as they live in a patriarchal world of oppression, women are never fully ‘liberated’” (Schüssler-Fiorenza 2013:106).

4.2.3 Contours of Feminist Theology: Christology in Feminist Theology

That the Incarnation of God (according to traditional Christianity) came in the form of a *male* human being, poses a potential challenge to feminist theology. Some feminist theologians reject Jesus as useful to the feminist cause altogether, while others do not. Reuther, for example, concludes after her study on the subject that, “Theologically speaking, then, we might say that the maleness of Jesus has no ultimate significance” (1993:137). Rather, “It has social symbolic significance in the framework of societies of patriarchal privilege...” (Reuther 1993:137). Three years later Anne Carr would draw the same conclusion (1982:292; cf. 1996:162-179), asserting

that the various aspects of the Incarnate Jesus (historical, racial, geographical, biological, provenance) are “contingent” rather than absolutes.

Evangelical feminists are essentially on the same page. Grenz and Kjesbo say:

“Because Jesus was a particular historical person, his maleness was integral to the completion of his task. This is not to say that the incarnation of our Lord as male means that maleness constitutes essential humanness or that women are in any sense deficient humans. Rather than dethroning the male as God’s ideal for humankind, the maleness of Jesus provided the vehicle whereby his earthly life could reveal the radical difference between God’s ideal and the structures that characterize human social interaction. In the context in which he lived, Jesus’ maleness was an indispensable dimension of his vocation. Only a male could have offered the radical critique of the power systems of his day, which is so prevalent in Jesus’ message...The liberating work of the male Jesus occurred in the context of the male-female roles within the orders of human society....Our Lord liberated men and women from their bondage to the social orders that violate God’s intention for human life-in-community (Grenz and Kjesbo 1995: 209).”

Asian feminist theology has a similar position: “The question about the maleness of Christ does not concern [Asian feminist theologians] as much as in the West, since their cultures are full of gods and goddesses and do not prescribe that the salvific figure needs to be male” (Pui-lan 2000:97).

Thomas Oden in *Classic Christianity* (2009) traces this topic in the writings of the early church. After examining several classical authors, he concludes that “Classical exegetes reasoned that both maleness and femaleness were both honored equally in the incarnation” (2009:265; cf. 284, 348). If Jesus was to be a genuine Savior in God’s redemptive plan, the incarnation had to be human, and to be human, one has to be born, and to be born, one has to come from a woman. So to equally represent the sexes in the great Event, Jesus was a *man*, being born of a *woman*. This

is yet another example of how the maleness of Jesus supports little of the traditional models of patriarchy and androcentrism.

As far as the life and teachings of Christ, feminist theologians again differ in their interpretation.

For example, the suffering of Christ is a powerful tool in Asian feminist theology:

“The fact that Jesus suffers shows that he is fully human, a co-sufferer with humanity. Jesus does not belong to the oppressors; he is one of the *minjung* (the masses). Many Christian women in Asia identify with such a compassionate God who suffers in solidarity with them, listens to their cries and responds to their pleas” (Pui-lan 2000:81; cf. 84 and Filipino feminist theology).

Pui-lan goes on to delineate the Christology of the Koreans (“Jesus as a Priest of *Han*”) and the Chinese (“An Organic Model of Christology”). The latter view is Pui-lan’s area of specialty, and it can be summarized in the following points: (1) due to the language and culture of the Chinese, the majority of theological controversies and discussions regarding Christ in church history would have made little sense (e.g., being “one essence with the Father,” ransom, atonement theories, images like Messiah and King of kings, etc.); (2) “we have to break through familiar images of Christ and dare to use non-human metaphors” (2000:91); (3) “sin and redemption must be rethought for sin is more than a disobedience or egotism of human beings, but has a cosmological dimension as well” (2000:91); (4) “christological understandings that easily lend support to any form of political and cultural imperialism must be debunked” (2000:91); (5) “the notion that Jesus is unique, particular, and the only way to God must be demystified” (2000:91); (6) such reconstructions as these do, in fact, have scriptural support (e.g., the image of Christ as vine and branches, etc.). Her own summary is:

“...an organic model of Christology explores the implications of organic and natural metaphors for Christ, rediscovers the potential of wisdom Christology, and proposes to see Jesus as one epiphany of God. It accents Jesus’ teachings about right living, his

relation with the natural environment and other human beings, his subversive wisdom on ecojustice, and the promise of God's compassion for all humankind. His death and passion are not singled out, but seen within the larger context of his struggle for justice for all—humans and all of creation...Sin is not so much human depravity or disobedience, but the breaking down of the interconnectedness of all things, threatening the web of life and the suffocation of mother earth" (Pui-lan 2000:93).

Christology in feminist theology also overlaps with the liberation theme. Christ comes as the great liberator—one of the oppressed who corrects and deconstructs the sinful structures of patriarchy in the first century (Reuther 1993:136, cf. 201). The corollary of this is, if a ban on women elders can be proven to be oppressive to women, then through the liberating work of Christ, women can and should be elders (Reuther 1993:194-213). The principles of mutuality and community—also central to feminist theology—further bolsters this conclusion (see “Partnership of Equals” in Pui-lan 2000:105-109).

4.2.4 An Evaluation of Feminist Theology

Feminist theology as a whole awakens scholars, Christians and otherwise, to the various assumptions people and societies make regarding sex (biological) and gender (social). It challenges all people to ask if and how they have been influenced by patriarchy and androcentrism—especially as it relates to Christian theology and biblical interpretation. It also encourages Christians in particular to pay attention to the social elements of the gospel; the teachings and behavior of Jesus and the early church may, indeed, have something to say about sexism. In short, feminism seeks to abolish sexism, and if such sexism is truly the result of sin as opposed to a good, positive design of nature/creation, then all peoples should take heed to the feminist challenge. Those within a Reformed-Evangelical framework are no exception.

Nevertheless, there are points of concern with the feminist-theological enterprise, namely, cases of internal inconsistency and ill-founded assumptions.

First, feminist theology appears to be internally inconsistent when it attempts to abolish hierarchy by means of hierarchy. This was ably pointed out by Kathryn McCreight (Yale Divinity School) in her book *Feminist Reconstructions of Christian Doctrine* (2000):

“Certainly the ‘full humanity of women’ seems to be a worthy principle, a noble goal to attain. Notice, however, that this view sets up a hierarchy of authorities for feminist interpretation of the Bible which allows feminist consciousness pride of place. Ironically, feminist theologians claim to subvert this kind of setting up and maintaining of hierarchies because it is considered anathema....In effect, holding as ultimate authority the ‘full humanity of women’ sets up just the sort of hierarchies of truth or doctrine which feminist theologians generally reject. This then places a wedge between explicit theory and implicit practice: in theory, hierarchies are denied, but in practice, setting up feminist consciousness as the hermeneutical guide exchanges one set of hierarchies for another” (McCreight 2000:42-43).

She goes on to say that “It is the authority of ‘experience’ in feminist interpretation which subordinates any other authority, whether text, tradition, or reason” (McCreight 2000:43).

But perhaps we can go even further: such a setting up of hierarchies in feminist theology is not only applicable to the hermeneutical task, but to the theological and historical task in general as well. This seems to be the case in, for example, Schüssler Fiorenza’s book *Changing Horizons* (2013). She argues that when doing theology, history, and understanding the nature of knowledge, everything should be re-interpreted in light of the feminist principle(s). These principles function as the final lens and arbiter of truth. This attitude can be briefly observed in the following quotations:

“Western science, philosophy, and theology have not known the world as it is. Rather, they have created it in their interest and likeness as they wished it to be. Therefore, feminists/womanists insist that it is possible for liberatory discourses to articulate a different historical knowledge and vision of the world” (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:106).

“Not only the content and traditioning process within the Bible, but the whole of Christian tradition should be scrutinized and judged as to whether or not it functions to oppress or liberate people” (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:55).

“...we cannot take as [the Bible’s] point of departure and normative authority of the biblical archytype, but must begin with women’s experience in their struggle for liberation” (2013:80).

“In short, critical feminist interpretation for liberation...places wo/men as subjects and agents as full decision-making citizens at the center of attention” (2013:12).

Elsewhere, she says:

“A critical feminist inquiry begins its analytic work with the sociopolitical level of the kyriarchal sex-gender system....the world is determined by relations of domination. Sex-gender is a part of such relations of ruling which also ground other divisions such as class, ethnicity or race” (2011:30). She even speaks of placing “biblical texts *under the authority of feminist experiences*” (2013:80, emphasis mine).

Thus, it seems that McCreight is right: feminist theology (at least of this kind) is plagued by a central inconsistency—eliminating the hierarchy of patriarchy and its principles (of male domination, female subordination, etc.) by installing the hierarchy of feminism and its principles (of female liberation, women’s experience, etc.). James Fowler (1981) and the liberation theologian J. Deotis Roberts (2005:8-67) show an awareness of this issue and point out the need to be cautious so that the oppressed does not become the oppressor and the oppressor does not become the oppressed.

A second inconsistency of feminist theology is the attempt at objectively and absolutely critiquing the social conditions of androcentrism and patriarchy on a subjective and relativistic

basis. As it was mentioned above, Reuther, Schüssler Fiorenza, and other feminist theologians (e.g., Pui-lan 2000:91) do not see any exclusivity in the Christian faith or in the person of Christ. Ultimately, one religion is as good as another. The task of the feminist theologian is not to seek knowable, objective, authoritative truth where it can be found (if it can be), but to shore up any ammunition from women's liberation (Reuther 1993:18-19) from all possible sources—sacred texts of the world's religions, church tradition, secular philosophy, sociology, the sciences, etc. (see Reuther 1993:21; Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:51-55). Theology, then, is done in a smorgasbord kind of manner—picking and choosing from all the academic disciplines and fields of knowledge in order to re-affirm the basic principles of feminism.

An obvious problem with this approach is that with so many contradictory sources underlying feminist theology (indeed, one simply cannot reconcile all of the theologies of the world religions), it becomes immediately problematic why the feminist cause deserves the attention it demands. If one can so easily sift through the world's most sacred literature and traditions and simply discard whatever doesn't fit the feminist mold, it raises the question as to why feminist theology should be treated with any more respect. One might ask, why should anyone take feminist theology for what it is, since feminist theology does not take other religions for what they are, but instead extracts from their writings and traditions whatever the feminist finds useful and rejects the rest? Feminist theologians often believe that the reason other theologians find feminist theology so threatening is because men fear losing their power. This is possible. But it is also possible that theologians fear feminist theology because of its utilitarian, domineering methodology—"systematically" (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:71) sifting through literature for its liberative material, rejecting the rest, and then moving on. This is again, ironic, since many

feminist theologians are ecofeminist (environmentally aware), and abhor the practice of raping mother earth of its resources in a narrow, utilitarian manner; but this is virtually the way some feminist theologians treat the literature and scholarship of various religions.

Another problem with this approach is its contradictory nature. Schüssler Fiorenza and Reuther's literature is littered with what might be deemed absolutist, ethical assertions ("we must", "we should not," "we ought"), but they essentially deny that it is possible to make such definite, absolute claims in the first place (see "Feminist Hermeneutics" in chapter three). There is really no fixed, objective point of reference (e.g., God; Christ for the Christian, or simply the Bible for many Reformed-Evangelicals). There is only experience, perception, and the ebb and flow of ethical principles found in various theologies in history. One is left to draw the conclusion that feminist theology as a whole offers little more than a scholarly opinion. If that's the case, then feminist theology ceases to be persuasive to many people, namely, to those who desire something universal instead of the latest scholarly opinion.

As long as subjects in societies are the source of a critique of an ideology (e.g., androcentrism), they are, in principle, no better than the thing that is being critiqued, for both share the same source and both are subject to change. Especially when feminist theologians assume a Darwinian basis for creation, there is little rationale to critique patriarchy—for male domination is just as much the product of an evolutionary process as female liberation, and if societies work on the basis of "survival of the fittest," then the environment will weed out feminist theology if it cannot survive. Only if feminism grounds itself in something unchanging that transcends creation will the feminist cause be compelling in any way. Revealing structures of oppression,

the suffering of women in history and androcentricity in culture only goes so far—especially if one believes that all people are sinful (because sinful people will not naturally be sensitive to the oppression of women).

This approach also leaves one asking why feminist theology is exempt from its own principle of a “hermeneutic of suspicion.” We are, according to feminist theology, to read *everything* with a “hermeneutic of suspicion,” realizing that everything is tainted by patriarchy and androcentricity. The male-bias permeates all of creation. Everything constructed by male-experience (history, theology, language, etc.) must be reconstructed in light of feminist principles. But, if the female-bias is so overt in this task, how can it be that feminist theology should not be viewed with a similar suspicion—one that recognizes the bias towards *feminist* principles and *women’s* experience? Are scholars simply to set aside their concern of presuppositions and just accept feminist theology as truth, the *norma normans* and reject all other theories as incorrect? This is terribly dogmatic, and it is also contradictory to feminist theologians’ own attitude: “It should be methodologically *mandatory* that *all* scholars explicitly discuss their own presuppositions” (Schüssler Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:54). Likewise, Reuther says “One cannot wield the lever of criticism without a place to stand” (1993:18). It is unfortunate that feminist theologians are not always aware that this principle may potentially undermine some of their own approaches.

For all the criticisms various feminist theologians give the New and Old Testament Scriptures, feminist theology (as it was observed above) seems to have a strong degree of agreement regarding Christology. The life and maleness of Jesus is not an obstacle to women’s liberation from a world broken by sin and tainted by patriarchy (in fact, these realities may be *sources* for

women's liberation). Pui-lan's organic Christology rightfully attempts to restore balance regarding images of Christ. It appears, however, to have overemphasized the environmental aspect. Pui-lan simply does not establish why sin "is not so much human depravity or disobedience" as it is harm to the environment (2000:93), nor does she establish that the biblical account somehow affirms this theological conclusion. It is true that environmental damage is the result of sin, and that it must be taken seriously (to not do so may threaten all human life!). But if Scripture is appealed to in correcting an imbalance regarding images of Jesus, why is not Scripture appealed to in defining what sin actually is? It would have been helpful, for example, if Pui-lan would have discussed central texts on the subject, such as 1 John 3:4 ("sin is lawlessness"). This is true for Reuther and Schüssler Fiorenza's definitions (or redefinitions) of sin as well.

A final concern of feminist theology is a potentially unbalanced approach in the pursuit of liberation, namely, the lack of *men's* liberation from patriarchy and androcentrism. As one reads through the works of Schüssler Fiorenza, Reuther, and Pui-lan, one wonders how the feminist goal is ever to be reached if men are always treated as the oppressor and not as the oppressed. But have not men fallen prey to the ideology of androcentrism and the social structures of patriarchalism? Do they not need liberation from such an oppressive perspective? Women may bear the brunt of suffering and men may be the primary oppressor, but men are in bondage to androcentrism just as much as women (or more than women) in the larger scheme of a fallen creation. Furthermore, if the Christian message is not oriented at one gender more than another, then men also need to hear a message of liberation. After all, if they are in control and are at the

top of the hierarchy of power and authority, the message of liberation should be proclaimed to men strongly and clearly.

While feminist theology as a whole supports women elders by virtue of their liberation from male hierarchy, those in the Reformed and Evangelical tradition will not generally find feminist arguments for women elders compelling because of feminist theologians' critical view of Scripture and relativistic epistemology; from their perspective, having a "high view" of the Bible cannot be compromised. This is not to say that feminist theology offers nothing to a Reformed-Evangelical case for women elders, but much of what feminist theology does offer to the argument often comes by way of hermeneutics (see "Feminist Hermeneutics" in chapter three) and not theology.

4.3 Roman Catholic Theology

Roman Catholic Theology differs from Protestant theology not only in its content but in its sources. While Protestant theology is marked by the Reformed principle of *Sola Scriptura*, Catholic theology is marked by *partim-partim*, meaning that theology is constructed partly from Scripture and partly from oral tradition. *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* explains:

"In a series of articles (Greg, 1959-61) H. Lennerz, SJ, vigorously defended the *partim...partim* theory and opposed it to the Protestant 'scripturist principle.' Neither tradition nor Scripture contains the whole Apostolic tradition. Scripture is materially (i.e., in content) insufficient, requiring oral tradition as a complement to be true to the whole divine revelation" (1967: 14:228).

In *Foundations of Christian Faith*, the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner says that in this particular discussion:

“...here...we can establish more easily a really objective and not just terminological difference in the content of doctrine between Evangelical and Catholic Christianity. For Catholic doctrine emphasizes the necessity and the validity both of tradition as well as of the Catholic teaching office” (Rahner 1997:361).

Although this difference between Protestants and Catholics leads to a number of theological disagreements, this difference does not lead to terribly different conclusions regarding women in pastoral ministry. Catholics generally agree with Protestants that women should not be ordained (for elders/priests). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (second edition, 1997) states in its chapter “The Celebration of the Christian Mystery”:

“ ‘Only a baptized man (*vir*) validly receives sacred ordination.’ The Lord Jesus chose men (*viri*) to form the college of the twelve apostles, and the apostles did the same when they chose collaborators to succeed them in their ministry. The college of bishops, with whom the priests are united in the priesthood, makes the college of the twelve an ever-present and ever-active reality until Christ’s return. The Church recognizes herself to be bound by this choice made by the Lord himself. For this reason the ordination of women is not possible” (1997:394).

In other words, the institution of the male Apostolate precludes women from being priests.

Several citations are given in support of this paragraph, including the statement by Pope John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (1994), which was declared by the Holy See as infallible Catholic Dogma in 1996 in *Responsum ad Dubium* (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1996).

The former Pope says:

“In the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, I myself wrote in this regard: "In calling only men as his Apostles, Christ acted in a completely free and sovereign manner. In doing so, he exercised the same freedom with which, in all his behavior, he emphasized the dignity and the vocation of women, without conforming to the prevailing customs and to the traditions sanctioned by the legislation of the time." In fact the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles attest that this call was made in accordance with God's eternal plan; Christ chose those whom he willed (cf. Mk 3:13-14; Jn 6:70), and he did so in union with the Father, "through the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:2), after having spent the night in prayer (cf.

Lk 6:12). Therefore, in granting admission to the ministerial priesthood, the Church has always acknowledged as a perennial norm her Lord's way of acting in choosing the twelve men whom he made the foundation of his Church (cf. Rv 21:14). These men did not in fact receive only a function which could thereafter be exercised by any member of the Church; rather they were specifically and intimately associated in the mission of the Incarnate Word himself (cf. Mt 10:1, 7-8; 28:16-20; Mk 3:13-16; 16:14-15)" (1994, section 2, paragraph 2).

Decades earlier in the 1976 "Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to Ministerial Priesthood," Pope Paul VI gave rationale for the ban of women priests. The document said the following in section five:

"'Sacramental signs,' says Saint Thomas, 'represent what they signify by natural resemblance.' The same natural resemblance is required for persons as for things: when Christ's role in the Eucharist is to be expressed sacramentally, there would not be this 'natural resemblance' which must exist between Christ and his minister if the role of Christ were not taken by a man: in such a case it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ. For Christ himself was and remains a man" (1976, section five).

Thus, according to Rome, women should not be ordained because they cannot physically represent Christ (a male human). In the words of theologian Manfred Hauke (1988:338-339), "Just as Christ, as mediator of salvation, 'can exist in his totality only if his masculine identity is included', so things stand too regarding his priestly representative."

These arguments were subsequently critiqued in both Catholic and Evangelical publications (e.g., Jewett 1980). For example, Rahner wrote in his 1980 essay "Women and the Priesthood":

"Moreover, if it is assumed that Jesus and the apostles had different and more substantial reasons for their action than the existing cultural and sociological situation, then it should be explained more precisely and in detail in what these other reasons consist; otherwise their attitude would appear to be based on an arbitrary decision. But in this respect the declaration is completely silent. The mere fact that Jesus was of the male sex is no answer here, since it is not clear that a person acting with Christ's mandate and in that sense in persona Christi must at the same time represent Christ precisely in his maleness.

But if we were to appeal to the "divine order of creation" in order to find and try to develop such reasons, then it would certainly be difficult (as is evident from the mistaken arguments of the Fathers of the Church and the medieval theologians) to avoid appealing to an anthropology which would again threaten what the Declaration recognizes as the equal dignity and equal rights of women" (Rahner 1981:43).

Reuther (a self-proclaimed Catholic) essentially said the same: "Since this strange new version of the imitation of Christ does not exclude a Negro, a Chinese or a Dutchman from representing a first-century Jew, or a wealthy prelate from representing a carpenter's son, or sinners from representing the saviour, we must assume this imitation of Christ has now been reduced to one essential element, namely, male sex" (Reuther 1981:46). In other words, Rome should identify why maleness (and not, for example, Jewishness) is vital to representing Christ.

Catholic theology is therefore divided over the subject of women priests, and different arguments are given for both their condemnation and their participation; there is no exact "theological methodology" that encompasses the women-ministerial debate in Catholic theology. In fact, in practice, the Catholic Church resorts to other reasons for condemning women in ministry than the ones observed above—one of which is biblical texts. According to Pui-lan, "In the Roman Catholic Church...Paul's injunctions that women should not speak in church (1 Cor. 14.34-35) nor exercise authority over men (1 Tim 2.11-15) are used repeatedly to reinforce women's inferiority and to deny them their rightful participation" (Pui-lan 2000:100). Similarly, Hauke said in his book *Women in the Priesthood?* (1988:401), "The pastoral letters...declare a decided 'No' on official teaching by women..." Note that Balthasar considered this particular book to be, according to his back-cover endorsement, "Undoubtedly, the definitive work available on this important topic." All of this indicates that scriptural theology still plays a central role in the

Catholic Church, and the value of properly exegeting these two key texts becomes that much more important for the church.

Raymond Brown also took a different angle in his 1975 essay “Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel.” In the essay, he stresses the importance of discipleship over and above the clergy/laity distinction. He says, “It may be useful to remind ourselves that it remains more important to be baptized than to be ordained, more important to be a Christian than to be a bishop, priest, or pope” (1975:694). In contrast with Roman Catholic theology’s traditional emphasis on hierarchy and the clergy/laity distinction, Brown argues that these fundamental commonalities between all of Jesus’ disciples pave the way for women in the priesthood. In his other books (e.g., *Priest and Bishop* 1999), he argues against various Catholic dogmas, for example, asserting that the Twelve Apostles were neither missionaries nor bishops.

Much of what Roman Catholic theologians have written seem to imply the legitimacy of women priests. Take for example Hans Von Balthasar in *Engagement with God*, where he says:

“...when a Christian is given a task to fulfill or call to a particular vocation, the task he is called to coincides exactly with his Christian character. Inside the Church, which is basically a network of people possessing different charisms, the pattern of human relationships matches exactly the pattern according to which the various charismatic functions are interwoven. This means, therefore, that I must now unreservedly learn to see my fellow Christians in the light of the task that Christ has determined that they should fill” (2008:52-53).

The question comes to mind: why is none of this true for the woman called to be a priest? One could argue that no woman ever receives a genuine call to be in pastoral ministry, but this is where feminist theology’s emphasis on women’s experience needs to be heard, because if their experience of being called to pastoral ministry is, in fact, genuine, then to deny women the

function/office of priest is resisting the work of God's Spirit. As Balthasar goes on to say: "The Christian's involvement has its origins in God's involvement for the sake of the world; it is grounded in it, captivated by it, shaped and directed by it" (2008:65). Indeed, while the church may be concerned about maintaining the traditional hierarchy, there are far more important things in store: "...authentic Christianity will give the world a great deal more to worry about than the towering edifices of the hierarchy" (2008:96).

4.4 Conclusion

We have examined many of the key concepts, ideas, and theologies behind the debate over women elders. This chapter has also shown which concepts are and are not central to a specifically Evangelical and Reformed argument for women elders. It appears that, due to the fundamental assumptions regarding divine revelation (and the authority of Scripture) that are central to Protestant theology, a legitimate case for women elders is largely made from a properly interpreted Bible—especially regarding those texts that directly address women in ministry. All other arguments from theology (e.g., creation, baptism, ecclesiology, etc.) are, for better or for worse, more or less secondary. A decisive evaluation of the "prohibition texts" in Scripture will help those embroiled in the complementarian/egalitarian debate to move beyond the contemporary gridlock, and an analytical procedure in making the case for women elders should also prove helpful in giving weight to other theological arguments that so commonly surround the debate.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRIMARY PREMISE (WOMEN ARE NOT FORBIDDEN TO BE PASTORS)

5. Introduction

This chapter will address whether or not the New Testament, in view of a broad, Reformed-Evangelical lens, can be used to directly prohibit women pastors. Since there are only a few texts that seem to directly forbid women from being/functioning elders, the following discussion will be largely exegetical in nature. We will also limit our primary discussion to 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.

As Linda Belleville accurately said in 2000, “To be honest, there are really only two New Testament passages that are consistently claimed to address women and authority roles: 1 Corinthians 14:33-34...and 1 Timothy 2:12” (2000:152). Those in other traditions recognize the importance of these verses as well. As it was observed in the last chapter, “In the Roman Catholic Church...Paul’s injunctions that women should not speak in church (1 Cor. 14.34-35) nor exercise authority over men (1 Tim 2.11-15) are used repeatedly to reinforce women’s inferiority and to deny them their rightful participation” (Pui-lan 2000:100). The need for a thorough interpretation increases even more when one realizes the mainstream feminist theologians are convinced that these text do, in fact, ban women from pastoral ministry (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:36).

5.1 Another Brief Word About Methodology

The Evangelical literature on 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is now vast. There are countless essays and whole books dedicated to these two sections of Scripture, each with their own unique contribution or argument about what God through Paul is really saying. It is natural for anyone who has followed the debate on women pastors to come to this chapter with a fair amount of suspicion. It is sufficient for the time to note that there are two particular features that distinguish this discussion from others. First, attention is given to the similarities between the two main prohibition texts (1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim 2:11-12). While it will not be argued that both are addressing the exact same situation, it will become clear that the similarities between the two are substantial and significant. In fact, it would be detrimental to interpret one text without the other. The similarities are so strong that a person should be immediately suspect at any interpretation that asserts that one text is a universal, blanket prohibition for all churches of all times, while the other is not.

Ironically, this is what we have been told in recent years by critics of women pastors: “As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches” (1 Cor 14), is only addressing a particular kind of behavior that was especially problematic for a particular church (e.g., disruptive questioning, or weighing of prophecies, etc.), while “But I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet” (1 Tim 2:12), is *not* addressing a particular way of doing something, but is a blanket prohibition for teaching and exercising authority *in general*.¹ At the very least, complementarians and others against women elders should acknowledge the complementarity between the two texts and perhaps

¹ Unless otherwise noted, Scriptural quotations come from the English Standard Version (ESV).

admit the improbability of one being interpreted as a general, universal ban while the other is not.

Of course, one should not be naïve in thinking that both texts have equal weight in the debate over women pastors. While virtually all who are against women pastors see 1 Timothy 2:12 as directly favoring their position, not all see 1 Corinthians 14 as accomplishing the same task. Foh's remarks are worth quoting again: "There is only one valid argument against women's ordination to the ministry: scriptural prohibition. This prohibition is found in 1 Tim 2:12" (Foh in Clouse and Clouse 1989:91). Indeed, for countless Evangelicals, this one verse is *the* verse that prohibits women from being pastors. That being the case, the primary attention of this chapter will go towards 1 Timothy 2:12.

Second and more importantly, this discussion is distinctive in that it gives priority to the immediate context. The larger cultural context of a writing is helpful. The larger context of the author's writings and whole-canon biblical theology is helpful. Word studies are helpful. Grammatical and syntactical studies are helpful. In fact, they're all interdependent. As Köstenberger rightly puts it, "An improper emphasis on one element in the interpretive process or a wrong judgment in one area of study will weaken, if not invalidate, one's entire interpretation" (Köstenberger 1994:259-283). But what both complementarians and egalitarians seem to agree on at the end of the day is that the meaning of words and the meaning of entire sentences are contingent on the context (note Johnston 1986:31). "Context is king," as the saying goes. And by *immediate* context, what is meant are the verses immediately prior (and after) the text—the "frame" if you will (this is phraseology borrowed from Bilezikian 2006:98, 112, 136,

210). This, I believe, is fairly decisive in establishing the sense of Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy 2.

5.2 Preliminary Observations on the Two "Permission" Texts

To avoid potential misunderstandings and to construct the argument of this chapter in as efficient manner as possible, it is necessary to quote the full contexts of the two texts under discussion:

"What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. 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. Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:26-40).

"I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and human beings, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.

Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning

themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety” (1 Timothy 2, TNIV).

1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34² have much more in common than simply forbidding women from doing certain spoken activities in church. When one compares the flow of each argument and their vocabulary, a number of similar features emerge.

In the verses prior to each prohibition, the author addresses the proper manner and behavior of New Covenant believers in their particular cultural and ecclesiastical situations. Scholars may not know *exactly* what the situation was in each church. But it seems clear from the immediate context that Paul’s focus is on *how* to do certain church-related activities—the right manner of doing things as Christians. For the church at Corinth, the question is “how do we prophesy?” Paul’s answer is in verse 27: it should be “by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret.” And what if there is no one to interpret? The next verse (v. 28) answers: “let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.” Verse 29 says “let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said,” and verse 30, “If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent.” Verse 31, again, provides a descriptive detail about the activity of prophesying: “For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.” Paul is not addressing the generic question of who should prophesy; he

² This essay assumes the authenticity of verses 34-35. For arguments questioning their textual legitimacy, see Fee (1987:699-706); Epp (2005); Payne (1995:240–62) and (2009:225-267); Walker (2007:699-705); Wright (1992:107). It is possible v. 34-35 are interpolations, but not likely due to their strong similarities (see below).

is concerned with how it should be done. This attitude dominates the tone and content of the immediate context.

Similarly, for the hearers of 1 Timothy, the questions are perhaps “who should we pray for?” and “how do we pray?” and “how should we dress?” and eventually, “how should women learn?” The Apostle says prayers should be “made for all people,” which is specifically defined as “for kings and all who are in high positions,” (1 Tim 2:1). But then he gets even more detailed about prayer in verse 8: “I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or quarreling.” *How* should one pray? With hands lifted up—and with a certain attitude: without anger or quarreling. “Likewise,” he continues in verse 9, “also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braider hair and gold or pearls or costly attire.” Again, right down to the particular style of a person’s hair, Paul specifically targets the manner of Christian behavior (Mounce 2000:114). Paul is not addressing the general enterprise of prayer, as if to determine who should dress and who should pray; he is concerned with *how* it should be done, as egalitarian and complementarian scholars can agree (Schreiner 2005a:95; Keener 2004:105). This attitude permeates the immediate context—and, indeed, the chapter as a whole.

Therefore, unless there is some clear, major indicator that Paul’s train of thought is interrupted, readers should expect that Paul continues to follow this attitude in both 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2. It would be odd to shift gears and stop talking about *manner* and, for example, begin to make new, broad generalizations and universal claims about generic activities for all churches for all times and for all situations.

5.3 Exegetical Observations on 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

Sure enough, Paul does continue addressing the “how question” in both 1 Corinthians 14 and in 1 Timothy 2, verses 34-35 and verses 11-12 respectively. In 1 Corinthians 14 he continues to address how one ought to do prophecy—how women in particular are to benefit and learn from this activity:

“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. 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 Corinthians 14:34-35).

The prohibition for women not to speak (v. 34) initially appears to be a broad generalization (“in all the churches”). But the prohibition cannot be a universal ban on absolutely *all* speaking since Paul already acknowledged women praying and prophesying with men in the church in chapter 11 (in contrast, see Culver 1989:29; Greenbury 2008:721-31, though see Ciampa and Rosner 2010:719). As Williams summarizes, “Paul is in the position of encouraging women to pray and prophecy and at the same time commanding them to be silent. This must force us to the conclusion that their silence is qualified” (Williams 2010:62). Readers should also notice that this is the third assertion for silence, and the previous two were *not* blanket universals. Verse 28 advised silence when someone wasn’t present to interpret tongues, and verse 30 to a prophet when someone else receives revelation, and “in neither of those cases, of course, are those people expected to remain silent at all times. Indeed, Paul is probably thinking of particular instances where different kinds of participants in the worship meeting should refrain from speaking” (Ciampa and Rosner 2010:720).

Verse 35 gives readers a better sense of the situation (in contradiction to Clark 2006:129). Paul says, “if there is anything they [the women] desire to learn”—and certainly they would, since the gospel of Christianity opened up the door to women learning alongside men (see Keener 2007:747-760). Thus, Leon Morris rightly says that, “Paul is here concerned with the way that women should learn” (Morris 2008b:91). Asking questions *in principle*, is not wrong. But there are obviously a number of situations when it can be wrong—such as asking questions in the middle of someone’s lecture, or asking questions in an impolite, disruptive, or arrogant manner, etc.

In light of these observations and intertextual challenges, Paul Barnett proposes the following solution:

“My suggested reconstruction of the situation Paul sought to correct is as follows: a prophet has spoken and a time of silence should have ensued before the next prophet rose to speak. Instead, however, various women seated together were breaking the silence by calling out questions to the prophet. Thus their action suffered from two faults. On the one hand, it was disruptive of congregational “silence” following the prophetic word, but on the other, it failed to express wifely submission to a husband in public” (2000:265-266).

In contrast with D. A. Carson³ (their commentary editor), Ciampa and Rosner argue that the context is addressing

“...nonliturgical forms of speech (i.e. they could speak as they participated in the use of gifts and in formal ways, but not in mundane, trivial, or merely ordinary conversation.) Even more likely is the suggestion that what was being prohibited was for women to

³ In addition to Carson (1996:129-31; 2006:140-153), see the following for arguments that “speaking” may refer to weighing prophecies: Grudem (2000:245-55); Hurley (1981:185-94; 1973:217); Liefeld (1986:150); Kistemaker (1994:512); Mounce (2000:118); Thiselton (2000:140-53); Blomberg (1994:281). The popularization of this interpretation is largely credited to Margaret E. Thrall’s *1 and 2 Corinthians* (1965). For criticism of this interpretation (of which I am sympathetic), see Ciampa and Rosner (2010) and Greenbury (2008):721-31.

approach and ask men in the congregation questions about things they were not understanding” (Ciampa and Rosner 2010: 725-727).

Similarly, Keener says, “Most likely the passage addresses disruptive questions in an environment where silence was expected of new learners—which most women were” (2005:171), and elsewhere, “He wants them to stop interrupting the teaching period of the church service” (1993:483; cf. Signountos and Shank 1983:283-295). Morris agrees: “We must bear in mind that in the first century women were uneducated. The Jews regarded it as a sin to teach a woman, and the position was not much better elsewhere. The Corinthian women should keep quiet in church if for no other reason than because they could have had little or nothing worthwhile to say” (2008:193; cf. Keener 2007). Kenneth Bailey in *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes* also concurs: “Paul is saying, ‘Women, please stop chatting so you can listen to the women (and men) who are trying to bring you a prophetic word but cannot do so when no one can hear them’” (2011:416; cf. Bristow 1991:64-65).

Complementarians can be found making similar remarks. Schreiner, for example, says:

“Virtually all acknowledge that the specific situation that called forth these words is difficult to identify. It seems most likely the women were disrupting the service in some way (we cannot recover specific circumstances due to paucity of information) and Paul responds to their disruptive behavior....What Paul rules out here is the asking of disruptive questions by wives in a rebellious spirit” (2005b:321, 192; cf. Foh 1989:85).

Returning to the text, the Apostle continues his thought and says “let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church” (14:35). The term “shameful” (αἰσχρὸς) is used only three other times in the New Testament, all by the Apostle Paul (1 Cor 11:6; Eph 5:12; Tit 1:11). In 1 Corinthians 11:6, Paul says “short hair” is shameful for a woman.

It goes without saying that short hair on women is not necessarily shameful—certainly not in 21st century American culture. Of course, short hair dyed in certain colors and in certain styles (e.g., spikes) might indicate a kind of rebellion and be shameful in certain contexts. Additionally, women speaking at church is not necessarily shameful. Whether praying and asking questions in Sunday school, reading announcements from the pulpit in morning service, or simply speaking about the pastor’s sermon in the foyer—none of these things are considered shameful (or wrong) by Christians. Nevertheless, there are times when women speaking might be shameful—such as rebuking a spouse in a disrespectful manner at a church meeting, or other situations.

Context and exegesis determine the degree of cultural contextualization and how the passage is applied today—as Ciampa and Rosner note with 1 Corinthians 14:

“Paul’s suggesting that the woman ask *their own husbands at home* reflects that cultural context where a man could be expected to be better informed/educated than his wife and was understood to be the proper channel of information to the wife. Here, *at home* contrasts with *in the church* at the end of the verse, highlighting the private rather than public venue for the questions, in keeping with much ancient Greek thinking about the place of women in society. In modern Western societies neither of those conditions normally hold. In many societies today women are no less prepared to ask appropriate questions than their husbands, and it is considered just as perfectly normal and appropriate for them to participate in public dialogues as it is for men. There is no longer any shame or disgrace associated with such engagement; rather, it would be considered shameful for a woman to be restricted from open participation in public conversations. The principles underlying Paul’s counsel, that women (and men) not act disgracefully in public, or in ways which reflect a lack of respect for the dignity of their spouses, may well call for a different set of concrete behaviors in our churches than would have been expected in first-century Corinth...women should show respect for order and for others (especially their husbands) in the worship setting.” (Ciampa and Rosner 2010:729).

Keener essentially asserts the same in *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (1993:483).

Therefore, it is not like Paul is forbidding women from learning in the church—which could easily be read out of the broad statement, “if they want to learn *anything* [τι] let them ask their own husbands at home” (emphasis mine).⁴ As Keener observes:

“More likely, Paul could be saying, “If you can’t learn it in church except *the way you’re doing it*, you need to ask your husbands at home.” In this case, he is not saying, “let women learn only from their husbands at home, and not in the church services”; he is saying, “Don’t learn so *loudly* in church!” He uses the same construction in 11:34: “If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment.” In 11:34, Paul does not mean there that no one should eat at the Lord’s Supper, or that it is wrong to be hungry when one gathers in church; his point is that it is better to eat at home than to disrupt the Christian community by the *way* one eats at church” (Keener 2004:72).

Indeed, it is clear that Paul is once again addressing the manner of behavior—the *how* question.

In the same way as 1 Corinthians 14, Paul continues his discourse in 1 Timothy 2 about behavior and addresses *how* women should learn at church:

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

5.4 Exegetical Observations on 1 Timothy 2:12

There are three notable facts about 1 Timothy 2:12 that should be immediately addressed.

First, the only imperative (command) in these verses (and in v. 5-15, in fact) is “let a woman learn” (μανθανέτω). This has been pointed out by several scholars (Sumner 2003:251; Blomberg 2005:167; Wright 2006:9), but it bears repeating since verse 12 tends to get all the attention.

⁴ The pronoun τι is rendered “anything” in most English translations (e.g., ESV, NASB, NRSV, NIV, NLT, etc.), though it is possible to render it as “something” (NET, HSCB). Either is possible. However, since Paul’s intention and the immediate context limit the meaning of the term to a specific sphere of ideas (i.e., Paul was not saying, “if they want to learn about *anything*—like Einstein’s general theory of relativity, or how to change the oil in the car...”), it is perhaps better to avoid the universal “anything” and opt for “something” instead.

Indeed, “Paul issues only one command: ‘Let a woman learn’ (v. 11). The other phrases set the parameters of the directive” (Grenz 1995:127). Both egalitarians and complementarians seem to recognize this important face, and both also recognize that we should not overemphasize this point at the cost of missing the main point. Grenz/Kjesbo and Schreiner are two examples:

“Paul’s injunction incorporates the radical ideal that women learn. Yet its central purpose is...to describe the demeanor in which such learning was to occur” (Grenz 1995:127-128).

“Paul does not merely say, ‘Women must learn!’ He says ‘Women must learn quietly and with all submission.’ The focus of the command is not on women learning, but *the manner and mode* of their learning. Egalitarians are correct in seeing a commendation of women learning, for the propriety of women learning is implied in the use of the imperative verb. But Paul’s main concern is the way they learn, that is, quietly and with all submission” (Schreiner 2005:97).

Although there may be a very fine distinction in the degree to which Grenz/Kjesbo and Schreiner give emphasis on the imperative, there seems to be a general agreement: given the immediate context and Paul’s entire arguments for the chapter, Paul is primarily addressing *manner and mode*, not general activities through a simple command. And given what Paul says about some of the Ephesian women (“they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not,” 1 Tim 5:13, cf. 2 Tim 3:6), it is probably important that these women learn, and Paul seems to make this clear enough in his language.

Second, verse 12 has a conjunction ($\delta\epsilon$, meaning “but” or “and”) that connects verse 11 to verse 12. Only three major English translations actually contain the word: the NET, NASB, and KJV. All three render the conjunction as “but,” so that it functions contrastively (cf. Spencer 1985:85). As Wallace notes, if $\delta\epsilon$ functions only connectively (the other function of the word), it does not

necessarily have to be translated; readers can (well, *should*) connect the two sentences/thoughts themselves (Wallace 1996:671). The problem is that without actually translating the word, readers might *disconnect* the original author's train of thought. Without "and," and especially without "but" in verse 12, readers can easily be left with the impression that the content/topic/tone of verse 12 is altogether different from that of verse 11. And this isn't true. *Verse 12 is a continuation of verse 11*—and as it has been stressed so far, verse 11 and 12 are a continuation of all that immediately comes before it (hence, Towner 2006:212). This point cannot be stressed enough. Why? Precisely because the complementarian and traditionalist reading of the text depends on a strong shift between verse 12 and everything before it, since that would show that Paul is no longer addressing manner and demeanor (of learning, in this case) but is rather speaking about "activities" and "ministries" (Moo 2006:180) *in general*—making a blanket, universal prohibition of generic exercising of authority and teaching men.

Douglas Moo argues that $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ functions to mark "the transition...from one activity that women are to carry out in submission (learning) to two others that are prohibited in order to maintain their submission (teaching and having authority)," and the result is that verse 12 "prohibits the women at Ephesus from engaging in certain ministries with reference to men"—despite the fact that he admits in the immediate footnote, "the nature of this word...renders extremely precarious any exegetical decisions based on its exact meaning" (Moo 2006:184, 496). He concludes that "...the simpler and more obvious mildly adversative transitional force suggested in this chapter should be adopted." On the contrary, Moo's proposal and his paraphrase of the text (2006:184; notice the unqualified addition of "also") is hardly the "more obvious" option since it introduces perhaps the largest "transition" of the chapter: a change from addressing the kind of learning (v.

11) to a broad-brushed universal prohibition of two “neutral,” generic activities (v. 12). Additionally, δέ can hardly be assumed to indicate any kind of “transition” at all, given (a) the dubiousness of the term and its proper translation, as already summarized by Moo himself; (b) that it is best understood as a contrastive (“but”) or a simple connective (“and”) in the context of 1 Timothy 2:12 (as English translators testify); and (c) the somewhat awkward and rare rendering of a transitional translation (“then,” “now,” “that is,” *BDAG*). What we can both agree on, however, is that verse 12 is a continuation of verse 11, and that it is helpful to at least include “and” or “but” in our English translations to mark the necessary, undeniable, and direct connection between the two.

Third, Paul’s language is notably specific, which translators have once again struggled to capture. In answering the question *how are women to learn?* Paul uses several rare, descriptive terms that (a) draw further attention towards manner and (b) virtually demand that Paul is addressing a specific, unique situation. (Special words are often used for special situations). Already in verse 9 Paul said that women should dress “modestly” (αἰδοῦς) and “discretely” (σωφροσύνης). The former term is used only here in the entire New Testament, and the latter term used only twice in Paul’s writings: here and in verse 15. The term for “proper” or “respectable” (πρέπω) in verse 10 is used by Paul in only three other places (Tit 2:1; Eph 5:3; 1 Cor 11:13). This highly specific language continues into verses 11-12. He first says women are to learn “quietly” (ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ, ESV, NET, NASB, NLT) and “with entire/all submissiveness (ESV, NET/NASB), or “with full submission” (NRSV). The general point seems clear enough: it is hard to learn if you’re the one doing all the talking.

Given the bold approach and the dual aspect of the command, and given the larger context of the chapter and of the letter, it is safe to assume that Paul’s command is *corrective* and not simply *preventive* (Witherington 1995:276). That is, the women he is addressing *were not* learning quietly and with all submissiveness, and so Paul provides a response. And if not quietly and not submissively, then the Ephesian women were behaving *disruptively*—which brings interpreters back to 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 again (Guthrie 2009:89-90; cf. Schreiner 2005a:95).

The language stays specific. The noun for “quietly” or “silence” (ἡσυχία) is used only two other times in the New Testament outside 1 Timothy 2:11-12 (Acts 22:2; 2 Thess. 3:12) and absolute silence is not meant in either. The final use of the term is actually found in the next verse: “But I do not allow a woman to teach or assume authority over a man, but to remain quiet [ἡσυχία]” (2:12). There is no basis to suggest that the kind of silence in verse 11 is different from the silence in verse 12. That being the case, it seems difficult to argue that ἡσυχία in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is an absolute silence—as if women, when learning, could not ask to go to the bathroom, speak when being called on, etc. (cf. Mounce 2000:126).

Complementarians readily acknowledge this (Moo 1981:199, is an exception). Schreiner, for example, says:

“Most scholars today argue that this word [ἡσυχία] does not actually mean “silence” here, but refers to a quiet demeanor and spirit that is peaceable instead of argumentative. The use of the same word in 1 Timothy 2:2 supports this thesis,⁵ for there not absolute silence but rather a gentle and quiet demeanor is intended. The parallel text in 1 Peter 3:4 also inclines us in the same direction, since the “gentle and quiet spirit” of the wife in the

⁵ Actually, it is not the same word. The term in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is a noun (ἡσυχία, -ας, ἡ) while the term in 2:2 is the adjective form of the noun (ἡσύχιος, -ον). This isn’t a major error. But we might note in passing that this adjective in 2:2 is only used once by Paul (the only other usage in the NT is 1 Pt 3:4), again highlighting Paul’s use of special vocabulary in 1 Timothy 2.

home can scarcely involve absolute silence! In addition, if Paul wanted to communicate absolute silence, he could have used the noun **σιγή** (silence) rather than ἡσυχία (quietness)...It seems more likely that Paul refers to a quiet and nonrebellious spirit instead of absolute silence” (2005a:98; cf. Hurley 1981:200).

Likewise, the outspoken egalitarian Philip Payne agrees:

“The meaning of ἡσυχία (“quietness”) in the context of this passage’s consistent desire for peace without trouble (e.g., 2:2, 8, 11, 12, 15) is not silence, but quietness-peace, the opposite of discord and disruption. **ἡσυχία** indicates a manner of learning that was culturally regarded as being the appropriate attitude and deportment of a well-bred serious student. Paul here commands that women be permitted to learn as proper students, with a quiet and teachable spirit” (2009:315; cf. Belleville 2003:4-10; Spencer 1985:77-80).

Both are correct. Paul is addressing the specific manner in which the specific women are to learn (Spencer 1985:77). In addition to Schreiner (2005a:97) and Hurley (1981:200-2001), the complementarian Douglas Moo fully agrees on this particular point: “For it is not the *fact* that they are to learn, but the *manner* in which they are to learn that concerns Paul...The stress falls not on the command to watch it, but on the manner in which it is to be done” (Moo 2006:183). Again, taught by a large consensus of scholars from both sides of the debate, it is clear that the immediate context and flow of Paul’s thought consists of addressing the manner, mode, and the “how” question, *not* ministry functions in general.

What is not clear, however, is why Moo and the complementarians deny that this is true for the *very next verse*—especially since Paul uses the term (“quietly”) again, and contrasts it with διδάσκειν (“to teach”) and ἀθροῦν (see discussion below on translation) in verse 12 (ἀλλ' εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ). If Paul were universally barring women from exercising generic authority and teaching in verse 12, he probably wouldn’t have contrasted that prohibition with “quietly” at the end of the verse since the term was just used in the previous verse to address a particular mode of

behavior—and as I asserted, the sense of ἡσυχία is the same in both verse 11 and 12. Further, if the complementarian reading is right, Paul probably would have used a different term to denote a more absolute kind of silence (as Schreiner pointed out), or (in a complementarian lens) would have said positively “but rather are to teach only women” or something along those lines. But none of these options are the case. Instead, Paul first connects v. 12 to v. 11 by the conjunction δέ and then repeats the term ἡσυχία to indicate that he is still talking about the manner of learning and not abruptly transitioning into talk about generic use of authority and generic teaching at church. As Towner and Payne rightly observe:

“In strong contrast (“but”; *alla*) to the inappropriate appearance or expression of domination by wives/women over husbands/men through teaching, Paul restates the demeanor (and hence the role of learner) they are to assume: ‘but (*alla*) let them be in quietness’” (Towner 2006:224).

“Either ‘to assume authority’ or ‘to dominate’ makes a better contrast with ‘quietness’ in 1 Tim 2:12 than ‘to exercise authority’ or ‘to have authority.’ Furthermore, either ‘to assume authority’ or ‘to dominate’ makes a better contrast with ‘to be in full submission’” (Payne 2009:379).

Paul then uses yet another rare term in the very next verse: ἀθεντεῖν (infinitive), which is used only here in the entire New Testament. The question is, what is the particular nuance of the term? Or, at the very least, what is Paul trying to communicate by using the term?

Standard reference works provide the following definitions:

“ἀθεντέω (s. ἀθέντης; Philod., Rhet. II p. 133, 14 Sudh.; Jo. Lydus, Mag. 3, 42; Moeris p. 54; cp. Phryn. 120 Lob.; Hesychius; Thom. Mag. p. 18, 8; schol. in Aeschyl., Eum. 42; BGU 1208, 38 [27 b.c.]; s. Lampe s.v.) to assume a stance of independent authority, give orders to, dictate to w. gen. of pers. (Ptolem., Apotel. 3, 14, 10 Boll-B.; Cat. Cod. Astr. VIII/1 p. 177, 7; B-D-F §177) ἀνδρός, w. διδάσκειν, 1 Ti 2:12 (practically = ‘tell a man what to do’).” (Bauer and Danker 2001:150).

“αὐθεντέω strictly, of one who acts on his own authority; hence have control over, domineer, lord it over (1T 2.12)” (Friberg and Friberg 2000:4:81).

“37.21 αὐθεντέω: to control in a domineering manner—‘to control, to domineer.’ γυναῖκι οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω ... αὐθεντεῖν ἀνδρός ‘I do not allow women ... to dominate men’ 1 Tm 2:12. ‘To control in a domineering manner’ is often expressed idiomatically, for example, ‘to shout orders at,’ ‘to act like a chief toward,’ or ‘to bark at’” (Louw and Nida 1996).

“883 αὐθεντέω (*authentēō*): vb.; ≡ Str 831—LN 37.21 control, have authority over (1Ti 2:12+)” (Swanson 1997).

“αὐθεντέω domineer, have authority over” (Newman 1993).

“αὐθεντέω, f. ἦσω, *to have full power over*, τινός N.T.” (Liddell 1996).

“831. αὐθεντέω *authēntēō*, ὄw-then-teh'-o; from a comp. of 846 and an obsol. ἐντης ἡντήēs (a worker); to *act of oneself*, i.e. (fig.) *dominate*:—usurp authority over” (Strong 2009).

“αὐθεντέω *I domineer over* (a colloquial word, from **αὐτογεννηγ**, “master,” “autocrat,” = **αὐτογ** + root *sen*, “accomplish,” in **αἵτιον**)” (House 2008:35; House and Robinson 2012:54).

If these works are any indication of the possible senses of the term, then it appears that it can have a number of nuances (depending on context). There can be an aspect of *self*-oriented, personal action. It can also have a *strong* or powerful nuance (“dominate,” “have full power/authority over,” etc.). And sometimes related to a strong connotation (or a self-instigated action), the term might also be used negatively (“domineer,” “lord it over,” etc.).

But lexicons do not determine the meaning of words; they only summarize how words have been used in various works of literature. The best way (and only way) to establish the meaning of a word is by (1) examining its contemporary use in parallel literature (beginning with the author’s literature, and then moving outward to similar literature in the same language), (2) lexical studies

(studies of cognates, etymology, etc.), and (3) examining the immediate context in which it was originally used (in this case, 1 Timothy 2:12). The general principles of linguistics and lexical semantics establish that the first and last of these three options are the most reliable sources of lexical information (note Silva 1994:51). The second is only used if the word is very rare, and is only insightful under certain conditions. Let us briefly visit each of these three areas and see what can be found.

As it is evident, the term can have a number of nuances (depending on context). There seems to be an aspect of *self*-oriented, personal action—which is not surprising given the αὐ- root.⁶ There also can be a *strong* or powerful nuance (“dominate,” “have full power/authority over,” etc.; see Guthrie 2009:90-91). And sometimes related to a strong connotation (or a self-instigated action), the term might also be used negatively (“domineer,” “lord it over,” etc.). This is unsurprising since its classical usage may have had negative connotations (Belleville 2006:214; cf. 2005:96), and the noun form of the verb (αὐτογενεῖν)—an important aspect to examine—most likely did have negative connotations in certain contexts around Paul’s time (e.g., “murderer”; see Payne 2009:362-364; Belleville 2006:212).

5.4.1 αὐθεντέω: Contemporary Use in Parallel Literature

When a *hapax legomenon* (a word used only once) in the New Testament occurs, there are often several, clear, reliable instances of the term in other first-century Greek literature. This makes it

⁶ Note the NT words αυjqavdhV = “self-satisfied”; αυjqavretoV = “of one’s own accord”; αυjqovmatoV = “of its own accord”; αυjqavpkeia = “self-sufficiency”; αυjqavpkhV = “self-sufficient”; αυjqtaokatavpkitoV = “self-condemned”; αυtovceir = “with one’s own hand,” etc. One also thinks of the English “autonomy,” which means “a law until itself.”

easier to nail down possible meanings of the word. But this is not the case with ἀθεντέω. Its usage around the first-century era is rare, varied, and disputed—“rare” meaning less than eight times within a century before or after Paul’s life, “varied” meaning that even within this handful of instances close to Paul’s time, the meanings are *not* all the same, and “disputed” meaning that (a) the exact number of instances (and the number of *significant* instances) is not agreed upon (due to such things as poor manuscript copies and eligibility, etc.), and (b) the translations of even these usages is as disputed as 1 Timothy 2:12 itself.

Nevertheless, when one actually looks at this handful of usages and examines possible renderings, the lexical definitions (above) appear fairly accurate. And whether a person favors one rendering or another, what is certain is that it is used to mean *a particular kind* of action. This is demonstrated in the table below⁷:

Table 5.1

Text using ἀθεντέω	Baldwin/Schreiner	Grudem	Payne/Werner	Belleville
Philodemus in <i>Rhetorica</i> 2.133 (110-35 BC)	to rule, to reign sovereignly; “the ones in authority”	to rule, to reign sovereignly; “those in authority”	“murders” or “those who murder”	“powerful lords”
“The Letter from Tryphon,” BGU 1208.38 (27 BC)	to compel, to influence; “when I compelled him”	to compel, to influence someone/something; “I exercised authority over him”	assume authority; “I assumed authority against him” ⁸	“I had my way with him” or “I took a firm stand with him”
Aristonicus Alexandrinus in <i>De signis Iliadis</i> 9.694 (27 BC-37 AD) ⁹	to be primarily responsible for, to do, or to instigate; “the one doing the speech”	- ¹⁰	“the one self-accomplishing the speech”	“the author of the message”

⁷ The data comes from Baldwin (2005); Grudem (2004); Belleville (2005:96-97 and 2006:214-15); Payne (2009). Note that quotations are used to delineate the author’s translation of the term in a given piece of literature and his/her own summary of what the term means; the translations are in quotes.

⁸ John Werner agrees with this translation: “The stranger certainly did not have *exousia* over another man’s slave. That is why he says he ‘assumed authority,’ admitting that his command was not a command based on pre-existing authority” (Werner, cited in Payne 2009:367). According to Payne (and there has been no subsequent refutation), Werner was misquoted as saying “exercise authority” in Knight’s 1984 essay on the subject, which quickly became an error that scholars uncritically re-cited over and over in various essays. Among others, this error recitation included Baldwin (1995:276) and Grudem (2004:680).

⁹ The date of this writing is uncertain; but we know that Aristonicus lived during the reign of Augustus and Tiberius.

1 Timothy 2:12 (60s AD)	“assume authority over...could be appropriate”; “exercise authority over” (Schreiner)	“exercise authority over”	“to assume authority,” or possibly “to dominate”	teaching that tries to get the upper hand; “to teach with the intent to dominate a man”
Ptolemy in <i>Tetrabiblos</i> 3.13.10 (127-148 AD)	to control, to dominate	to control, to dominate; “dominates Mercury and the moon”	to dominate	“dominates”
Moeris Atticista, <i>Lexicon Atticum</i> (2 nd cent)	to exercise one’s own jurisdiction	to exercise one’s own jurisdiction; “to have independent jurisdiction”	- ¹¹	-

In creating this table, I originally had a column for Wolters, but as I started entering in the data, it became clear that almost all of his translations were just definitions from lexicons and contained little justification for why his particular choices in translation were to be preferred over others. It also became clear that some of his choices were presented in a misleading fashion. For example, in summarizing the occurrence in Philodemus, Wolters says “If we do read the verb, then its meaning here, according to standard lexicographical reference works, is ‘rule’ or ‘have authority over’” Wolters (2006:49). By “standard lexicographical reference works” for NT Greek, the average scholar would probably be thinking of Bauer and Danker’s work (2001), and other fairly recent Greek-English lexicons and Greek dictionaries (e.g. Swanson, Louw-Nida, House and Robinson, etc.), or ancient and classical Greek lexicons and dictionaries. Instead, Wolters references the following:

“See C.J. Vooy, *Lexicon Philodemeum*, I (Purmerend, The Netherlands: Muusses, 1934), s.v. (‘dominor’), and *Diccionario Griego–Español*, s.v. (‘ejercer la autoridad’). See also Knight, ‘ἀθθεντέω’, p. 145.”

¹⁰ For unknown reasons, Grudem does not list this reference. A digital search of “Aristonicus” in *EFTB* yielded no results.

¹¹ Payne and Belleville do not see *Lexicon Atticum* as insightful since it uses the intransitive use of ἀθθεντέω instead of the transitive.

It should be obvious that a Greek-Spanish dictionary and Knight's (largely outdated) essay on the subject hardly constitute "standard lexicographical reference works" for this NT term. And while Vooy's 1934 Dutch publication (updated in 1941) may still have some relevant use, calling these works "standard lexicographical reference works" is a bit misleading.

In any case, what conclusions can be drawn from this brief summary of possibilities on the table above? First, by immediate comparison, the complementarian and egalitarian renderings over 1 Timothy 2:12 are both possible. Neither is terribly out of place. Complementarians, like Schreiner and Albert Wolters, acknowledge this (Schreiner 2005a:104; Wolters 2006:50). However, the rendering "exercise authority" or "have authority over" seems less likely because of its *generality*. It would be quite odd if Paul chose an extremely rare word to only say the ordinary (Scholer 1986:205; Belleville 2006:211; Thielman 2005:418, footnote 40; Payne 2009:373-74; cf. Marshall 2007:59). This is especially true since we know Paul had lots of other options to do so—and we know that he used these other options in his own writings. Within NT data alone, Paul's options were: (1) "have authority" (ἔχει ἐξουσίαν, used twenty-one times: Mt 7:29; Mk 1:22; 2:10; 3:15; Lk 5:24; 12:5; Jn 19:11; Acts 9:14; Rom 9:21; 1 Co 7:37; 9:4; 9:5; 9:6; 11:10; 2 Th 3:9; Rev 9:3; 11:6; 14:18; 16:9; 18:1; 20:6); (2) "reign" (ἐξουσιάζω, used four times: Lk 22:25; 1 Cor 6:12, 7:4 twice); (3) "exercise authority" (κυριεύω, used seven times: Lk 22:25; Rom 6:9, 14; 7:1; 14:9; 2 Cor 1:24; 1 Tim 6:15); (4) "rule" (προΐστημι: used eight times: Rom 12:8; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 3:4, 5, 12; 5:17; Tit 3:8, 14). Yet, Paul chose none of these.

Second, "exercise authority over" or "have authority over" is by no means the obvious or normative rendering of the term. *None* of the examples given in the table above by any of the

scholars are clearly and certainly rendered as such, nor are they found in Baldwin's own summary list of possibilities in his extensive study, which is found here:

- “1. The root meaning involves the concept of authority.
2. The context of 1 Timothy 2 appears to make meaning 1, “to rule, to reign sovereignly,” impermissible.
3. Meanings 2 and 2a, “to control, to dominate” or “to compel, to influence someone/something,” are entirely possible.
4. Meaning 2c, “to play the tyrant,” could only correspond to Chrysostom's unique usage if the context could be shown to intend the same clear use of hyperbole, and the context does not seem to do that...
5. Noting that ἀθεντεῖν in 1 Timothy 2:12 is transitive, a translation of “assume authority over” (i.e., meaning 3a) could be appropriate, while 3 or 3b, which are intransitive, are not possible. If a negative meaning were intended, meaning 3c, “to flout the authority of,” could be possible, yet we have seen this meaning appears only well after the New Testament period.
6. It is difficult to imagine how meaning 2d, “to grant authorization,” or meaning 4, “to instigate,” could make sense in 1 Timothy....” (Baldwin 2005:51).

It is interesting that, although the generic “exercise authority”/“have authority over” are *not* listed as options in this summary, and even after Baldwin says that Schreiner will determine which of these listed meanings matches 1 Timothy 2:12, Schreiner in the very next chapter “adopts none of these, but rather ‘exercise authority over’” (Payne 2009:373). Perhaps Schreiner should have read Baldwin's own summary a bit closer; his bias towards a complementarian rendering of 1 Timothy 2:12 is rather clear.

Third, there are a variety of possible meanings for the term. Köstenberger is right when he says:

“Word studies of the term ἀθεντεῖν...in extrabiblical literature (1 Tim 2:12 is the only instance where the word is used in the NT) are able to supply a range of possible meanings. As one considers the term's meaning in its specific context in 1 Tim 2:12, one should seek to determine the *probable* meaning of ἀθεντεῖν with the help of contextual and syntactical studies” (Köstenberger 1994:259-283).

It is erroneous to simply say, as Schreiner does, that “The recent studies of H. Scott Baldwin and Al Wolters show the term signifies a positive use of authority” (Schreiner 2005b:108). It is also an error to cite Baldwin and Wolters’ research as proof, since neither of their studies uphold Schreiner’s claim.

Fourth, it is erroneous to simply flatten and funnel all the possible meanings of the term into one generic concept so that any possible nuance or connotation is automatically discounted. Grudem makes this error when making the broad-brushed claim, “Whenever we have seen this verb occur, it takes a neutral sense, ‘have authority’ or ‘exercise authority’...” (Grudem 1998:3). Six years later Grudem modified his view, saying the word’s sense is “*primarily positive or neutral*” (2004:317, emphasis mine). But this is no less erroneous than his earlier claim. As the above table demonstrates, few, if any occurrences (certainly not most of them) denote a “positive” use of authority.

Fifth, it is also unjustified to claim that, “What we can say with certainty is that we have no instances of a pejorative use of the verb before the fourth century AD” (Baldwin 2005:49; Cf. Wolters 2006:55). One can easily argue (as Payne, Belleville, and others have done) that three to four of the six instances above are contexts where ἀθεντέω is being used in some negative manner. If even *one* of these cases was *possibly* pejorative, it is wrong to talk confidently about “certainty.”

For these reasons, it appears that the typical claims of complementarians regarding the use of ἀθεντέω are either mistaken or misleading. They are also contradictory. Does the

“complementarian interpretation” of ἀϑεντέω in 1 Timothy 2:12 and parallel literature amount to a “positive” sense (Schreiner), “neutral” sense (Grudem A), or “neutral or positive” sense (Grudem B)? And which has Baldwin’s study established? The answer cannot be all of them. These contradictions between complementarian interpretations of complementarian studies makes their overall interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12 appear a bit rushed. It is one thing to say “we don’t know exactly what the term meant in the first century or in 1 Timothy 2:12.” It is quite another to say “we don’t know exactly what the term meant in the first century or in 1 Timothy 2:12, so we’re going to assume that there’s no particular reason why Paul chose it, that it has no nuance of any kind and thus means the generic exercising of authority”—and then ban half the global church from being pastors. This is not sound reasoning.

5.4.2 ἀϑεντέω: Lexical Studies

Both complementarians and egalitarians have conducted lexical studies of ἀϑεντέω. Etymology, the study of word roots and origins, is not typically used to establish the meaning of a term because the meaning of words can change over time, betraying their historical origins. For this reason alone, etymology can be easily abused (see Chapter One of Carson 1996). But, since ἀϑεντέω is a genuinely difficult case, scholars appeal to etymology in one way or another to shed extra light. The complementarian D. A. Carson explains:

“I am far from suggesting that etymological study is useless. It is important, for instance, in the diachronic study of words (the study of words as they occur across long periods of time), in the attempt to specify the earliest attested meaning, in the study of cognate languages, and especially in attempts to understand the meanings of hapax legomena (words that appear only once). In the last case, although etymology is a clumsy tool for discerning meaning, the lack of comparative material means we sometimes have no other choice” (1996:33).

αὐθεντέω, of course, is both a *hapax* and a word with little “comparative materials.” Etymology is therefore useful to some degree.

As it was already observed, Baldwin has established that the “The root meaning [of αὐθεντέω] involves the concept of authority” (2005:49). There is no dispute here. What is in dispute is if that is *all* that can be said about its “root meaning.” This is where the study of cognates can be helpful. For example, “befriend” is the verbal cognate of the noun “friend.” Similarly, “friendly” is the adjectival cognate of the noun “friend.” So if a person wanted to know the meaning of one of these terms, she might examine related cognates to see what their meanings are, and then make a logical inference. So, to use the same example, if a “friend” is like a “buddy” or “companion,” then to “befriend” would probably mean “to make a buddy/companion.” Sure enough, that is what the word “befriend” means. Of course, this may not always work. Some cognates have unrelated meanings (e.g., **ἐπιστάμαι** (v. “understand”) and **ἐπιστάτης** (n. “master”). But that is the exception rather than the rule. In the end, examining the cognates of a word can (and often does) shed useful light on the possible meanings of words.

The noun cognate of the verb αὐθεντέω is αὐθέντης. The complementarian Albert Wolters’ conducted what is perhaps the most extensive study of the word ever completed, and it revealed that the term sometimes has strong, negative connotations (2006:45-61). As Payne has pointed out, Wolters “lists twenty-seven instances of αὐθέντης meaning ‘murderer’ in Classical Greek, four in the first century AD and eight in the second century AD” (2009:362; cf. Belleville 2005b:82-83; 2005a:212). The other two meanings of the term appear to be “master” and “doer.” Therefore, if there is any meaningful relationship between the sense of αὐθεντέω and the sense

of its verbal cognate ἀθέντης, one might infer that ἀθεντέω would have a *negative* nuance, *controlling* nuance, *self-oriented* nuance, or (in a particular context) any combination of these; It is possible, after all, that (for example) the controlling aspect of an action is what *makes* it negative. Interestingly, lexicographers usually follow these very three directions when defining ἀθεντέω: “to domineer” (a negative nuance), “to dominate” (a controlling nuance), or to “assume a stance of independent authority” (a self-oriented nuance).

However, none of these three options are in the best interest of a complementarian reading—which must assert that ἀθεντέω has a neutral sense (Grudem B), neutral or positive sense (Grudem A), or simply a positive sense (Schreiner) of exercising authority. Only then can the ban on women elders hold. This puts complementarians and the study ἀθέντης in a very awkward position. They can go one of three directions. They can (1) concede that a study of ἀθέντης may support a particular nuance of its verbal cognate ἀθεντέω, and risk giving egalitarians’ credit to their interpretation(s); (2) skew the data to make it look like the complementarian position is supported; or (3) reject *all* of the data and argue that the study of cognates isn’t even legitimate. As it turns out, Wolters opts for the second route, and Baldwin for the third.

Wolters says the following in the conclusion to his study:

“With respect to the meaning of ἀθεντέω in 1 Tim. 2.12, my investigation leads to two further conclusions. First, the verb ἀθεντέω should not be interpreted in the light of ἀθέντης ‘murderer’, or the muddled definitions of it given in the Atticistic lexica. Instead, it should be understood, like all the other Hellenistic derivatives of ἀθέντης, in the light of the meaning which that word had in the living Greek of the day, namely ‘master’. Secondly, there seems to be no basis for the claim that ἀθεντέω in 1 Tim. 2.12 has a pejorative connotation, as in ‘usurp authority’ or ‘domineer’. Although it is possible

to identify isolated cases of a pejorative use for both ἀθεντέω and ἀθεντιά, these are not found before the fourth century AD. Overwhelmingly, the authority to which ἀθεντης ‘master’ and all its derivatives refer is a positive or neutral concept” (2006:54).

It is simply bizarre to read these conclusions—for almost every sentence contains an assertion that either directly contradicts Wolters’ own research or is unsubstantiated by it. First, Wolters’ study has not demonstrated that “master” was the default “meaning...that the word had in the living Greek of the day.” According to his own table of data, there are three to four occurrences of “murderer” in the first century (Philo, two in Josephus, and possibly *Wisdom*), and three to four occurrences of “master” in the first century (Euripides three times, possibly *Hermas*). How, then, especially since the occurrence of “murderer” comes from a greater variety of sources than those of “master,” can one say that the data clearly points to “master” as the default meaning of for the Greek of Paul’s day? Second, nothing in Wolters’ study substantiates the claim “there seems to be no basis for the claim that ἀθεντέω in 1 Tim. 2.12 has a pejorative connotation, as in ‘usurp authority’ or ‘domineer’”—mainly because ἀθεντέω isn’t under discussion. It is unclear why Wolters even says this (especially since it seems to reveal his agenda of arriving at complementarian conclusions). Third, it is erroneous to assert that both the noun and verb were never used pejoratively until the fourth century. Payne points this out with regard to the verb ἀθεντέω:

“Not even one instance of the later ecclesiastical use of ἀθεντέω with the meaning “to have authority over” or “to exercise authority” has been established before or near the time of Paul....The first instance of ἀθεντέω confirmed to mean “exercise authority” is ca. AD 370 in Saint Basil, *The Letters* 69, line 45...Lampe has established the patristic use of ἀθεντέω predominately to convey various nuances of assuming, having, or exercising authority. Although there is significant difference between “to exercise authority” and the root meaning of ἀθεντέω, “self-achieving,” the original meaning of ἀθεντέω could have shifted first to “self-achieving through assuming authority,” then “assuming authority” and eventually to “exercising authority.” This shift, however, is not at all self-evident from the root meaning of ἀθεντέω and so should not be assumed to have

occurred much before its first confirmed occurrence in AD 370 and certainly not in Paul's day over three centuries earlier" (2009:362; cf. Keener 2004:109).

As far as the pejorative use of the noun ἀθέντης is concerned, it is unclear why "murderer" does not count as a "pejorative" use. If it doesn't, what does, and how do we know? This is, too, not established in Wolters' study.

Fourth, the statement, "Overwhelmingly, the authority to which ἀθέντης 'master' and all its derivatives refer is a positive or neutral concept" also lacks support. In order to actually *demonstrate* this particular assertion, Wolters would have to conduct an exegesis of every occurrence of the term in its original context and provide a full explanation of why each occurrence was rendered in his particular choice of English words. Instead, his study is only a *summary* of this. No doubt, Wolters has his reasons for choosing between "murderer," "master," and "doer" in each case, and reasons for believing why each instance is either "positive," "negative," or "neutral." But that is not included in the study—and it is precisely what would *need* to be included if one could justifiably say, "Overwhelmingly, the authority to which ἀθέντης 'master' and all its derivatives refer is a positive or neutral concept."

Fortunately, not all complementarians follow Wolters and skew the data to fit their position (and overstate their case in the process). But the alternatives are no less detrimental to the interpretation of those who forbid women elders. As I indicated above, Baldwin chose the third route in responding to research of the term ἀθέντης: in his study of ἀθεντέω, he attempts to establish that the study of cognates is generally useless. This is a particularly odd argument to make since exegetical scholars and lexicographers of all theological traditions (including complementarians) regularly appeal to the study of cognates to understand the meaning and

relationship of certain words. To simply exclude the study of cognates in the study of a word's meaning is not just "a controversial move" (to quote Keener 2005b:231), it is an *unsustainable* move. (Space does not allow for a full justification of this point; I've compiled my thoughts in an essay that is currently awaiting publication).

It is almost time to move on to the next section about the context of 1 Timothy 2:12. But first it is necessary to ask one more question about lexical studies: when does the root of a word play a role in the writer's mind? In his renowned volume on lexical semantics, Moisés Silva asks this precise question in his chapter on etymology:

"...the incisive question may be asked, When *does* the root of a word in fact play a role in the writer's mind? One important clue is the relative *transparency* of the word. The notion of transparency is applied rather broadly to all those words that are *motivated*, that is, words that have natural relation to their meaning. *Splash*, for example, is phonologically motivated, because its sound recalls its sense. *Leader* is morphologically motivated, for someone who knows what to *lead* means what the suffix *-er* stands for can easily arrive at the meaning of the word. Finally, we speak of semantic motivation in cases like *the foot of a hill*, where the figurative character of the phrase makes the meaning intelligible to someone who has not previously heard the expression. All of these words are transparent; whenever a word does *not* suggest a perceptible reason for having its form, then the relation between form and meaning is *arbitrary* and the word is *opaque* (Silva 1994:48).

A fair case can be made that Paul's choice of ἀυθεντέω was, in a way, morphologically motivated. There are numerous ἀυ- words that are found in the New Testament and a substantial number of their meanings stress the *self*. Here are some clear examples:

- αυτοαυνη** = "self-satisfied"
- αυτοαυρητο** = "of one's own accord"
- αυτοματο** = "by itself"
- αυταυρηια** = "self-sufficiency"
- αυταυρηκ** = "self-sufficient"
- αυταοκαταυρητο** = "self-condemned"

αυτοῦσεα = “with one’s own hand”

Additionally, the third person pronoun *αυτοῦ* can function as an adjectival intensive, which focuses on the self and is regularly translated “himself,” “herself,” or “itself.” Also, the word *αυσεα* (“boast”), implicitly directs attention to one’s self.

So when Paul writes to Timothy and uses an extremely rare term that begins with *αὐ-* and has the root concept of “authority,” it is not unreasonable to suspect that Paul was talking about a particular kind of authority that is focused on the person exercising it. Again, this is another reason lexicons define *αὐθεντέω* as “of one who acts on his [or her] own authority” (Friberg 4:81), “to assume a stance of independent authority” (*BDAG*), and “to *act of oneself*” (Strong). Several popular English translations of 1 Timothy 2:12 also follow this path (note: italics display rendering of *αὐθεντέω*):

“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to *assume authority over* a man; she must be quiet” (1 Tim 2:11-12, TNIV, NIV; cf. NEB, REV, Vg.).

“But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to *usurp authority over* the man, but to be in silence” (KJV)

It’s best if a woman learns quietly and orderly in complete submission. Now, Timothy, it’s not my habit to allow women to teach *in a way that wrenches authority from a man*. As I said, it’s best if a woman learns quietly and orderly. (VOICE)

5.4.3 *αὐθεντέω*: Immediate Context

We have looked at parallel passages that use the term *αὐθεντέω*. We have looked at several lexical studies of the term. Now it is time to look at what is perhaps the most important piece of the puzzle: immediate context.

As with any word's usage, the immediate context is the most important element in determining the final meaning. Words do not have meaning in and of themselves; words have meanings in a context. Even when it comes to 1 Timothy 2:12, many complementarians (Schreiner 2005a:104; cf. Moo 1980:68) and non-complementarians recognize this (Towner 2006:222). Baldwin certainly does. He says, "Often context reveals the basic sense of a word. If the general flow of the text is understood, usually the meaning of the word will be evident...language must be viewed as an interconnected system wherein the *context* provides the clues to the meaning of the words used" (2005:39-40, 43). Baldwin also summarizes the context of 1 Timothy 2 in a clear and accurate way. But, this crucial point is tucked away in a footnote in the back of the volume when it should be front and center:

"Submission to authority, not independence, was one of the driving values of the early church. So several of the examples given are in a context where the authority undoubtedly intends the context to have negative connotations" (Baldwin 2005:201, footnote 32).

This is very true. And that context of "negative connotations" includes verse 12. Why would it be any surprise that Paul uses a rare term that is adequately (and perhaps *particularly*) suited to carry a strong, self-oriented and/or negative nuance in the middle of one of the most strict and controversial prohibitions in the entire New Testament? Prohibition is the essence of negativity. Would it really be probable that Paul is banning a *good* activity, especially given the flow of the chapter? No it would not. And would it be probable for Paul to be universally banning an entire ministry for half the congregation in general ("neutrally")? No—if we give priority to the immediate context.

So while complementarians agree that context is the determining factor on the meaning and nuance of the term, this only proves the point they wish not to prove: the immediate context fits best with a strong, self-oriented and therefore (given the context) *negative* meaning of ἀθεντέω—which is used to highlight a particularly non-submissive behavior that merits a strong prohibition. For Paul to (a) all of a sudden condemn an activity that is understood positively (“I do not permit a woman to teach good things or exercise good authority”), or (b) understood generically, so that *all possible nuances* are automatically nullified, is exegetically unwarranted.

Thus, Marshall and Witherington have rightly concluded:

“It is a wrong kind of authority that is being condemned rather than a proper use of authority” (Marshall 2007:59; cf. Spencer 1985:88).

“Since Paul clearly is correcting misbehavior by both men and women and is concerned about such behavior in worship, it is reasonable to conclude that the translation ‘domineer’ [or ‘assume authority’ or ‘take control’] is the appropriate one here...This conclusion is further supported by the concluding phrase, which reiterates the need for being quiet in this context, while teaching is going on” (Witherington 2006a:228).

The same goes for “teaching” (διδάσκειν): it must also be understood to have a strong and negative connotation (e.g., “teach arrogantly,” “teach self-centeredly,” “teach independently of any authority,” “teach as if you own the place,” etc.; to see examples of other possible negative uses of “teach,” see Mt 5:19; Tit 1:11; Rev 2:14, 20.). This is especially clear since it is directly paired with ἀθεντέω by οὐδὲ (“nor”). Much of Köstenberger and Payne’s exhaustive studies on this subject affirm this interpretation. After examining forty-eight extra-biblical examples, Köstenberger concludes that, “...the activities denoted by the two infinitives διδάσκειν and ἀθεντέω will both be viewed either positively or negatively by the writer” (2005a:74). In this

case, they are obviously both negative (Köstenberger and Schreiner both err, however, in assuming that “to teach” negatively must mean “to teach error”; cf. Towner 2006:223-224).

Payne has gone further and shown that “to teach” and “to assume authority/to dominate” are not two separate ideas. It is more likely that they are to be understood together. He concludes his extensive study by saying,

“To interpret οὐδὲ in 1 Tim 2:12 as separating two different prohibitions for women...one against teaching and the other against having authority over a man, does not conform to Paul’s customary use of οὐδὲ. It does not even have a single close parallel in the entire Pauline corpus” (2009:348).

Blomberg also agrees with Payne on the basis of the immediate context:

“The larger context of 1 Timothy 2 further supports this interpretation. While not always employing a formal hendiadys and while using conjunctions other than *oude*, Paul seems to have a propensity to use pairs of largely synonymous words to say just about everything of importance twice (or, occasionally, four times)! Thus we find in verse 1 ‘petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving’; in verse 2a, ‘kings and all those in authority,’; in verse 2b, ‘peaceful and quiet,’ and ‘godliness and holiness’; in verse 3, ‘good and acceptable’ (KJV; TNIV, ‘pleases God’); in verse 4, ‘to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth’; in verse 7a, ‘a herald and an apostle’; verse 7b, ‘I am telling the truth, I am not lying’; in verse 8, ‘without anger or disputing’; in verse 9, ‘decency and propriety’; and in verse 11, ‘quietness and full submission.’ With this many examples of the pattern, we might well expect to find a similar pair in verse 12” (2005:168; cf. Saucy 2001:306-307).

Therefore, Marshall’s conclusion is well grounded and well-stated:

“The quiet demeanor and recognition of authority which are to characterize the learner are contrasted with teaching in a manner which is heavy-handed and abuses authority. αὐθεντεῖν as a reference to ‘authority’ (leadership) unrelated to teaching would exceed the scope of the discussion initiated at vs. 11. It is, therefore, more likely that the verb characterizes the nature of the teaching rather than the role of women in church leadership in general” (Marshall 2004:460, cited in Witherington 2006a:228; cf. Morphew 2009:126).

5.5 Summary and Implications of the Text

In conclusion, the exegetical details of 1 Timothy 2:12 do not favor complementarian conclusions. And if the immediate context is given proper weight in interpreting ἀθεντέω and the passage as a whole, then the complementarian proposal should be one of the first to be rejected. Paul is not banning a generic, “neutral” activity—any more than he is generically addressing who should pray or not, who should wear clothes or not, or whether women should learn or not in the rest of the chapter. Nor is it any more neutral than Paul addressing whether Christians should speak in tongues or not, or if they should prophecy or not in 1 Corinthians 14:26-33, the sister passage of 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Manner and demeanor is the focus and the subject, not general ministries and functions.

It is even more certain that 1 Timothy 2:12 is *not* “intended to eliminate women from the office of elder” (Foh 1979:248). No elder or discussion of offices in the NT is ever associated with “assuming authority” or “dominating” (ἀθεντέω) someone, and there is no contextual reason to assume that Paul is even addressing church “offices” as he does in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 (note Nicole 1986:49). Even the most ardent complementarians agree on this point (e.g., Köstenberger 2005:79; Saucy 2001:307; Knight 1999:142).

1 Timothy 2:11-12 reflects a situation where women are being taught but they’re not being submissive to the teaching (or to the teacher, or both; see Oden 1989:97; Wright 2006:9; Towner 2006:215) but rather are “taking control” and “assuming authority” for themselves and teaching

the (male) teacher (v. 12) in an unsubmitive manner (v. 11), and is therefore worthy of prohibition.

Although this interpretation has been regularly criticized by critics of women pastors, it has weathered the storm by a variety of Christian scholars:

“It is not that women in general cannot teach but that a woman cannot teach in such a way as to usurp authority over teachers already duly designated....Paul is saying: Let a woman learn in a tranquil manner with a humble attitude, unlike the disruptive voices in Ephesus. He personally would not permit these women to teach in a way that expressed an attitude of domination over men” (Oden 1989:97-98).

“Paul would then be prohibiting teaching that tries to get the upper hand—not teaching per se” (Belleville 2005a:223).

“In the life of the Ephesian church, there were teachers and there was a time set aside for instruction (perhaps remotely equivalent to adult Sunday school classes). During those sessions, the women were required by Paul to become quiet and submissive learners instead of struggling to assert themselves as teachers. The silence twice enjoined here is not the mute passivity of women in the synagogue...It is the silence of the docile disciple who receives instruction eagerly and without objections or self-assertion” (Bilezikian 2006:136).

“He probably means, therefore, that women should not exercise inappropriate authority over men, not simply that they should never exercise authority over men” (Thielman 2005:418).

At this point, we return to 1 Corinthians 14 to compare it with the situation of 1 Timothy 2:12.

Belleville provides a fair summary:

“One can surmise from the situation at both Corinth and Ephesus that women had difficulty handling their newly found freedom in Christ and sometimes expressed this freedom in inappropriate ways. At Corinth their eagerness to learn resulted in a disruption of the orderly flow of worship. At Ephesus their freedom to learn and to teach led them to do so in a contentious and dictatorial fashion. Both abuses are understandable given the

primarily domestic and lifelong subordinate roles women played in the culture of that day, but both need correcting, whether it be in Paul’s day or ours” (2000:180).

Table 5.2

1 Corinthians 14	1 Timothy 2
Previous verses (1 Cor. 14:26-33 and 1 Tim. 2:8-10) address New Covenant believers and their freedoms/gifts, essentially asserting “here’s the right way to do it”:	
<i>The right way to deal with the new gift of tongues:</i> don’t let more than 3 speak in tongues at once (v. 27), let prophesy occur one by one with weighing (v. 29-31), etc.	<i>The right way to pray:</i> lift your hands and don’t be quarrelsome (v. 8) <i>The right way to dress:</i> don’t braid your hair or wear costly garments (v. 10)
<p><i>The right way to learn by prophecy:</i> don’t ask disruptive/unthoughtful questions and/or challenge the authority of your male teachers so as to disrespect them. (v. 34-35):</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“if they have a desire to learn” “with all submissiveness” “Quietly” and “remain quiet” “They are not permitted to speak.”</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“As the Law also says...”</p> <p>(Not a generic church ban of all women speaking or prophesying)</p> <hr style="width: 20%; margin: 10px auto;"/> <p>The problem: “pride” (Morris, p. 194)</p>	<p><i>The right way to learn during teaching:</i> don’t ask disruptive/unthoughtful questions and/or challenge the authority of your male teachers so as to disrespect them. (v. 11-12):</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“let a woman learn” “in submission” “Keep silent” “And I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority/take control/domineer over a man.” “For Adam was formed...”</p> <p>(Not a generic church ban of all women teaching men and exercising authority over men)</p> <hr style="width: 20%; margin: 10px auto;"/> <p>The problem: “pride” (Pierce, p. 352)</p>

What, then, of the next two verses in 1 Timothy 2?

For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (1 Timothy 2:13-14)

Even though women are free to learn just like men in the church, they should respect men (*practice*, and not merely “profess godliness,” 1 Tim 2:10), and women, of all people, should hesitate to correct and challenge men during teaching at church since, “Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (v. 14; cf. James 1:19). Indeed, there is irony in the situation. The women Paul is addressing were more or less putting themselves ahead of their (presumably male) teachers—when it was man who was actually *created* first, not woman. How much more should these women stop, think, and listen. And the women Paul is

addressing were perhaps correcting their male teachers—when it was woman who was the first to be deceived and mistaken, not man. How much more should these women be hesitant to confront and challenge when the men are teaching at church!

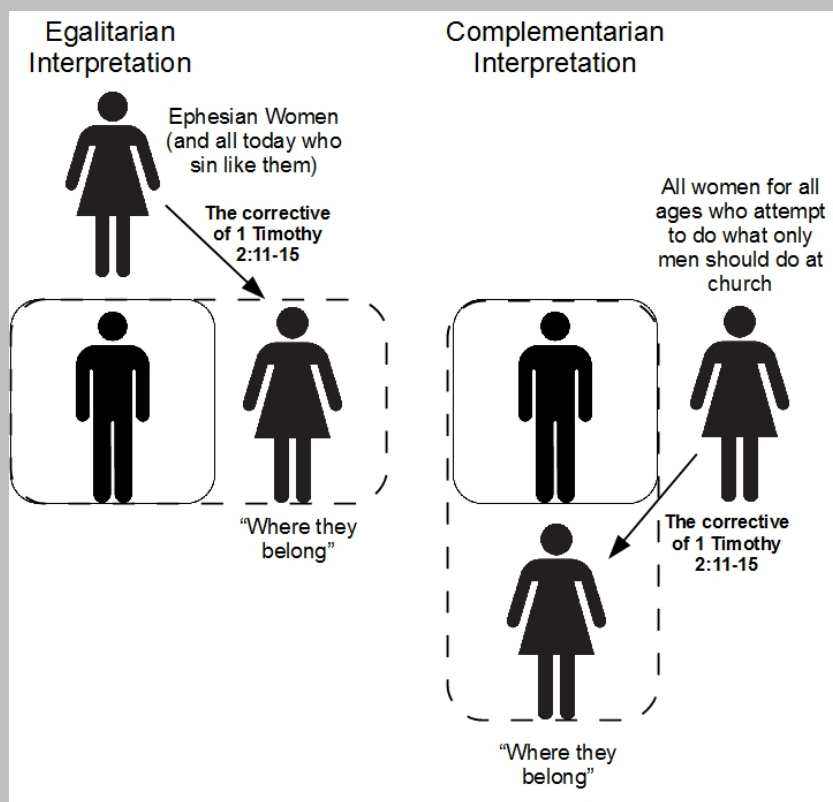
The references to Genesis 2, then, are not an appeal to “the creation order” to establish male primacy/superordination/headship in regular church teaching ministries (e.g., the eldership), as if to say, “women should never teach and exercise authority over men in church because you just weren’t made for it” or “because such actions violate male headship” (Schreiner 2010:45). Paul’s general attitude is not “you can have authority over a man’s body for sex (1 Cor 7) and convert the lost and plant churches as a traveling missionary/evangelist (Rom 16:7; Phil 4:2-3) and prophesy (1 Cor 11; Acts 2; 21:9) and all those good things, but ladies, don’t preach the gospel to the guys at church. That’s just wrong!” And Paul certainly isn’t basing his argument on any kind of inferiority of woman (see Witherington 1991:122). Rather, Paul is simply pointing out the irony of the situation and shoring up reasons, in his own way, why the disruptive women should settle down and behave more like Christ. In effect, then, he says, “you should learn quietly and respect your male teachers while in church (otherwise you’re not going to learn anything); you’re not any smarter than them (have you noticed the history of deception?) nor fundamentally better than them (have you forgotten where you originally came from?). So settle down and be humbled.”

“The theme of humility verses pride, especially as it concerns leadership roles, seems to be the primary focus of Paul in this passage with patience and hope functioning as secondary themes. This is supported by the broader context of the letter, which develops the subject of humility at the outset (1:7), then applies it to women with regard to their physical appearance (2:9-10), to anyone who would aspire leadership in the assembly (3:1-13), to the treatment of elders (male and female) by younger critics (5:1-2), to conceited persons teaching strange doctrines for personal advancement (6:3-10), and to

those tempted to become proud because of their wealth (6:17-19). Thus, it is not a theme that needs to be introduced on the basis of reconstruction but rather is one that flows from and is consistent with the book's broader context" (Pierce 1993:352).

Indeed, Paul is not pulling women down to be under men, he's pulling women down so that they no longer behave as if they are above men (Peterson 2008:68).

Figure 5.1



Unsurprisingly, Paul has the same attitude in 1 Corinthians 14:36, where he takes aim at self-centered pride: "Was it from you [women] that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?"

"More than once Paul has had occasion to complain of the pride of the Corinthians. Clearly they felt free to strike out on new lines, justified by only their own understanding of things Christian" (Morris 2008b:194).

The sin of pride and self-assertion is at the root of the women problems in Ephesus and Corinth. 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 are brought together once again.

One of the implications of our interpretation is that the general principle applies to men as much as to women. As Blomberg notes (2011:56; cf. Marshall 2008:77):

“Indeed, it is hard to imagine Paul disapproving of the extension of his commands here to both genders, as if women could pray while angry and divisive men could flaunt extravagant clothing and ignore righteous living!”

This should be no surprise since virtually all of the gender-specific instructions in the chapter can be reversely applied. *Nobody* (as opposed to just women) should wear excessive and distracting clothing at church. *Everyone* (not just men) are welcome to lift their hands up in prayer without quarreling.

5.6 The Proposed Exegesis in the Context of Biblical Theology

Finally, it must be noted that our exegesis of these two texts harmonizes with the rest of biblical theology.

“If a reader came across 1 Timothy 2:12 with no knowledge of the instances of women prophesying in the Old and New Testaments or of the description of Priscilla teaching Apollos or of the foundational verse Galatians 3:28 that “in Christ there is neither male or female,” he or she would probably conclude that the Bible takes a dim view of the ability of women to teach. Given that knowledge of other Scriptures, however, the reader is more likely to conclude that there is something about the circumstances of 1 Timothy 2:12 that, if known, would help in the understanding of Paul’s perspective. Since Priscilla did indeed teach doctrine and since the women who prophesied at Corinth (and presumably elsewhere) were providing instruction and were edifying the church as they did this, it is reasonable to ask whether the teaching in 1 Timothy was of a different sort” (Liefeld 1989:136-37).

That is what has been concluded through this study of 1 Timothy 2: Paul's aim is not addressing the generic functions of eldership.

Additionally, it would make little sense for Paul to prohibit women's use of authority and teaching in the church when they exercise authority and teach in every other sphere of creation. Indeed, women have authority in a variety of spheres in creation (and some complementarians have little trouble admitting this; e.g., Saucy 2001:310). In Scripture, and even in some of the most patriarchal periods of human history, women have authority at home in their family (Ex 20:12; Prov 1:8), in family business (Prov 31:11-26), in marriage (even over their husband's body; 1 Cor 7:4), in the workplace (1 Sam 25:18-19; 1 Kgs 4:8, 24. Cf. 1 Chron 7:22-24; Est 4:5) and in the theocracy of Israel (Jdg 4). Christian women are told to teach other women (Tit 2:3-4) and Christian women take part in instructing Christian men on doctrinal matters specifically relating to the gospel (Acts 18:26; note Bock 2007:592-593). Given 1 Timothy 1:3 and Acts 16:1, it appears that Timothy's "Jewish mother and grandmother would have been mainly responsible for his learning of 'the holy Scriptures' in the early years" (Towner 2006:582). Additionally, women pray and prophesy with the authority of Christ's name with men in the church (Acts 1:12-14; Acts 2; 1 Cor 11:5, 13) as New Covenant believers. All who are Jesus' disciples (men and women) are commanded to preach the gospel to every creature in the Great Commission (Lk 24; Mt 28; see chapter six).

Finally, and perhaps most important, women are specifically *created* to have authority and exercise it over creation with their male counterpart (Gen 1:26-29). Indeed, as both sides can agree, exercising dominion and authority is part and parcel of what it means to be human, and

this exercise of authority applies for women as much as for men (Ortlund 2006:97; Chanski 2008; Clark 2006:9; Hess 2005:81-82; Sproul 2003:43). Therefore, it would be wrong to simply teach a broad universal principle (whether on the alleged basis of some biblical text or not) that God created men to bear “authority” and that women simply lack this aspect/attribute, or that a certain kind of authority (e.g., “spiritual”) is only designed for men to have and not women, or that women should simply have less of authority, in general, all or most of the time. The fact is, God has ultimate authority and distributes it through both men and women.

Thus, Christians today naturally (though perhaps not fully) recognize women’s authority in spheres beyond marriage and family such as in education (e.g., teacher or professor), the state (e.g., state representative, or judge), and the church (e.g., teaching Sunday school) without any worry of confusing “roles.” This is because leadership is not an attribute, role, or aspect reserved for male humans. Christians also recognize that it is morally good for women to teach men in some contexts even though they do not explicitly appear in Scripture, such as a seminary professor teaching Greek to male students. This is precisely because the nature of man and woman and the authority they bear from God over creation and through each other in marriage and in the home extends into the rest of society and creation (see chapter seven of this study). Sex, marriage, and family are the foundation and (in many ways) the blueprint for other structures that exist in creation—all of which are (or at least, should be) driven by love and godliness.

Indeed, an egalitarian view better fits the larger picture of biblical theology. Especially in the New Covenant era, where “faith has come” and “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” (Gal 3:28), where both “sons and daughters” will prophecy (Acts 2:17-21), where the sign of the New Covenant is gender-inclusive baptism, where women kick-off the inauguration of the New Covenant era by hearing the first news of the Incarnation (Lk 1:32-35), being the first Samaritan and Gentile convert (Jn 4:7-42; Mt 15:21-28), and being the first witnesses to the resurrection (Mk 16:1-15) and the witnesses of both Christ’s burial *and* resurrection, and in the New Covenant era where the male, earthly, Jewish, priesthood is abolished (Heb 7-12), where God Himself in the flesh—even in a male body—consistently and intentionally challenges woman’s secondary, subordinate place (Groothuis 2002:17-20; Watts 2003:43-62), it is problematic to confidently label women elders a “pulpit crime” (White 2006:56).

5.7 Alternative Interpretations

Given the controversial history of these two texts, one can’t be too certain about certainty in weighing options for 1 Timothy 2:12. Perhaps it is wise to at least examine three other possibilities that have some merit to them.

First, maybe Paul is only addressing (and therefore only really forbidding) false teaching. As Keener succinctly puts it: “If Paul does not want the women to teach in some sense, it is not because they are women, but because they are unlearned” (2004:120). Since responding to false teaching is the occasion of 1 Timothy, and since women in the first century were generally not as educated as they are today (Keener 2007), this interpretation would seem to have a lot of merit. I won’t even summarize a bibliography of all who hold this position, but it is no small list. You’re

probably wondering: how does this square with 1 Corinthians 14, since 1 Corinthians wasn't primarily written to address heresy? Perhaps it doesn't need to; Paul was simply giving a similar prohibition and uses similar language to address two different situations. Or, as Fee, Epp, Payne, and others assert, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 may not even be a part of our original New Testament, so there would be nothing to actually square anyway.

All of this is possible. But the interpolation theory of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 lacks strong textual support and betrays the similarities that it has with 1 Timothy 2:11-12. And the false-teaching interpretation seems exegetically difficult to square (e.g., Why didn't Paul just condemn false teaching [ἑτεροδιδασκαλέω] like he did in 1:3 and 6:3? Wouldn't there have been a better solution to the problem than just banning one entire sex from teaching anything in church at all? Etc.).

A second option may be that Paul is only addressing wives and husbands in both 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:12 as opposed to addressing women and men in general. This is possible because the Greek terms used in these texts (ἄνθρωπος and γυναίκα) can be interpreted either "man"/"husband" or "woman"/"wife." Context usually helps us decide one way or another.

In his exegetical commentary, Garland makes a particularly forceful argument that this is the case in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 (cf. Winston 2003:39-174). After his extensive discussion he says:

"I conclude that Paul's instructions are conditioned by the social realities of his age and a desire to prevent a serious breach in decorum. The negative effect that wives publicly interrupting or contradicting their husbands might have on outsiders (let alone the bruising it would cause to male sensitive egos) could not be far from his mind. Paul may fear that the Christian community would be "mistaken for one of the orgiastic, secret, oriental cults that undermined public order and decency" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1984:232),

in which women exercised more prominent roles. To forestall this impression, he presents the practice of the Palestinian communities as a model to be imitated (see Nadeau 1994)” (Garland 2003:673).

What this conclusion has in its favor is Paul’s assumption that the women are married in 1 Corinthians 14: “If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask *their husbands* [ἰδίους ἄνδρας] at home” (14:35). This is a plain indicator that he’s primarily (and perhaps *only*) addressing wives.

But this doesn’t *need* to be so (Ciampa and Rosner 2010:722-723). Maybe Paul is just generalizing—addressing all women, but assuming that most of them are married (similar to how Paul in 1 Timothy 3 assumes that an elder of the church is married and has kids, but an elder doesn’t necessarily have to be married and have kids). But, let’s assume for the moment that Paul *is* only really addressing wives in 1 Corinthians 14. Given the vast similarities between this text and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 (see chart above), one might conclude that 1 Timothy 2:12 is addressing only wives as well. Guthrie entertains this possibility for a moment, but rules against it (Guthrie 2009:91). Hurley gives further reason why wives/husbands are probably not the focus of 1 Timothy 2:12 (1981:187).

Because of all of these different options, and because of further cultural research, Towner has essentially adopted his own unique position that allows for either husbands/men or /wives/women, and allows for either the false-teaching interpretation or the interpretation of this chapter (a particular kind/manner of teaching is being forbidden). Here is what he says:

“If, as Marshall suggests, Paul is addressing women who have been involved in teaching heresy, then ‘teaching’ is here under a negative evaluation. But even if the problem is that they have assumed the role inappropriately (whatever they teach) out of a desire to

dominate in a public meeting (or out of a desire to enact gospel freedom), their assumption of the teaching role is under a negative evaluation. In strong contrast ('but'; *alla*) to the appropriate appearance or expression of domination by wives/women over husbands/men through teaching, Paul restates the demeanor (and hence the role of learner) they are to assume: 'but (*alla*) let them be in quietness.' Feminists and egalitarians may debate whether this was a retrograde move on Paul's (or the author's) part. Hierarchicalists assume that Paul was simply applying a creation ordinance. Textual and background considerations suggest, however, that the presence and influence of a circle of wealthy women in the church were at issue. Their flouting of the traditional dress code suggests a link with the broad trend of the promiscuous wealthy Roman wives that Winter has described. Other yearnings for power and public presence make the paradigm of this 'Alpha' Roman female a possible background to the grasping wealthy wives depicted here. The presence of the heresy and its probable influence on the household and women/widows, and its revision of values, complicate the background. But even if a neat reconstruction is beyond our reach, tantalizing points of contact present themselves as we consider the heretical reading of the OT, prohibition of marriage, and the greed (6:5-10) that might have led the opponents to befriend and beguile this circle of wealthy wives and widows (potential patronesses) so attentive to secular strands" (Towner 2004:223-224).

In conclusion, there are endless exegetical interpretations of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12, and these are an additional three that deserve some attention. All of them are possible, all of them have a degree of credibility, and none of them amount to a universal ban of women elders.

5.8 Conclusion

For many Christians, "There is only one valid argument against women's ordination to the ministry: scriptural prohibition. This prohibition is found in 1 Tim 2:12" (Foh 1989:91). This "valid argument" has been shown to be invalid. 1 Timothy 2 cannot be legitimately used to ban women elders if one gives priority to sound exegesis.

It is now appropriate to move on to our secondary argument which addresses the specific functions of eldership in NT theology.

CHAPTER SIX

A UNIVERSAL BAN ON WOMEN PASTORS IS PROBLEMATIC FOR NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

6. Introduction

If Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2:12 (or any other Scriptural text for that matter) really amount to a universal ban on women teaching and exercising authority over men at church, this "teaching" inevitably includes the proclamation of the gospel. In fact, those against women elders often insist that this is precisely what the "teaching" is in the verse (Schreiner 2005b: 101; Moo (2006: 185; cf. Saucy, 2001:302-303). Such critics of women elders vary, however, on what exactly is being prohibited, and how to apply this prohibition today (see next chapter). But there is a consensus that in certain situations women, *because they are female*, should not be teaching and proclaiming the gospel in the same circumstances where men can and should.

The question for this chapter is if it is really characteristic of the early church and NT theology to place such restrictions on Christians' proclamation of the gospel. This chapter will answer in the negative. The fact is, when it comes to the advancement of God's kingdom through the message of the gospel, biology (among other potential obstacles) is rarely a concern (although, what is socially appropriate *is*, at times, a noticeable concern). This is because this work of evangelism abroad and the worship and spiritual edification within the church is driven by the Spirit and the

Spirit's outpouring of gifts on believers, not driven (or even regulated) by permanent, prefabricated molds of how a man and a woman should behave. In fact, the elevation/restoration of women is *characteristic* of the New Covenant community, which is distinctly indicated by Acts 2, Galatians 3:28, and the gender-inclusive activity of baptism. It is good to see those who forbid women elders at least acknowledge this particular truth (e.g., Saucy 2001:161).

Our plan, then, is to survey the NT landscape and assess the consistency of New Testament theology with a universal prohibition of women from preaching and teaching the gospel simply because they are female persons, or simply because their listeners involve male persons. By "preaching and teaching the gospel" I generally mean proclaiming the good news about the coming, person, and work of Christ.

6.1 Proclaiming the Gospel in the Gospels

Since the following study is a brief overview of the place of gospel-proclamation in New Testament theology, it is natural to ask: when does the proclamation of the gospel begin? One could argue that it began in Genesis 3:15, the so-called "first gospel" (*protoevangelium*) where a savior is promised to humankind: "he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." We could survey gospel proclamation from that point forward all the way into the first century, noting that there is virtually no end to the variations in which God chooses to announce and promote the good news. Nevertheless, to keep this portion of our study concise and focused, we will limit this study to the New Testament Scriptures and spend most of our time in Luke-Acts.

Early news of Christ's coming was announced in extraordinary ways. In the first chapter of Luke's gospel, the angel Gabriel announces that Mary of Nazareth will conceive a son, call his name "Jesus," and that "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk 1:31-33). Gabriel also adds to this wonderful news that, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you..." (1:35). The Messiah's entrance into the world is apparently not isolated from other members of the Trinity; the Spirit is intimately involved from the very beginning. This is a theme that will continually resurface throughout our study.

Mary puts this good news to song, traditionally called "Mary's Song" or the "*Magnificat*" (Latin). It is yet another creative proclamation of God's intervention and salvation in a line other similar songs, such as the song of Moses in Exodus 15, Miriam in Exodus 15, Deborah in Judges 5, Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, etc. (note Tribble 1995:22-23). It is as theological as it is musical, addressing the very character of God and God's relationship to people—and all in a highly personal manner. Her song stretches back to the faithfulness of God in eras past, and yet remains forward-looking. As one commentator puts it, "Mary's Song is a virtual collage of biblical texts. This not only emphasizes its beauty, but also shows how the past can be reemployed to give meaning to the present" (Green 1997:101-102; note Koontz 1959:339).

One must remember that the Song is a part of Holy Scripture. It is as authoritative as any male composition in the biblical canon—"profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for

training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). Additionally, it is important to note that songs in the ancient world were often meant to teach (cf. Col 3:16), as Saucy points out:

“Although one hears little of song as a medium of teaching in today’s church, the early church following the practice of Judaism held singing in high regard as a vehicle of instruction. Recent studies of New Testament hymnody show that early Christian hymns featured “both didactic and hortatory elements,” that is, instruction and exhortation. The Psalms of the Old Testament, sung in the church, provide rich examples of such elements. The church also composed new songs declaring the new work of God in Christ. Many scholars identify the Christological teaching of Philippians 2:6-11 as an early Christian hymn (cf. Rev. 5:9-10; possibly Eph. 5:14; Col. 1:15-20; 1 Tim 3:16). We are not told who composed these hymns, but Mary’s song known as the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55) suggests that women participated in the composition of these early Christian hymns as well as in their singing, which constituted a “mode of the Word in which Christ makes Himself heard” in the community of believers” (Saucy 2001:169).

Whatever the purpose of the song was (e.g., a simple, private expression of praise that somehow was made available to gospel writers decades later, or a carefully crafted tune intended to be passed down from generation to generation), Luke finds the song worth integrating into his “accurate account” (Lk 1:1-3) of “all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1). In the forthcoming stories about Jesus, Luke establishes through the song that Jesus

“...actually does and promotes what the *Magnificat* claims are characteristic acts of God. In this way Luke makes some very controversial words and works of Jesus reinforce the idea that he is actually doing what God characteristically does. The conclusion: Jesus is God’s Son” (Simons 2009:42).

Then, another miracle happens followed (once again) by praise to God. In Acts 1:64, the tongue of the infant John was “loosed, and he spoke, praising God.” Perhaps this comes as no surprise since it was predicted that “he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb” (1:15). In any case, it is unknown what John said or how much he said, but only that “all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea” (1:65).

John's father was then "filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied" (1:67). It is not exactly clear why Zechariah's Song ("*Benedictus*") is considered "prophecy" while Mary's is not, except for perhaps the stronger predictions about the future and a more confrontational proclamation about the coming salvation (note the change to second person in v. 76). Green concludes that:

"Zechariah's Song displays few of the formal structural elements of the Song of Mary, but two features are obvious. First, within the Song words and motifs are repeated and associated with new contexts so as to accent and develop their meaning....One can also point to the repetition of the language of salvation in vv. 69 and 77..." (Green 1997:112).

Whatever the nature or pattern of the song, it is clear that the word about Christ is getting out a little at a time.

These early announcements about Jesus emerge from a rather odd group of sources: an angel, a poor woman, a baby's prophetic and priestly father, and the baby himself. The Spirit is behind the whole scheme: impregnating a virgin, filling an infant inside his mother's womb, and leading a priest to prophesy about his own son and the Christ. This pattern continues: a peculiar group of people become witnesses of the good news about Christ, and the Spirit continues to play a key role in the task of proclamation.

In the second chapter of Luke, another angel appears, this time to shepherds who were "keeping watch over their flock by night" (Lk 2:8). The angel announces, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Lk 2:10-11). Luke then introduces readers to two noteworthy characters who affirm Christ—though their primary knowledge of Jesus evidently comes directly from God and not the testimonies of Zechariah, Mary, or the shepherds. The first of these two characters is Simeon:

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:25-35).

Given the way that Simeon is described (note Morris 2008a:104) and how that description overlaps with Zechariah, it is possible that Simeon is a prophet” (Green 1997:145; cf. Bock 2012:314). Whether this is the case or not, what Simeon says is not a mere repetition of the good news already proclaimed. Morris contends that “what he says goes beyond anything the shepherds said” (2008:105), and Green, “What Simeon has asserted in his prayerlike hymn is so extraordinary that even Mary and Joseph are amazed,” “apparently this portion of the narrative has opened up possibilities requiring further development and clarification” (1997:146). Simeon does not simply inform people about the fulfillment of a personal prophecy; he proclaims that salvation in the Messiah involves the Gentiles.

All of this takes place in the Temple, which Green notes is:

“...the meeting place between the divine and the human...This portrayal is ironic, for here and in Acts 22:17-21 this location helps to legitimate the universal reach of the gospel: precisely in the center of the world of Israel, the Jerusalem temple, God discloses that salvation for Israel includes salvation for the Gentiles” (1997:146).

It is at that point in the story that Luke introduces another character:

“And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:36-38).

While there is ambiguity in Simeon’s role, there is less ambiguity for Anna. She is explicitly “a prophetess”—a female prophet. For Luke’s readers—especially given how Luke notes her descent from the “tribe of Asher”—the term “prophetess” would be understood as the kind prophetess found in the Old Testament period” (note VanGemeren 1990:371). There, we read about Miriam the “prophetess” (Moses’ sister who sang and danced in Ex 15:20-21), Deborah “the prophetess” and judge (Judg 4:4), Huldah (during Josiah’s reign in 2 Kgs 22:14 and 2 Chr 34:22), Noadiah (a false prophetess during the post-exilic period in Neh 6:14), and Isaiah’s wife (Is 8:3). Witherington rightly states that Anna “stands in the line of such Old Testament figures as Deborah and Huldah...” (1990:209; cf. Belleville 2000:56; Plummer 1902:72). Of course, there is still a sense in which Anna stands between times and takes part in the inauguration of a new era. But her function appears to be rooted in Israel’s history.

The prophet in pre-Christ times has been described by theologians in various ways. This is because prophets fulfilled various functions. But common to them all seems to be the basic purpose of publicly speaking on behalf of God—usually revealing things that would not have otherwise been known to the people. Thus, Marshall says: “Anna possessed divine insight into things normally hidden from ordinary people, and hence was able to recognize who the child in the temple was and then to proclaim his significance to those who were interested” (1978:123).

The *ESV Study Bible* captures this broad consensus when describing the prophet “as a spokesman” (Packer and Grudem, 2008:1229; cf. Willis 1995:105; Long 2007:103).

VanGemenen also makes a number of other insights into the role of the Old Testament prophet. He presents seven strict criteria for what comprised the prophetic “office” (VanGemenen 1990:42-43). Old Testament prophetesses seem easily capable of fitting each criteria. There is little reason to suggest that the role of prophetess is fundamentally different or lower in authority than that of male prophets. Both proclaimed the Word of the Lord—personally, publicly, verbally, and authoritatively (Willis 1995:105; Idestrom 2007). Waltke notes this in his work *An Old Testament Theology*:

“In the Old Testament, women are called to be “prophetesses” on an equal footing with prophets...Clarence Vos, in his superb doctoral dissertation on our topic, says, ‘That officials from the royal court went to a prophetess relatively unknown with so important a matter is a strong indication that in this period of Israel’s history there is little if any prejudice against a woman’s offering of prophecy. If she had received the gift of prophecy, her words were to be given the same authority as those of men’” (Waltke 2007:240).

This theological truth is particularly clear in the Old Testament example of Deborah, a “prophetess” and “judge” who appears in Judges 4-5. But this discussion will have to wait until Chapter Seven.

So, where does Anna fit in all of this? Luke spends most of his time in the short paragraph establishing Anna’s reliable character. This is likely “a further attempt to render unimpeachable her testimony concerning Jesus” (Green 1997:150). In other words, Luke isn’t going to tell Theophilus about Jesus on the basis of poor sources, and he wants to make that clear. But Anna is significant in other ways besides her impeccable character. Morris says:

“There had been no prophet for hundreds of years, so it is noteworthy that God had raised up this *prophetess*. The Talmud recognized seven prophetesses only (*Megillah* 14a), so this was no ordinary distinction” (2008:106).

Additionally, while we know little about what Simeon and Zechariah did after their encounter with the infant Christ, we do know that Anna continued her public ministry—proclaiming the gospel in the Temple, and likely beyond: “she continued to speak [ἐλάλει] of Him” (NASB; note Witherington 1990:209). Anna’s audience is also specified: “she continued to speak of Him *to all* [πᾶσιν] *those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem*” (NASB, emphasis mine; note that “speaking” (λαλέω) is “equally important” term as “preaching” and “proclaiming” in the NT; see Luter 2002:11).

There is obviously no reason to think that men were excluded from this broad group of seekers, or that Anna would stop proclaiming (“preaching,” Bock 1994:230) the good news when men were present. If it was fundamentally wrong for a woman to teach and preach to (a) men of true faith (b) in a public location (c) without a man in her life to serve as her ultimate representative and authority figure, then Anna failed miserably. Luke also would have failed to persuade his readers that she is a godly woman after all since, in theory, she would have been sinning by acting outside of her “feminine role.” But none of this is the case. The fact is, “Through Simeon and Anna, public proclamation of the birth of God’s Messiah was made to the people of Israel, and in particular to the devout and godly ones who were looking and praying for His promised coming” (Witmer 2003:335).

As the following segment of Luke’s Gospel indicates, Jesus the child appears to be the next major figure to speak about gospel matters—and again in the Temple. Luke says Jesus’ parents

found him “in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions” (Lk 2:46). But the next verse makes clear that Jesus wasn’t simply asking questions; he was also teaching: “And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding *and his answers*” (emphasis mine). Readers learn that even as a twelve year-old boy in the realm of experts—and at the apparent dismay of his parents—the furthering of truth and God’s Kingdom must continue.

Greater momentum builds with the “voice crying in the wilderness” (Lk 3:4, cf. Mt 3:3; Mk 1:3; Jn 1:23) who was “filled with the Holy Spirit” from the womb (Lk 1:15, 41). Wearing “a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist” (Mt 3:4; cf. Mk 1:6), John the Baptist “preached good news to the people” (Lk 3:18). The “word of God came to John of Zechariah in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Lk 3:2-3).

Reader’s should briefly note that this is the first time Luke uses the terms εὐαγγελίζω (3:17) and κηρύσσω (3:3). Both are the standard terminology used when talking about teaching and preaching the gospel (cf. Luter 2002:8-11). Κηρύσσω is a common term (used 61 times in the NT) that specifically means to publicly proclaim or preach something.¹ Louw and Nida break down the term into three possible meanings: (a) “to announce in a formal or official manner by means of a herald or one who functions as a herald”; (b) “to announce extensively and publicly—‘to proclaim, to tell’,”; (c) “to publicly announce religious truths and principles while urging acceptance and compliance—‘to preach’” (Louw and Nida 1996:416). *BDAG* condenses

¹ The noun form of this term is κήρυγμα, which means “preaching,” or “proclamation.” It is used nine times in the NT.

these three definitions into two: “to make an official announcement, *announce*” and “to make public declarations, *proclaim aloud*” (2001:543). The ESV renders the term under “proclaim” 41 times, “preach” 19 times, and “talk” once.² Εὐαγγελίζω, on the other hand, is used 54 times in the NT and means “to tell the good news, to announce the gospel” (Louw and Nida 1996) or in *BDAG*, either generically to “bring good news, announce good news” or specifically “proclaim the divine message of salvation, proclaim the gospel” (2001:402). The term is usually rendered “preach” in the ESV (36 times and “proclaim” twice), and “proclaim” in the NRSV (32 times, “preaching” once). Both of these terms are often used interchangeably since they overlap (e.g., Rom 10:12-18). Hence, John the Baptist comes preaching (κηρύσσω, Lk 3:3)—and preaching the *gospel* in particular (εὐαγγελίζω, Lk 3:17). There is also another term, καταγγέλλω, which is used 18 times in the NT. *BDAG* (2001:515) defines it as “to make known in public, with implication of broad dissemination, *proclaim, announce,*” and Louw and Nida, “to announce, with focus upon the extent to which the announcement or proclamation extends” (1996). Thus, the term appears synonymous with κηρύσσω with a nuance about the extent of proclamation.

All of this is important because many who oppose women elders try to force women’s gospel proclamation (particularly that of the early church in Luke-Acts) into the realm of the private sphere when this betrays the consistent meaning of the terms—especially Κηρύσσω and καταγγέλλω, which specifically entails a *public* speaking. As it will become more and more clear, women in the early church take part in this public proclamation. Others sometimes try to

² Mk 1:45. What led the ESV translators to opt for “talk” in this one verse is somewhat of a puzzle to me. It is also interesting to note the significant difference in the NRSV renderings, with “proclaim” used 56/61 times, “preach” 3 times, and “announced” and “proclamation” once. This is important to note for those who want to attribute a special meaning to the task of “preaching” (e.g., some official pulpit task); if we are not familiar with the original languages, we may be unconsciously influenced by the word choice of our translations. The NRSV seems to avoid the potential baggage of “preach.” I personally do not see any benefit of using “preach” over “proclaim.”

force women's gospel proclamation to be *nonverbal* (e.g., women "proclaim the good news" by being a godly mother, making lunch for the neighbors, etc.). But this meaning falls outside the normal use of the term (though, see 1 Cor 11:26) and requires specific exegetical warrant.

Luke says that "crowds...came out to be baptized by [John]" (Lk 3:7). As the son of a priest who prophesied under the direction of the Spirit, John's ministry is unsurprisingly a prophetic ministry that (like Zechariah, Simeon, and Anna) proclaims the good news about the Messiah and looks forward to his local involvement, specifically when one "who is mightier" than John "will baptize [the people] with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Lk 3:16).

It isn't long and Jesus comes back into the scene. After being baptized, empowered by the Holy Spirit (Lk 3:22; Mk 1:10; Mt 3:16; Jn 1:32), and returning from the temptation in the wilderness unscathed and "in the power of the Spirit" (Lk 4:14), the grown Messiah begins proclaiming the good news. In the very next verse in Luke's narrative, we are told that Jesus taught in synagogues (4:15) and was "glorified by all." Then, on the Sabbath, he identifies himself as the one to "proclaim good news [εὐαγγελίσασθαι] to the poor" (4:18), "proclaim [κηρύξαι] liberty and "proclaim [κηρύξαι] the year of the Lord's favor" (v. 19). From this inaugural point forward, the Messiah continues ministry in a variety of ways and contexts. He continues "preaching" (κηρύσσων) in synagogues (Lk 4:44), "teaching" from various locations (6:6; 13:10) like a boat (5:3), "teaching" amidst Pharisees (5:17-26), scandalously witnessing to a Samaritan woman at a well (Jn 4), teaching disciples numerous lessons through parables in a variety of contexts, etc. There seems to be no place or situation where it is fundamentally inappropriate to proclaim the gospel in one manner or another.

In combination with miracles, these events spark more talk about the Messiah and his work, such as the demoniac who goes away “proclaiming [κηρύσσων] throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him” (Lk 8:39). In fact, to be more effective (and reap a “harvest,” 10:2) Jesus commissions twelve of his disciples to take on his work—specifically “to cure diseases” and “to proclaim [κηρύσσειν] the kingdom of God and to heal” (Lk 9:1-2; 6:13; cf. Mt 10:1), or in Mark’s words, “so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach [κηρύσσειν] and have authority to cast out demons” (Mk 3:13-15). They did as Jesus said: “they departed and went through the villages, preaching [εὐαγγελιζόμενοι] the gospel and healing everywhere (Lk 9:6).” These twelve Jewish men were given the name “apostles” (Lk 6:13), generally meaning “delegate,” “messenger,” “envoy,” or “ambassador.” The Twelve are also significant in witnessing to Jews since they symbolize the Twelve tribes of Israel (Bock 2002:627; Ladd 1993:390). The choice to replace Judas Iscariot’s “ministry and apostleship” (Acts 1:25) with Matthias in Acts 1:26, and Paul’s references to the twelve (1 Cor 15:5; cf. Eph 2:20; 4:11; Gal 1:17; 1 Thess 2:6) also points to a special significance of this group.

However, one must be careful not to overemphasize the significance of the Twelve since (a) Jesus then commissions “seventy-two others” to do essentially the same work as the Twelve (Lk 10:1-17; Köstenberger and O’Brien 2001:119); it is clear that healing and preaching the gospel is by no means limited to the Twelve (1 Cor 15:5, (b) James was not replaced when he died (Acts 12:2), nor was any subsequent apostle, and (3) both the Twelve and the seventy-two are identified as being under the broader category of “disciples” (see Lk 9:14, 16; 10:23; Mt 11:1).

Schüssler-Fiorenza is particularly keen in making this point and then connecting it with the subject of women elders/priests. She says:

“Luke-Acts precludes the notion that the Twelve could have appointed a line of successors, since Luke’s the*logical perspective assigns only a very limited function to the twelve apostles. The Twelve are mentioned for the last time in Acts 6:2ff, and they disappear altogether after chapter 15. It is, moreover, curious that most passages in Acts speak only of the work of one of them, Peter. Luke-Acts does not characterize the Twelve as missionaries, and there is little evidence in Acts that they were all active outside Jerusalem. In Acts the apostle par excellence is Paul, who clearly was not one of the Twelve....it needs to be stressed that according to Luke-Acts the historical and symbolic function of the Twelve has not continued in the ministries of the church....If Luke should have required that the replacement of Judas must be a male follower of the historical Jesus, then this does not say anything about maleness as an essential requirement for the ordained priesthood or episcopacy in the church, since Luke does not envision any ‘apostolic succession’ of the Twelve....The historical-the*logical issue at stake is therefore not whether wo/men can be appointed as successors of the apostles, since Jesus did not call any wo/man disciple to be a member of the circle of Twelve. Rather the the*logical issue at hand is whether the discipleship of equals will be realized by the *ekklēsia*, the democratic assembly of *all* citizens in the church” (2013:227-229).

Prior to the sending out of the Twelve and Seventy-Two, Luke provides read an interesting summary about Jesus’ disciples:

“Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming [κηρύσσων] and bringing the good news [εὐαγγελιζόμενος] of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means” (Lk 8:1-3).

These verses are significant because of the unusual way female disciples are featured. In his intricate commentary on these sections, Bauckham critiques the idea that women disciples are always depicted as being subordinate to the Twelve and are always stuck in subordinate positions of traditional, household tasks while the role of male disciples is preaching and teaching. He says (2002:113-115):

...the true male counterpart to the women's "service," as described in Luke 8:3, is not preaching or leadership but the abandonment of home and family by the twelve (Luke 5:11; 18:28-29). In 18:28-29 Peter is, as usual, spokesman for the twelve men when he says that "we have left our homes and follow you." Hence the specific terms of Jesus' response: "no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children..." (where "wife" is peculiar to Luke, not in the Matthean and Markan parallels). The twelve who abandon everything and the women who give their material resources for the common support of the community of disciples exemplify in different ways the teaching of Luke's Jesus about possessions. The difference happens to coincide with gender, but not at all because the women disciples continue the same kind of women's role they were ordinarily expected to play. Both the men and the women among Jesus' disciples behave in a significantly countercultural way with regard to material resources. But the differing positions of men and women in the society from which they come mean that, perhaps rather surprisingly but entirely intelligibly, it is the women, rather than the men, who have disposable financial sources from which to supply the economic needs of the itinerant group....

On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus made his way "through towns and villages, teaching and journeying" (Lk 13:22). After he arrives, Jesus steps back into a familiar area, the Temple, where he was blessed by Simeon and Anna as an infant so many years ago. And like the prophetess Anna before him, "he was teaching daily in the temple" (Lk 19:47; cf. 20:1) and "people came to him in the temple to hear him" (21:37). But, this time around, the good news was not limited to the Women's Court, and the good news was not someday in the future; it was there in the Temple itself.

Having come full circle, Jesus' ministry begins to shift gears and focus on *the* event. After some discussion about last things, it happens. In Luke 23 (Mt 27; Mk 15; Jn 19), God incarnate is crucified on a cross. Three days later, this crucified Lord rises back to life "according to the Spirit of holiness" (Rom 1:4). The center of history is finally reached. Ancient prophecies are now fulfilled; even greater hopes are now alive; the good news has been fulfilled and is ripe for a

new age of proclamation. The story leaves readers asking: who will bear witness to these events of epic importance?

Certainly Christians of both sexes. In addition to being among the few disciples who were present at the crucifixion (Mk 15:40; Mt 27:55-56), women were the first to arrive at the tomb of Jesus (Mt 28:1-8; Mk 16:1-8; Lk 24:1-12; Jn 20:1-13). As it has been pointed out by countless scholars, this is particularly noteworthy since a woman's testimony in the first century was not worth the same as a man's testimony (Ferguson 2003:78; cf. Bauckham 2002:270). The choice of women to fulfill this weighty role is a bit odd—too odd, in fact, to simply bypass as an insignificant anomaly of biblical history. Theologians and exegetes have rightly concluded *intentionality*—an arrangement established within the grand story in order to further symbolize the restoration that Christ brings to humanity, or to suggest something about the responsibility given to women regarding the proclamation of the good news, or perhaps to refute the Jews and their interpretation of Scripture once again (for the daughters of Eve *can* and *should* be trusted). But maybe there is a different purpose. Theologians may never know. What is clear is that the God of the Scriptures finds no trouble in giving the greatest responsibilities to the most unexpected people.

But these women disciples have even more significance: they were the only disciples to witness both Jesus' burial *and* resurrection:

“[The women's] witness had a unique role because they alone witnessed the burial as well as an empty tomb, and so could vouch for the fact that the tomb they found empty was the one in which the body of Jesus had been laid. But, according to Matthew, Luke, and John, they were also qualified to testify “I have seen the Lord” (John 20:18), just as the male eyewitnesses to the resurrection were. Using the word “apostolic” in this Pauline sense (1 Cor 9:1), the women were apostolic eyewitness guarantors of the traditions about

Jesus, and the Gospel stories about their visit to the tomb and encounters with the risen Jesus are the textual form eventually given to the witness that they must have given orally during the early decades of Christian life and mission. The names so precisely preserved by the Gospels show that the witness of the women was not known simply in a generalized form as that of an anonymous group, nor was it attached solely to the most prominent of these women disciples of Jesus, Mary Magdalene. Rather each of these named women, some better known to some of the evangelists, others to others, were prominent figures in the early communities, active traditioners with recognized eyewitness authority” (Bauckham 2002:188-89).

Again, the point is not simply to underline women’s participation. There is much more than that. At this particular point in the story, the entire validity of the Christian faith rests in the hands of these few women. No other disciples saw Christ enter the tomb and three days later find it empty. The prevailing cultural attitude towards women’s testimony was largely negative, and the Romans were already trying to cover-up the whole thing (Mt 28:11-15). The “deck is stacked,” as it were. And it gets worse after the women witness the resurrection: not even “the apostles” believe what they say: “These words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them” (Lk 24:11).

Just when it appears all is lost, things finally take a different course. Peter visits the tomb for himself and Jesus appears to a number of other disciples. Eventually, the budding church comes to see the truth of the resurrection, and thus of the Christian faith. The “spreading flame” (to borrow from Bruce’s book title) began its journey around the world.

6.2 Proclaiming the Gospel in Acts

Moments before Christ ascends into heaven, Jesus has a meal with his disciples (which includes the eleven and “those with them” Lk 24:33). He tells them:

“...Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed [κηρυχθῆναι] in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:46-49).

This public proclamation (κηρύσσω) of “repentance and forgiveness” is given to all of Jesus’ disciples—to women in the same manner as men. This is apparent given the presence of women during the whole story (Lk 24:10, the “they” and “them” in v. 33, 50-53; Acts 1:14)—a fact that few (if any) scholars deny. As far as the text is concerned, the only qualifications for telling the gospel story is having known Christ personally and being enabled by the Spirit (Bock 2002:404). The women disciples of Jesus meet these qualifications (and, if we follow Paul’s terminology, this makes the women disciples “apostles” as well; see Bauckham 2002:188, in conjunction with Spencer 2005:36-37 and Schüssler-Fiorenza 2013:229 regarding the male-choice of apostles in Acts 1:21).

It is easy to be thrown off by “Men of Galilee” (Ἄνδρες Γαλιλαῖοι) in Acts 1:11 and “men, brothers” (Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί) in 1:16. But, as Peterson remarks (2009:122), “the context suggests that both *andres* and *adelphoi* refers to males and females together...”—just as “hey guys” might actually mean “hey guys and gals” in English. Greek, like many languages, is *androcentric*. This highlights a vital hermeneutical principle that is often ignored by those who forbid women elders and believe that women in the early church only had supportive roles: even in contexts that exhibit explicit male language, women are often being addressed (Winston and Winston 2003:11; cf. Carson 1998). One might even go as far as to say that “any interpretation and translation claiming to be historically adequate to the language character of its sources must understand, and they would translate, NT androcentric language on the whole as inclusive of

women until proven otherwise” (Schüssler-Fiorenza 2013:63). It is probably more accurate to say that, because of the way both Greek and English is used, readers can never be certain that when terms like “men,” “man,” or “brothers” are mentioned, only males are being spoken about or both males and females are being spoken about unless more information is indicated by the context. At times readers must “supply what is lacking” (Bauckham 2002:201) if our goal is an accurate translation of meaning (see the translations of Acts 1:16 below).

Perhaps to avoid similar misunderstandings, Luke explicitly notes the women disciples in verse 14:

“These [the eleven] all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers” (Acts 1:14).

For that reason, various translation supply “and sisters” in their rendering of 1:16 (TNIV, NIV, NCV). Others simply have “Friends” (NRSV, MSG, CEV).

After Matthias was appointed to replace Judas as an apostle (1:26), Luke outlines “the day of Pentecost” (2:1). The significance of this particular event should not be underestimated. The promise of the Spirit was mentioned multiple times by Jesus (Jn 14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:13). The event only happened once and will not happen again. It marked the beginning of a new age—where Christ is no longer here on earth in bodily form, but is still present, working in His people through His Spirit. Thus, the disciples of Jesus would function as the very “Body of Christ” and be known as the ἐκκλησία, the “church,” “assembly,” or “congregation.”

For all practical purposes, Luke provides a concise rundown of the event: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”

(Lk 2:4). The phrase “as the Spirit gave them utterance” resonates with the rest of the New Testament teaching about spiritual gifts and church functioning in general (see 1 Pt 4:10; 1 Cor 12:8-11; 14:26; Eph 4:7, 11-13; Heb 2:4. Cf. 1 Cor 7:17). As it was with the commission in Luke 24 and Matthew 28, the church proclaims according to the movement of the Spirit.

The speaking at Pentecost might not fit the typical label of “preaching” (Peterson 2009:135). But what the disciples proclaimed was certainly meant to be heard and understood by the general public, for the Jews in Jerusalem “were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language” (2:6). As far as what they were talking about, the text only says “speaking [λαλούντων] the mighty works of God” (2:11). Whether this included only recent things (e.g., resurrection) or ancient things (e.g., the Exodus), we do not know. But, combined with the climactic conclusion of salvation in verse 21 and all that has been observed so far in Luke 24 and Acts 1, it is fair to say that those who were filled with the Spirit “proclaimed the gospel message on Pentecost” (Grenz and Kjesbo 1995:79).

That women were involved in this proclamation is actually a point made by Peter himself in the subsequent sermon. He cites Joel 2 as being fulfilled in the presence of all:

“But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons *and your daughters shall prophesy*, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; *even on my male servants and female servants* in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and

magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:14-21, emphasis mine).

The term “prophesy” appears to be used in a broad way. It is combined with “visions,” and “dreams” (2:17) as a result of the Spirit’s outpouring. Peterson notes this difficulty and summarizes the meaning of “prophecy,” saying, “‘Prophesying’ appears to be a particular way of describing Spirit-directed ministry, both to believers and unbelievers” (2009:142; cf. Marshall 2008:78-79).

The assertions made by Peter and his quotation of Joel speaks about the nature of a new era, not simply a one-time event. The events on this day—the Spirit’s coming like fire, the speaking in tongues and prophesying, Peter’s speech, etc., is all part of the inauguration of “the future age” (Keener 1993:330). Pentecost marks “the beginning of a new epoch in the history of redemption” (Clowney 1995:69).

The way Peter treats the text of Joel makes this particularly clear:

“Peter adds an expression that gives the event pointed eschatological significance. He substitutes for Joel’s words “after this” the words, “and in the last days” (Acts 2:17)...The last days are the days of the Spirit who has now been given. In some real sense of the word, the messianic era has come, the eschatological salvation is present” (Ladd 1993:381).

As indicated by Christ’s words at the end of Luke’s Gospel, this enablement is directed at the (verbal, public, personal) proclamation of the gospel. Indeed, “The Holy Spirit...specifically guides those who preach the gospel” (Thielman 2005:146).

In summary, Pentecost essentially “sets the tone” for “Spirit-directed ministry” in the “Spirit-indwelted community” (Bock 2012:374). This ministry is definitional to the church and consists of carrying God’s message. Thus, Keener says,

“...Acts 2:17-18 must remain decisive, for it describes the Spirit-filled church from Pentecost forward, all whom God could call (vv. 38-39) in the era of salvation (v. 21)...even if this gift of prophecy did continue today only in a more restrictive sense, the text at least indicates that women as well as men must speak God’s message with the Spirit’s power” (2005b:209; cf. Long 2007:114).

Indeed, “in the context of Luke, Joel’s prophecy is interpreted to elevate the role of women in ministry” (Long 2007:102).

Standing on all of these observations, Grenz and Kjesbo reveal the inevitable conclusion:

“Women’s participation in the Pentecost event has radical and far-reaching implications. Not only did women receive Christ’s commission as credible witnesses to the resurrection, but at Pentecost they also received the Spirit’s power to carry out this central community responsibility. This means that women had received the same foundational qualifications for ministry as men in the New Testament church. The endowment of women for ministry finds confirmation in Luke’s narrative of the activities and experiences of the community. All disciples—men and women—shared together in prayer, were filled with the Spirit and proclaimed the gospel message on Pentecost. In the same way, both men and women participated in subsequent prayer gatherings, experiences the fullness of the Spirit, and preached the Word of God with boldness” (e.g., Acts 4:23-31)” (1995:79; cf. Long 2007:103).

In other words, Acts 2 demonstrates that gender equality (of some kind associated with Christian ministry) is characteristic of the New Covenant community.

The episode in Luke 4 that Grenz and Kjesbo cite above comes after Peter’s second speech (Acts 3):

“When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together

to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'--for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak [ἐλάλουν] the word of God with boldness. Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common" (Acts 4:23-32).

There is no reason to believe that "friends" in 4:23 and "they" in 4:32 excludes female Christians. Those who "were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness" includes women—again fulfilling the promise in Acts 2.

It is explicit that women were a common part of the community of believers in the subsequent text. Acts 5:1-11 recounts the story of Ananias and "his wife Sapphira" (5:1), verse 14 says "And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women [ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ γυναικῶν]," and 6:1 mentions widows who were "being neglected in the daily distribution" of food. Any scholar that wishes to erase women from the bold speaking of 4:31 will find it very difficult to do so. Of course, one might suggest that the "speaking" in 4:31 is not the preaching of the gospel. But there is no basis for such a suggestion. The context and entire flow of the narrative is recounting the proclamation of the gospel that has been going on since Pentecost. This is particularly clear when we read earlier in chapter 4 that "As they were speaking [Λαλούντων] to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees

came up to them, being greatly disturbed *because they were teaching the people and proclaiming* [καταγγέλλειν] in Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (4:1-2, emphasis mine; cf. 3:24; 16:6-10). “Speaking” here is directly defined as the teaching and “proclaiming” of the gospel. It is therefore exegetically untenable to suggest that the speaking in 4:31 is not the preaching of the gospel and/or that women are not taking part in it.

Luke continues to give most of his attention to the Apostles, who teach in the temple (5:21, 42). At one point, seven disciples are chosen by the Twelve Apostles to help serve tables. The Twelve say:

“Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:3-4).

What’s interesting is that while the Apostles contrast the material tasks of the seven with their own “spiritual” tasks of “prayer” and the “ministry of the word,” the seven were apparently not limited to such material (or “diaconal”) work. Stephen, one of the seven “deacons,” is introduced to Luke’s audience in the context of “The word of God kept spreading” (6:7), said to be “full of grace and power...performing great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6:8), and proclaimed the gospel, for the people present “could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking” (6:10). Stephen’s Spirit-filled sermon (6:3, 10, 55) is the longest speech in Acts (Peterson 2009:256). Therefore, one must be careful not to suggest that deacons just do “material things” while elders do all the preaching and teaching.

After Stephen’s death, we read that “Saul approved of his execution” (8:1), and that a period of persecution broke out. “Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he

dragged off men and women and committed them to prison” (8:3). Commentators note that it is significant that women were included in this persecution; “Saul recognizes that women are as committed to the cause as men and that to stamp out the church must involve destroying everybody associated with it” (Dowsett 2009:1297). Thus, Witherington says, “...the women were significant enough in number and/or important to the cause of The Way that Saul did not think he could stop the movement without taking women as well as men prisoners” (1990:144).

This detail is reiterated in the narrative. Acts 9:1-2 says that Saul “went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, *men or women*, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (emphasis mine). In his speech in Acts 22:4, Paul says to the crowd, “I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison *both men and women*” (emphasis mine). It is unlikely that Paul threw women in prison for cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing (some of the traditionally “feminine” tasks). There is no basis to read into these texts the idea that women always took on a supportive, subordinate role, whether due to their biology or due to a supposed fixed, God-ordained gender role. As it was noted by Bauckham above, female Christians probably served such supportive functions, but were not limited to them. A consistent reading of the narrative asserts that Christian women were effective instruments in verbally, publicly, and personally proclaiming the good news, and they continued to do so in a variety of situations that included proclaiming the gospel to men, whether alone at the Temple (Luke 2), with a husband at the synagogue (Acts 18:26), or at home with family (Tit 2:3-4)—in whatever situation the early Christian women found themselves. They preached the gospel, to use Paul’s words, “in and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2).

While these passing remarks of “both men and women” suggest something about the prominent role that women played in the operation of the church and in the spread of the gospel, they might also indicate that Paul’s view of gender has always been somewhat egalitarian (Bristow 1991:55-56). Paul’s loosely egalitarian view of gender presents itself plainly in 1 Corinthians 7 (this will be addressed in chapter seven).

The proclamation of the gospel continues in Samaritan villages (Acts 8:25), with the Spirit being the initiating agent (e.g., “the Spirit said to Philip,” 8:29). Saul “proclaims [ἐκήρυσσεν] Jesus” after being “filled with the Spirit” in Acts 9:17-20. The Spirit even keeps the disciples from preaching in certain areas so that the word can be heard in others. Acts 16:6-7 says:

“And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak [λαλῆσαι] the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them” (Acts 16:6-7).

Peterson says, “It is quite extraordinary that the Spirit would prevent the preaching of the gospel in this way, suggesting that the ministry in Macedonia and Greece was God’s priority at this point in time” (Peterson 2009:454). Of course, the Spirit is not quenching the proclamation of the gospel, but rather (temporarily; Paul *does* preach in Asia, 19:10) diverting missions to certain geographical regions.

As one continues reading Acts, it becomes apparent that the work of evangelism and global mission is not all that the church does. Local ministry is just as important, for without it, there would be no launch pad from which to effectively reach the nations. There also wouldn’t exist a *community* of believers, which is the essence of the church. Instead of being hosted and led exclusively by men (which would be somewhat expected if maintaining a permanent pattern of

male headship/leadership was a notable concern to the church), women tended to host churches as more disciples were made. Given the nature of the home in the first century, this is also more significant than many realize.

“The householder in Greco-Roman times was automatically in charge of any group that met in his or her domicile. Households in the first century included not only the immediate family and relatives but also slaves, freedmen, and freedwomen, hired workers, and even tenants and partners in a trade or craft. This meant that the female head of household had to have good administrative and management skills (see *oikodespotein*, ‘to rule one’s household,’ in 1 Tim. 5:14). Paul thus places great emphasis on a person’s track record as a family leader, as it is a definite indicator of church-leadership potential (1 Tim 3:4-5; 5:14)” (Belleville 2005a:123; cf. Pollard 1995:273; Osiek 2005).

One might also remember that there were no church buildings in the first-century like there are today. The primary location for “church” was someone’s house (cf. Saucy 2001:168). It is not unreasonable to presume that, at least in some cases, the person “in charge” of a household was “in charge” of the church that regularly met in that same household, especially since the line between “public” and “private” was not so clear. Torjessen argues that:

“So long as church leadership continued to model itself on the familiar role of household manager, there was no cultural barrier to women assuming leadership roles. First- and second-century Christians, familiar with the authority and leadership role of the female head of household, would have perceived women’s leadership within the church as not only acceptable but natural. The early church’s specific leadership functions posed no barriers to women, whose skills and experiences as managers amply prepared them to assume the duties of teaching, disciplining, nurturing, and administrating material resources” (1995:15).

Whatever the precise case may be, the New Testament does not leave readers guessing if there were any women who hosted churches in their homes. “In fact, we are more often given the names of women in whose homes churches met than we are of men....” (Saucy 2001:163). When Peter escaped prison, “he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying” (Acts 12:12). After Lydia became

the first Christian convert in Europe, she opened her home to Paul and Luke (Acts 16:15, 40). In his letter to the Colossians, Paul says “Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house” (Col 4:15). In 1 Corinthians 1:11, Paul talks about being informed about quarrels by “Chloe’s people” (ESV, NASB, NRSV, or “Chloe’s household,” NET, or “them which are of the house of Chloe,” KJV). These instances of women church hosts are all the more significant when one remembers that in the first-century world (like today), it is common to speak of the husband as the one who is primarily responsible for the household. In other words, the NT authors are probably not going to mention only a woman’s name as being the host of a church if another man is really in charge of the household.

Despite these observations, many who forbid women elders see all of these examples as “irrelevant” and say “nothing about who the leaders of the church were...If a woman has a Bible study in her house today, that is no indication that she is the leader of that study” (Schreiner 2006a:222). This assertion demonstrates a fundamental ignorance about the household of the first-century, and it is rash to parallel today’s church hosting and that of the early church. The women who hosted these churches undoubtedly did more than simply open their doors—and not merely because of the cultural context and nature of the household, but because the church was specifically oriented at growth and expansion (Mt 28:19-20; Lk 24:37; cf. Rom 1:8; Col 1:6; Acts 2:41; 4:4). This required leadership, planning, resources, an effective place to conduct various kinds of training, etc. It does not seem to even be a possibility for Schreiner that the kind of church hosting we read about in the NT *was itself* an administrative, “leadership” function of the church. Again, this is not the kind of situation often found today where a church Bible study group is asking after each session, “OK, who wants to host the study at their house next week?”,

where the answer has little or no implications about the health and fruition of the church. The type of hosting going on in the NT period was the establishment of a long-term, strategic base of operations where the “head” of the house was key to the success or failure of the church’s goals. It would have been detrimental for the apostles and disciples of the early church to continually place themselves under the power, guidance, and influence of someone who wasn’t really a godly leader of the church.

In Acts 16-18 we read about another house-church. When Paul was in Corinth he stayed in the house of a married couple because of similar employment interests:

“And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade” (Acts 18:2-3).

By the time 1 Corinthians was written (53-55 AD), these two Christians established a house-church, for Paul says “Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house” (16:19).

The two are mentioned again in verse Acts 18:18, 26, Romans 16:3, and 2 Timothy 4:19. In no place in Scripture is one mentioned without the other. However, Priscilla does seem to stand out for several reasons:

“Four of the six times the two are mentioned in the New Testament, Priscilla’s name comes before Aquila’s and it is unusual in antiquity for a woman’s name to precede her husband’s. Luke notes that Aquila is a Jew from Pontus, and implies that Priscilla was from the city they had recently left—Rome. Thus, Luke probably intends his audience to think of Priscilla as of higher social rank, or of more prominence in the Church, or both, than her husband” (Witherington 1990:220; cf. Bauckham 2002:214-215; Belleville 2005a:122).

Thus, when Priscilla and Aquila correct the theology of the great Christian apologist Apollos (Acts 18:24-28), “if anyone is indicated by Luke as the primary instructor it is Priscilla” (Bauckham 2002:220). Bauckham goes on to rightly conclude that, “Not all the implications of Acts 18.24-6 are clear, but certainly Luke portrays Priscilla as a co-worker of Paul in the Gospel” (2002:220).

Paul portrays the couple in the same fashion: “Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well” (Rom 16:3). Lest one attempt to redefine “fellow worker” as “church cook” or “children-bearer for the Kingdom,” note how the term “fellow worker” (συνεργός) is used by Paul and in the rest of the NT:

“Greet Urbanus, our *fellow worker* in Christ, and my beloved Stachys” (Romans 16:9).

“Timothy, my *fellow worker*, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen” (Romans 16:21)

“He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God’s *fellow workers*. You are God’s field, God’s building. (1 Corinthians 3:8-9).

“Not that we lord it over your faith, but *we work* [are workers] with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith” (2 Corinthians 1:24).

“As for Titus, he is my partner and *fellow worker* for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ” (2 Corinthians 8:23).

“I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and *fellow worker* and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need...for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me” (Php 2:25, 30).

“I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel

together with Clement and the rest of my *fellow workers*, whose names are in the book of life” (Php 4:2-3).

“and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my *fellow workers* for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me” (Col 4:11).

“and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s *coworker* in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith,” (1 Thessalonians 3:2).

“Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved *fellow worker*” (Philemon 1).

“and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my *fellow workers*” (Philemon 24).

“Therefore we ought to support people like these [ἀδελφῶν and τέκνα in v. 3-4], that we may be *fellow workers* for the truth” (3 John 8).

These are all of the instances of the term in the NT. Paul *always* uses it in the context of proclaiming the gospel and building up the church. He also uses the term in the same manner for women (e.g., Priscilla, Euodia, Syntyche) as for men (e.g., Timothy, Titus), regardless if spouses or men of any kind are mentioned with them. There is no basis to read into any of these texts some idea of female subordination or limitation, nor any of the fine (and often artificial) distinctions proposed by those who deny women elders, like impersonal (instead of personal) activity, private (instead of public) activity, or nonverbal (instead of verbal) activity. In contrast to falling in a hierarchy of authority and power, Paul encourages the Corinthians to “*be subject...to every fellow worker* [συνεργοῦντι, the rare verbal form of ‘co-worker’] and laborer” (1 Cor 16:16, emphasis mine).

For all of these reasons, in the case of Priscilla, it is exceedingly difficult to simply reduce the female gospel-proclaimer to a permanent supporting role that is distinct from a male Christian’s “public” or “formal” role of regularly preaching and teaching Christian truth. There is once again

a remarkable lack of interest in sexual distinctions and intentionally maintaining patriarchy when it comes to proclaiming the gospel. I say “remarkable” because, in theory, it would be a tremendous sin, a catastrophic restructuring of the God-ordained, multi-millennial “creation order” (“headship”), for a woman to teach or preach over a single male person at a local church gathering. If such a sin was just *so obvious* to the early church, and if “male headship” were *so important* to the functioning of the church in its pursuit to be Christ to the world, then certainly Luke is misleading his readers.

Paul continues his missionary journey and spends two years “reasoning daily in the Hall of Tyrannus” (Acts 19:10-11). He goes to Jerusalem “purposed in the Spirit” (19:21). In Acts 21:4-5 we are reminded that “disciples” includes “wives and children.” And in 21:8-9 we read of “Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven” and “had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.” Luke probably makes this passing observation to re-affirm the truthfulness of Pentecost: the Holy Spirit has truly been poured out on “daughters” (Acts 2:17-19; see Witherington 1990:218). Or, it could just be that the ministry of these women was worth noting, and Luke didn’t want their work to be overshadowed by that of their father, “the evangelist.” It is hard to tell, and nobody knows for sure.

But what is clear is that prophecy is distinctive. Not everyone in the church does it. Prophecy in Luke-Acts is by all means a “leadership” function in the church, as E. Ellis’s study “The Role of Christian Prophets in Acts” demonstrated in 1970 (note Long 2007:104-105; cf. Witherington 1990:218). Belleville makes essentially the same point in her own study of women leaders in the church:

“Some argue that early church prophecy was merely an impromptu movement of the Spirit and not a recognized leadership role in the church. Yet Luke makes it clear that the prophet was just such, when he identifies the leaders of the church at Antioch as “prophets and teachers” (Acts 13:1-3). Nor was prophecy, as some would claim, an activity valued less than other forms of ministry. This is evident from Paul’s identification of prophetic speaking with “revelation” (*apokalyphthē*, I Cor 14:29:29-30) and his naming apostles and prophets together as the “foundation” of the church, when speaking of it metaphorically (Eph. 2:20). He even goes further and puts apostles and prophets in a category by themselves. It is to “God’s holy apostles and prophets” that “the mystery of Christ...has now been revealed by the Spirit’ (Eph 3:4-5)” (2006a:123-124).

So there are sound reasons to believe that the kind of prophecy that takes place in Acts is legitimately called a “leadership function” in the early church. It is no wonder that Paul says, “God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets,” and then *twice* asks the Corinthians to desire the gift of prophecy: “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy...My brothers and sisters, earnestly desire to prophecy” (1 Cor 14:1, 39).

From Acts 21 forward, Luke begins to focus more on the Apostle Paul and ultimately, his trial. The book of Acts ends with Paul “proclaiming [κηρύσσων] the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (28:31).

6.3 Proclaiming the Gospel in Paul’s Writings

As God’s chosen Apostle to proclaim the good news, the theme of proclamation naturally flows out of Paul’s writings. In his epistle to the Romans, he teaches that proclaiming the gospel is important because it is needed for salvation (Romans 10:12-18). A couple of chapters later, Paul

makes the point that gifts and functions within the church are determined “according to the grace given to us” and “according to the proportion of” their faith:

“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness” (Romans 12:3-8).

There is no indication that some of these gifts are only given to one sex and not another.³ Biology and/or “roles” is not the point; edification is. This Spirit-function approach, as it was mentioned above, is synchronous with the rest of NT teaching; “according to the same Spirit” and “empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills” (1 Cor 12:8, 11); “while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will” (Heb 2:4); “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace” (1 Pt 4:10); “When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up” (1 Cor 14:26); “But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift...And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:7, 11-12). It would have been terribly easy for Paul to address the gender question if it was such a vital aspect of church order and functionality—especially for a book like Romans

³ The differences between English translations of this text are significant. For example, one notes the repeated insertion of “his” and “he” in the NASB and NET in these verses, when they are not exegetically demanded by either the grammar or the context. This makes an unfortunate male-centered rendering where even the KJV (in agreement with the NRSV, ESV, NIV, and others), at least in verses 6-7, is more accurately “gender neutral,” using “the one” for a noun, or generally excluding a noun altogether (NRSV, NIV).

(perhaps the most articulate and foundational of Paul's letters). This isn't to say Paul doesn't address the relationship between gender and ministry, but when he does he addresses the subject for more specific situations (e.g., hair coverings/styles in 1 Cor 11; prophesying in 1 Cor 14; manner of teaching/learning in 1 Tim 2; sex, singleness, and marriage in 1 Cor 7, etc.).

Romans 13 and 14 goes on in a thorough exhortation, covering every aspect of the Christian life in high-speed: morality, civil relations, church relations, personal relations, even eating (14:23). His discussion appears to climax in 14:13, and 19: "Therefore we must not pass judgment on one another, but rather determine never to place an obstacle or a trap before a brother or sister...So then, let us pursue what makes for peace and for building up one another" (NET). Paul is again noticeably pragmatic. When questions come about one thing or another in the internal tensions of the church, what must be done in the end? The church must be edified and the gifts of individuals must be used.

In chapter 15 of Romans, Paul begins to wrap up the letter. He reviews his work in the gospel and again underscores the centrality of proclaiming the gospel and the Spirit's role in that endeavor:

"But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach [εὐαγγελίζεσθαι] the gospel..." (Rom 15:15-20a).

Paul was not unaided in his pursuit to preach and teach the good news across the Mediterranean. In the last chapter of Romans, he commends a number of women such as the deacon Phoebe (16:1-2), Mary (16:6), the apostle Junia (16:7; see Chapter Seven), Persis (16:12), Tryphaena and Tryphosa (16:2, perhaps sisters), the mother of Rufus (16:13), Julia and the sister of Nereus (16:15). But, why are they commended? Paul is clear: for their “hard work” (κοπιᾶω), which could be used to denote physically hard work (Eph 4:28; 2 Tim 2:6), but is more commonly used in referring to “labor in teaching and preaching” and church edification as it is here (1 Tim 5:17; cf. Rom 16:6; Col 1:27; Php 2:16; 1 Cor 4:12; 15:10; 16:16; Gal 4:11; 1 Thess 5:12) (see Schreiber 2000). Otherwise, Paul calls such women disciples “co-workers” in the gospel (see below), “a favorite term of Paul’s to describe those who labor alongside him in the gospel, and not one he uses in general of Christians” (Kruse 2012:599). All in all, of the 26 names on this list “nine are women, and if we add Phoebe there is a very impressive number when we reflect on the character of the male-dominated society of the day” (Morris 1988:531).

In 1 Corinthians, Paul underscores the particular importance of preaching the gospel over and against baptism. He says, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach [εὐαγγελίεσθαι] the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power” (1:17). One apparently does not even have to be a great speaker in order to fulfill the task of proclaiming the good news (cf. 2:1, 4, 13; 2 Cor 10:10; 11:6; 2 Pt 1:16). As in Romans, Paul once again locates the power of preaching in the Spirit:

“And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming [καταγγέλλων] to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.... these things God has revealed to us

through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:1-5, 10-14).

In 9:16 Paul says, "For if I preach the gospel [εὐαγγελίζωμαι], that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" Certainly Paul is not alone in this conviction. Christians of all ages and from all periods of history have had the same burden of publicly proclaiming the gospel to all creatures—irrespective of sex. (Or are we really to suppose that in this text (and others), Paul simply assumes that preaching the gospel (in any context) *and the conviction to do so* is exclusively masculine?).

After a number of different admonitions in chapter 10, Paul concludes: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (10:31). He then proceeds into another section specifically directed at prophetic ministry in Corinthian church:

"Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. Every man who has *something* on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. Therefore the woman ought to have a *symbol of authority* on her head, because of the angels. However, in the Lord, neither is

woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man *has his birth* through the woman; and all things originate from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God *with her head* uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God” (1 Corinthians 11:1-16, NASB).

In this section, Paul expresses a concern about head coverings that has puzzled theologians for centuries. As tempting as it is, space does not allow for a full exegesis of the chapter, so we will only summarize.

Not only do scholars disagree about how the text should be interpreted, but they also disagree on what Paul is addressing in the first place. Some say he is addressing headscarves, others veils, still others hairstyles. Some say that each of these traditions were common in certain cultures (Greek, Jewish, Christian), while others say that they were not. Still others debate about when these traditions changed and how significant they would have been to a first-century church in Corinth. Additionally, as with so much of gender studies and theology, Bible translations pose an obstacle in properly interpreting the text. The NASB is particularly helpful in showing this since it italicizes words that aren't found in the original Greek. This immediately clues readers about certain difficulties. For example, 11:4 says in the NASB, “Every man who has *something* on his head...” (literally, “coming down from the head”). What is this thing coming down from man's head? Paul doesn't say—at least not immediately (he mentions men's long hair in verse 14). Verse 10 poses another difficulty: “Therefore the woman ought to have *a symbol of* authority on her head...” In actuality, the verse only says “have authority on her head.” Translators supply “a symbol of.”

In my evaluation, Payne’s argument for “wild hairstyles” is persuasive, having the most exegetical explanatory power and giving the most justice to the ancient literature and milieu of the first century world (Payne 2009). His conclusion is that:

“Men’s effeminate hair attracted homosexual liaisons, and women’s hair let down loose symbolized sexual freedom in the Dionysiac cult, which was influential in Corinth. Consequently, Paul prohibits those leading in worship from either practice. Men ought to respect Christ, their source in creation, by not displaying effeminate hair. Women ought to exercise control over their heads by wearing their hair up in public worship to symbolize fidelity in marriage and respect to man, their source in creation” (Payne 2009:211).

The exegetical benefits of this interpretation are too numerous to list, and even those who reject women elders are found commending this interpretation (Schreiner 2010:37). Readers can decide for themselves if this particular proposal is the best out of the options.

Whatever Paul may be addressing, there are more stable conclusions that can be drawn. For instance, it is clear that women are taking part in the prophetic activity of regular church gatherings (Payne 2009:149). Indeed, “That women were praying and prophesying in the public assembly posed no problem for the Corinthians or for Paul himself” (Osburn 1995b:316).

Although this fact supports “women in ministry” in an explicit, substantial way, 1 Corinthians 11 is often used to *discourage* women from Christian ministry—including pastoral ministry. It is asserted that Paul is teaching a timeless principle of male control; 1 Corinthians 11 teaches that women must not do anything during church services (and elsewhere) that might violate the permanent principle of “male headship.” If one is not keenly aware of personal predispositions and the baggage that comes along with English words and translations, this popular interpretation

might appear credible, even obvious, after a quick reading of the text. But, the reality is that this interpretation it is fraught with insoluble difficulties.

First, as it has been pointed out over the decades, if Paul was asserting a permanent hierarchy in creation that has God on top and women at the bottom, it is odd that Paul did not actually follow that order (God-Christ-man-woman). Groothuis says:

“If this verse were speaking of a chain of command, it should rather say first that God is the head of Christ, then that Christ is the head of man, and finally that man is the head of woman—as do all the diagrams that we have seen illustrating this concept. But instead, the ‘head’ relationships’ are listed in chronological order of origin” (1997:159; cf. Bilezikian 1997:167).

A strict hierarchical reading may have also presented a problematic doctrine of the Trinity, namely, the error of gradationism (see Giles 2002 and Erickson 2009); verse 3 “was used by heretics to argue that Christ was inferior to the Father” (Ciampa and Rosner 2010:511).

Second, “Great care must be taken to avoid the assumption that the Greek word for ‘head’ has the same meaning(s) as our English word, and the sense that many have that the meaning of the word is transparent may be due, in part, to reading the text in light of the common use of ‘head’ in English to refer to those who are in charge of a department or area of responsibility” (Ciampa and Rosner 2010:508). Payne notes that, “The majority view in recent scholarship has shifted to understand ‘head’ (κεφαλή) in this passage to mean ‘source’ rather than ‘authority,’ including many who argue that Paul believed men should have authority over women in social relationships” (2009:118). After citing an extensive list of external publications, he goes on to offer a total of fifteen reasons why “source” (or “source of life”) is a better understanding than “authority” (cf. Morris 2008b:149; Fee 1987:501-504). Although neither completely agree with

Payne, the scholars Cervin, Thiselton, and Perriman have also convincingly argued against the complementarian claim (Schreiner 2006b:127; Grudem 1996) that the term certainly means “authority” (Thiselton 2000; Cervin 1989; Perriman 1994:602-22). Johnson’s 2006 appraisal called for a general pause on all sides, especially since the term “as a metaphor can have a different sense in a different context and even different senses in the same context” (2006:21-28). Nevertheless, for all the reasons that scholars have given in the past quarter century, it does appear that a simple “authority” reading of “head” is not the best option in 1 Corinthians 11 and parallel NT passages.

Third, the “authority” (ἐξουσία) in 11:10 is (a) often mistakenly mistranslated as “veil” or “symbol of authority,” when the text only says (and means) “authority,” and (b) is often mistakenly assumed to be man’s authority (or symbol of authority) over woman when it is woman’s authority (or her obligation to exercise her authority) that is being addressed. The fact is, “there is no known evidence either that *exousia* is ever taken in this passive sense [103 NT occurrences, Philo, LXX, Josephus] or that the idiom ‘to have authority over’ ever refers to an external authority different from the subject of the sentence” (Fee 1987:519). That being the case, it is highly, *highly* unlikely that Paul is speaking about man’s personal, permanent authority over woman as has been traditionally understood. It is crucial to remember that the only time Paul ever clearly speaks about man having ἐξουσία over woman is where woman is said to exercise the exact same kind of ἐξουσία over man—ironically, in an earlier chapter of 1 Corinthians: “For the wife does not have authority [ἐξουσιάζει] over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority [ἐξουσιάζει] over his own body, but the wife does” (1 Cor 7:4).

Due to these facts, and despite centuries of interpretations to the contrary, exegetes from all theological backgrounds (including complementarians) have rightly concluded that in 11:10:

“The woman’s head is not one over which others have authority. God has granted her authority to pray and prophesy. She exercises that authority in a dignified way by respecting both herself and the rest of the congregation through the avoidance of provocative attire or any dress or behavior which would bring shame on herself, others, or God...” (Ciampa and Rosner 2010:533; cf. Garland 2003:524-526; Keener 2004:38; Payne 2009:182-186; Frame 2008:629; Witherington 1990:169; Barrett 1968:250; Bruce 1971:106; Hurley 1973:206-212; Bailey 2011:301-313).

Unsurprisingly, in the next verse (11:11) Paul immediately makes sure that readers know that woman is not independent of man. One complementarian says:

“Paul begins verse 11 with *However*. In verses 11-12, he guards against the misunderstanding that women are somehow inferior to men. But he would not need to say this if he had just affirmed women’s authority and right to prophesy in such strong terms in verse 10” (Schreiner 2006b:135).

But this is not true. Paul isn’t guarding against the idea that women are somehow inferior to men in 11:10, but against the idea that they are separate from one another—which is what we *would* expect if verse 10 is talking about woman’s authority as one specifically distinguished from man (v. 8-9). As Payne carefully notes:

“The translation, ‘However, woman is not independent of man,’ implies that something in verse 10 might lead women to feel justified in asserting their independence. On subordinationist interpretations of ἐξουσία (‘authority’) in verse 10 as the husband’s authority, there is no such thing in the preceding context. On these interpretations one would expect Paul to begin, ‘However, *man* is not independent of woman,’ since they regard everything preceding verse 11 as affirming man’s authority over woman. The translation, ‘However, woman is not independent of man...,’ suggests that by itself verse 10 entails the independence of woman, which is only possible if verse 10 is an affirmation of the authority of woman” (2009:191).

This interpretive correction of 11:10-11 has forced scholars to re-think the meaning of the previous three verses since the entire section hangs together by a string of conjunctions. If 11:10 is speaking of woman's independent right to exercise authority in the church gathering (like when she prays or prophesies), it makes no sense to interpret the vv. 7-9 as re-asserting/establishing the kind of permanent male authority over woman characteristic of complementarian theology.

“Paul’s specific and contextual concerns clearly motivate the whole passage: he uses the word [‘head’] precisely because his concern is with the way in which the [head] must be attired in worship. He follows the assertion of woman’s secondary place in the order of creation (vs. 8f.) not with a command for her to subordinate, but with an insistence that her correct attire is a sign of her [authority] to pray and prophesy. Paul’s purpose seems to be the establishing of ‘proper’ distinction between men and women rather than with male superiority or authority. The practical issue of attire is uppermost in his mind” (Horrell cited in Ciampa and Rosner 2010:510).

Rather, these verses are probably there to say that man and woman are distinct in their natures (contrary to the homosexual option) as demonstrated by their different origins, that this matters for church order (contrary to some of the Corinthians), and that women in particular—Christians praying and prophesying in the presence of God’s people—are fully human, authority-bearing creatures (contrary to those undervaluing the ministry of women).

Because this interpretation is so radically opposite of what the church has been saying for over a thousand years, it falls deaf on the ears of many complementarians, gender-skeptics, and some feminist theologians. It is assumed that the Apostle Paul (a former Pharisee) *couldn't* have been so pro-woman. He couldn't have elevated women to the same privileged position as men—not in church, not anywhere. Especially since this text has been used to limit women's ministry, the attitude goes, it certainly could not have been meant to support women's ministry. But this is

where one must consult the rest of Paul's theology and teaching with as little prejudice as possible. As an Old Testament scholar, certainly Paul knew the fundamental image-bearing equality between men and women (Gen 1:27; Keener 2004:37), knew that origin determines nature (putting woman on the same plane as man, not below man), and knew that woman's being created *for* man (Gen 2:18)—as opposed to being made for the aardvark, antelope or beetle—was another attestation of her worth and value, not her inherent subordination (Hamilton 1990:175-176; Hess 2005a:86). Thus, Paul can say earlier in 1 Corinthians that a wife has authority over her husband's very body just as the husband has authority over the wife's body (7:4). All of chapter seven, in fact, is dedicated to talking about the relationship between man and woman on its most basic level (marriage)—*and it is thoroughly egalitarian in its approach* (see chapter seven).

This balanced view of the sexes is adopted in the very next verse of 1 Corinthians 11: "However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman" (11:11). If he had wanted his readers to go away with a complementarian/traditionalist theology (hierarchical and female-subordinationist), or go away with a radical feminist theology (asserting woman's independence from man), the Apostle probably would not have made such egalitarian-sounding points here or anywhere else (cf. Eph 5:21-22). Translating $\delta\iota\alpha$ as "because of" in this section, and rejecting the inaccurate translation of "husband" and "wife" in 11:3 (oddly maintained in the NRSV and ESV) might help readers avoid artificial patriarchal, androcentric overtones contained in traditional interpretations (Bailey 2011:308-313).

Fourth and finally, readers must once again be reminded that Paul is primarily addressing prophecy, hair styles/coverings, and edifying the church—not the popular concept of “gender roles” per se. Foh correctly states that, “The male-female relationship is discussed only because it is relevant to how men and women pray and prophesy during worship” (Foh 1989:85-85). Whatever conclusions scholars do draw from 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, they must give weight to such conclusions with this reality in mind. (I.e., one’s entire perspective of gender and women in ministry should not rest solely on an interpretation of these verses.)

In the end, 1 Corinthians 11 provides support for women’s participation in Christian ministry—specifically at regular church gatherings (Saucy 2001:167). Given the kind of functions women fulfilled in the early church before and during Paul’s time (see the study of Luke-Acts above), it would be increasingly odd for Paul to establish permanent regulations for local church gatherings that contradict this previous activity and the non-discriminatory spirit of the New Covenant community (Acts 2). Just as wives have the “conjugal rights” to “have authority” over their husbands (1 Cor 7:4-5)—who is their own “head” (1 Cor 11; Eph 5), so women of the New Covenant have authority over their own head (1 Cor 11:10) to pray and prophesy in the presence of the congregation—with men undoubtedly present.

The next chapter of 1 Corinthians continues to address the internal operations of the local church. It contains a lengthy discussion about spiritual gifts, which Paul says is ultimately for “the common good” of the church (12:7). These spiritual gifts are “distributed to each one as [the Spirit] wills” (v. 11). The unity and diversity displayed in the gifts exists “so that there may be

no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another” (12:25).

The chapter finishes with the following words:

“And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:28-31; cf. 14:1).

There is no indication that only some of the functions in this list are reserved for men only, and given what has been observed so far in NT theology, there is every reason to believe that women partook in each one of these gifts/positions. Perhaps 2 Corinthians 3:17 is relevant here: “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” Additionally, we know for fact that in the early church there were women apostles, prophets, and teachers—in the very sense that Paul here describes (see chapter seven). Would Paul ask anyone to desire a gift (14:1) that they could never have due to their biology? Or would Paul ask anyone to desire gifts that they could not use at normal church gatherings where men were always present? Probably not. Spiritual gifts, after all, were meant to edify all, not only certain sexes.

1 Corinthians 14:12 and 26 once again underscore Paul’s ultimate goal in the midst of his many commands:

“So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church...When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up” (1 Corinthians 14:12, 26).

Regarding this last verse (14:26), Saucy says: “We do not know the nature of all of this teaching nor how it took place, but there does not appear to be any gender restriction applied. (2001:169; cf. Col 3:16).

Ephesians 4:11-12 parallels 1 Corinthians 12: “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” Again, the contingency is not on role or biology, but “according to the proper working of each part,” which “makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Eph 4:16).

Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians is also concerned with the gospel (1 Thess 2:2, 9, 13). Paul commends “the word of the Lord sounded forth from” the church (1:8). In the letter to the Philippians, there is also great interest in the “progress of the gospel” (1:12; cf. 1:5, 7, 27), and in concluding his letter Paul gives notable attention to two Christian women:

“I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life” (Philippians 4:2-3).

Were Christian women in the first century (and forever) limited to subordinate and/or supporting roles, it is quite odd that Paul calls not on the women to help but on someone else to help them (cf. Rom 16:1-2). It is even more odd that they are said to “have labored side by side” with the Apostle Paul specifically for “the gospel” (ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ). The fact is:

“That he had women as co-workers in Philippi should surprise us none, since the church there had its origins among some Gentile women who, as “God-fearers,” met by the river on the Jewish Sabbath for prayer (Acts 16:13-15)...here [Php 4:2-3] is one of those pieces of “mute” evidence for women in leadership in the NT, significant in this case for its off-handed, presuppositional way of speaking about them. To deny their role in the church in Philippi is to fly full in the face of the text. Here is the evidence that the Holy Spirit is ‘gender-blind,’ that he gifts as he wills; our task is to recognize his gifting and to “assist” all such people, male and female, ‘to have the same mindset in the Lord,’ so that together they will be effective in doing the gospel” (see 1995:390, 398).

The letter to the Galatians and to Titus shows an acute interest in the purity of the gospel. Galatians stresses the right gospel (in contrast to the “false gospel” of the Judaizers), while Titus stresses right doctrine and its proper dissemination in the community of the church.

In Titus 3 we read the following:

“Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people” (Titus 3:2).

Paul encourages the Christians in Crete to be blameless in the sight of those outside the church.

That means addressing not only church concerns, but behavior at home and in the family.

Towner says:

“All Christian household codes address women and slaves (sometimes passing over husbands and masters) because of the fact that in their respective relationships to husbands and masters, their behavior as Christians would be carefully observed (particularly if their counterpart was not a believer). The master determined the religion of the household, and conventional wisdom alleged that slaves and women were notorious for bringing home all kinds of new-fangled religions from the marketplace. If a new religious conviction entered the equation, the potential for tension and strong reactions by unbelievers inside and outside of the household increased dramatically” (2006:729).

Thus, Paul commands slaves to “be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” and young wives, “working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled” (Tit 2:9-10, 5). The “doctrine” (2:10, cf. 2:1) and “word of God” (2:5) that Paul refers to is not the doctrine of sexism where all women are subordinate to men in a hierarchy of gendered human beings, nor the doctrine of racism where all “inferior races” are subordinate to their superior masters in a

hierarchy of ethnic human beings. Rather, Paul is simply telling the Cretan Christians to be Christ-like wherever they are at in their life and culture (cf. Col 3:17-4:1; see Towner 2006:722-740; Guthrie 2009:214-218; cf. Paul’s attitude in 1 Corinthians 9:20-23).

Nevertheless, standards must be made to ensure the proper functionality and passing down of doctrine within the believing community. These lists of qualifications are given to “elders,” “deacons,” and “widows” in 1 Timothy 3-5. The origins of elders and deacons are not altogether clear, but they seem to have roots in both Jewish and Greco-Roman tradition (see Hübner 2013a:18-29). Women were certainly recognized (at least by Paul) for being deacons (1 Tim 3:11; Rom 16:1-2) and widows (1 Tim 5:9-13) in the church (Hübner 2013). It is unclear how common women elders were since there are no named elders in the New Testament (either male or female), and Paul assumes that this position was fulfilled by the typical, first-century Christian leader—a male who was both a husband and a father. Given all that has been observed so far in the NT, there is little reason to suggest that the assumption of maleness in the qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are any less occasional than the assumption of their married and parental status. Those wishing to ban elders on the basis of their gender from 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 must (to be consistent) also ban those men who are unmarried and/or lack children. (Only the Eastern Orthodox Church is consistent in that regard, since they require elders to be married and have children.)

“Women elders” appear in Titus 2:3 (πρεσβύτιδας, *hapax*) and 1 Timothy 5:2 (πρεσβυτέρα) as basically “old women” in the church, and thus not quite in the same sense as elders in 1 Timothy 2 and Titus 1. One must not be too strict, however, in drawing distinctions between groups (e.g.,

“official” and “unofficial”) since there is considerable fluency in such positions (see chapter seven). Out of the lists of qualifications for deacons, elders and widows, only elders are required to be able to teach (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:9), though one must remember that teaching and preaching was not certainly limited to elders. In addition to all that has been said above, Paul speaks of regular “teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom” in the church (Col 3:16). It is also useful to recall that Stephen (a table-waiter or “deacon”) gave the longest sermon in the book of Acts. A fuller discussion of church “offices” and their qualifications will take place in chapter seven.

6.4 Proclaiming the Gospel in the Rest of the NT

Peter had the same attitude as Paul above about being subject to others. He says in 1 Peter 2-3, “Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good” (1 Pet 2:13-14). He goes on to say, “Honor everyone,” and gives instructions for slaves and masters, wives being “subject” to their husbands, etc. The text makes a number of assertions about gender roles, but we mention this text because of its relevance on the preaching of the gospel. Peter says that wives are to be submissive to their husbands “so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives” (3:1). Is this a ban on the verbal proclamation of the gospel of women to men? No. As the complementarian Wayne Grudem concedes in his commentary, “Peter does not exactly say that Christians should never talk about the gospel message to their unbelieving husbands or friends,” but “he does indicate that the means God will use to ‘win’ such persons will generally not be the Christian’s

words but his or her *behavior*” (2009:146). Peter then sums up in 3:8: “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.”

Earlier in the letter, Peter speaks about the church as a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pt 2:9). This passage is often cited as refuting arguments against women elders that rely on the male-only priesthood. The passage appears to affirm the Protestant teaching of the “priesthood of all believers,” which surpasses the male-priesthood of the Old Testament (cf. Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). While this is an important point, one must not overlook the last half of the verse since it identifies the *purpose* of this chosen people and holy priesthood: “that [ὅπως] you may proclaim [ἐξαγγείλητε] the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” There is no exegetical basis to disconnect the first phrase from the second phrase of the verse. All those “chosen” have been chosen for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel. Peter, as you can notice, is more specific in what is being proclaimed, saying the “excellencies” (ἀρετή, used five times in the NT) or “mighty acts” (NRSV), “virtues” (NET), or “the praises of him” (KJV). This harkens back to Acts 2 and the foundations of the church: the men and women prophesied, “telling...the mighty works of God” (2:11). All disciples of Jesus are called to verbally, publicly proclaim the gospel to all creatures.

In other portions of his letters, Peter talks about the proclamation of the gospel in some unusual ways. In 1 Peter 3:19 mentions Christ who, being dead in the flesh and alive in the spirit, “went and proclaimed [ἐκήρυξεν] to the spirits in prison,” and in 4:6 says, “For this is why the gospel

was preached even to those who dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.” But, if preaching to the dead seems a bit strange, one must also remember that the proclamation of the gospel even extends to angels in the Apocalypse: “Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people” (Rev 14:6).

All of these texts again remind us that the manner and extent of Christian preaching is immeasurably diverse. If there was ever a time to “break the rules” and deviate from the norm, it is during the Spirit-driven mission of proclaiming the good news about Christ and salvation. Indeed, Christians “preach the gospel, in season and out of season,” (2 Tim 4:2). If Jesus can preach the gospel to those in hell, and if angels can preach the gospel to earth’s inhabitants at the end of the world, and if all Christians are commissioned by God in the flesh to preach to “all creatures” until that last age comes (Mt 28), one must ask if it is likely that God would forever ban half the covenant community from preaching the gospel (in church of all places) simply because that person has XX chromosomes, or simply because her listeners have XY chromosomes. Such a suggestion is, at the very least, out of sync with the theology of the New Testament on both a thematic and an exegetical level. It is safer to conclude that when it comes to preaching the gospel, the Holy Spirit is (to borrow Fee’s words) “gender-blind.”

6.5 Conclusion

Those who hold to an infallible Bible must harmonize the theology of Scripture. This presents a problem for those who forbid women elders.

We have seen either explicitly or implicitly, women partake in the verbal proclamation of the gospel, in public and in private, to groups including men and groups including women, in churches and in numerous other contexts. We have seen that the people who God chooses to use in this proclamation are not discriminated on the basis of biology, nor are the gifts of the Spirit (teaching, prophesy, etc.) given according to biology. We have also seen that at crucial points in doctrinal teaching in letters and in the NT narrative, the overriding goal is church edification, obeying the directives of the Spirit, and the salvation of souls.

We have not seen a consistent concern for gender roles—much less a concern to ensure that male Christians *always* remain in positions of “ultimate responsibility and leadership” (Saucy 2001:162) via teaching and preaching in and outside of the church. When we *have* seen a concern for gender propriety and sexual distinctions, it has not amounted to anything close to a universal ban on women teaching and exercising authority over men at church, no matter how hard or creatively one tries to infer such a principle. Often enough, those texts that traditionally have been used to keep women out of Christian ministry are not only weaker in their exegetical conclusions, but they actually *support* women’s ministry. At the same time, we have observed other important texts that lend support to women in ministry that are perhaps overlooked in the debate. All of this has additionally shown that the New Covenant community known as the “church” is marked by gender equality (Acts 2; Gal 3:28), vividly displayed in the gender-inclusive, public sign of baptism and the regular ordinance of the Lord’s Table (where women as

much as men “proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes,” 1 Cor 11:26). There simply are no grounds for sexism in the Body of Christ.

In short, we have seen that a complementarian reading(s) and application(s) of 1 Timothy 2:11-14 contradicts (among other things) the New Testament teaching regarding the primacy of the Spirit-driven proclamation of the gospel. Therefore, assuming Scripture’s consistency and infallibility, the complementarian reading(s) of 1 Timothy 2:11-14 is incorrect. A theology that affirms women elders is true because of the impossibility of the contrary.

Those who demand a more extensive argument than the one presented in this chapter must remember the male-centered culture in which the New Testament was written. We have, for example, observed the impact of androcentric language in exegesis—words that are “masculine” that might be thought to only encompass male persons, but actually encompass women. When one realizes the saturated level of androcentricity in the New Testament documents, the cases of women performing various ministerial and “manly” tasks (whether “manly” according to first-century culture or to our own culture today) become all the more significant, as do the places where women initially appear absent but are truly present. The documents of the New Testament present only a slice of early church history and from a perspective that, due to such cultural and historical circumstances, would not necessarily lend itself towards egalitarian ideals (whether gender, racial, or other forms of egalitarianism). Schüssler-Fiorenza is generally right in this regard: “Since for various reasons the NT authors were not interested in extolling women’s and slave’s participation in leadership in the early Christian movement, we can assume that they transmit only a fraction of the possibly rich traditions of women’s contributions to the early

Christian movement” (2013:66; cf. Pui-lan 2000:104). We must, as Bauckham said, “supply what is lacking” (2002:201). Gender-inclusive (or “gender-neutral”) translations help readers to some degree, but also serve in pointing to the larger hermeneutical challenges.

In addition to androcentrism, we must also be reminded that the world of the first-century is inarguably patriarchal. It common for critics of women elders to say such things as, “the New Testament commends the activities of women in various sorts of ministries except those that would violate the male leadership principle” (Knight 2006:358). But if this “male leadership principle”—little more than an alternative label for male control—is to some degree actually patriarchy, androcentrism, and sexism generated by the fall,⁴ the reader of the New Testament ought to be particularly careful not to attribute such historical phenomena to an absolute, universal moral norm (see chapter seven). To make the point differently, the Bible gives far more attention to Jewish people than to other ethnicities, but no Christian would demand an equal treatment of all ethnicities in Scripture to have a “biblical argument” for racial equality. That men dominate the scene of Christian leadership in the early church is expected; the question is how much significance should be given to it. Is it prescriptive, or descriptive?

It is therefore superficial to demand an account of women in ministry directly comparable to men in ministry from the Scriptures. Not only are the purposes of Scripture limited and its historical contexts fixed, but its own internal principles (e.g., the institution of the New Covenant and its elevation of women) have not reached full realization even today. More concretely, it is superficial to demand an explicit instance of a woman doing what complementarians say women

⁴ I say “to some degree” because it is possible biological disposition (both unfallen and fallen) may also have contributed towards the male leadership observed in human history.

are forbidden from doing in 1 Timothy 2:12 (e.g., Gordon cited in Piper and Grudem 2006:76; Grudem 2004:365; Schreiner 2005b:268). This is particularly true since those who make such a demand do not really know what this would look like in today's environment, much less in the first-century (see next chapter).

The Christian must ultimately recognize how and why he or she is giving weight to certain arguments and positions, and adjust his or her expectations and thought-processes according to Christlike humility, logical consistency, and the fruits of exegetical study.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONFIRMING ARGUMENTS

7. Introduction

It is now time to provide more concise, arguments in support of women elders. As the analytical structure of this argument indicates, these additional arguments take the form of “affirming arguments,” meaning that they bolster, not adequately independently establish, the conclusion that women can be elders. Three of these arguments will be provided.

The first argument addresses a hermeneutical concern regarding the popular prohibition of women elders. Reformed and Evangelical scholars agree that, in hermeneutics and theology, the “clearer” texts of the Bible should be used to interpret the less clear. The problem is that 1 Timothy 2:9-15 is not one of the “clearer texts,” so to be consistent, the text should not (alone) be used to universally ban women elders; it is better, in fact, to err on the side of permitting female elders than to err on the side of a universal, permanent prohibition of female elders because of the obscurity of 1 Timothy 2:12 and the importance of Christian ministry.

The second argument addresses the claim that the “headship” in marriage should extend into the church so that church leaders should be male only. On the contrary, marriage is fundamentally egalitarian, so to whatever degree that leadership in the home extends into the leadership of the church, this only goes to *support* women elders, not undermine them.

Finally, the last argument will briefly show that women apostles, deacons, and prophets in the first-century church supports women elders. Attempts to draw a line around the office of elder as being distinct from all other church functions and offices will be shown to lack a sound basis. “Eldership” is not so special so that only men can occupy that position/task.

7.1 Applying Scriptures like 1 Timothy 2:12

Evangelicals and Reformed Christians can often be found saying that the ambiguous and difficult texts of Scripture ought to be interpreted in light of the clearer texts of Scripture. The problem is that 1 Timothy 2:11-15 (like 1 Cor 14:35-36) is one of the most puzzling and controversial texts in the New Testament, and yet those who are against women elders are willing to put most—if not all—of their weight on this text. These kinds of inconsistencies should cause Christians to seek better alternatives.

Here is an outline for this section:

1. First, we will briefly define what is meant by passages that are “plain,” “straightforward,” and “clear” (henceforth “Category A”) and passages that are “obscure,” “difficult,” and “less clear” (henceforth “Category B”).
2. Second, we will confirm that 1 Timothy 2:9-15 generally falls under Category B for five reasons:
 - a. The meaning of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 has been and is still highly disputed.
 - b. 1 Timothy 2:9-15 does not make sense according to a literal, “straight-forward reading” of the text, and therefore requires greater exegetical treatment.

- c. 1 Timothy 2:9-15 contains an unusual number of obscure terms.
 - d. 1 Timothy 2:9-15 has produced an unusually large number of diverse interpretations from both sides of the debate.
 - e. 1 Timothy 2:9-15 has been particularly difficult to apply for those who deny women elders. Complementarians in particular do not know how to apply a passage that, according to their position, *should* be easy to understand and apply at a practical level.
3. Third, we will confirm that both sides of the debate generally believe that readers of Scripture should interpret passages in Category B in light of those in Category A.
 4. Fourth, we will confirm that those who forbid women elders do *not* hold to the above principle (3) regarding 1 Timothy 2:9-15, but those who allow women elders *do*.
 5. Finally, we will suggest that it is wiser to err on the side of allowing women elders than to err on the side of forbidding them because of the difficult nature of 1 Timothy 2:12 and because of the importance of Christian ministry.

7.1.1 Premise 1: Clarifying the Clarity of Scripture

In bibliology, one particular attribute of Scripture is called “clarity” or “perspicuity,” which basically asserts that Scripture is able to be understood. In addressing this subject in his book *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, the Reformed scholar John Frame says, “Scripture is always clear enough for us to carry out our present responsibilities before God” (2010:207). One of Frame’s students, Wayne Grudem, says something similar in defining the clarity of Scripture in his *Systematic Theology*: “The clarity of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that

its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God's help and being willing to follow it" (2000:108).

Various confessions speak of the clarity of Scripture, such as section 1.7 in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Second London Baptist Confession*:

"All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them."

The Confessions cites 2 Peter 3:16 in support of this doctrine:

"And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures" (2 Peter 3:15-16).

As the Confessions indicate, the clarity of Scripture does not mean that all passages of Scripture have the same degree of clarity. There are, as Peter says, some words of Scripture that are "hard to understand" (*δυσνόητος*, used only once in the NT). One commentary on this passage says:

"[*δυσνόητος*] is a rare word, with a nuance of ambiguity about it. It was applied in antiquity to oracles, whose pronouncements were notoriously capable of more than one interpretation. There are, says Peter, such ambiguities in Paul's letters" (2009:171).

Unfortunately, Peter does not tell us what passages he has in mind. They may not necessarily be the ones that Christians today find difficult to understand. Packer says, "...we may grant at once that there are in Scripture many points of exegetical detail on which a confident choice between competing options is almost if not quite impossible..." (1992:330). Indeed, there is a degree of subjectivity in the clarity of Scripture, as Frame points out:

“...the Confession’s statement...recognizes that not every part of Scripture is equally clear to everybody...The clarity of the Word...is selective. It is for some, not all. It is for those with whom God intends to fully communicate. That selectivity has further dimensions, for even disciples of Jesus do not always find the Scriptures entirely clear. For example, a six-year-old child may believe in Jesus, but have a very rudimentary understanding of Scripture. That, too, is under God’s sovereign control. It is God’s decision generally to communicate with us through Scripture more and more clearly as we grow in spiritual maturity. So the Confession says that not everything in Scripture is equally clear to every Christian” (2010:205).

Thus, the “clarity” of Scripture assumes a standard of clarity that depends on the reader. This also means that the clarity of Scripture exists on a spectrum; there are difficult passages and *very* difficult passages, clear passages and *somewhat* clear passages, etc.

Does this mean that there are no general principles of what makes certain written texts difficult to understand? Maybe not. Below are five general criteria that indicate when a text may properly fall under Category B (“obscure,” “difficult,” “less clear”):

1. The meaning of the text has been (and may still be) highly disputed.
2. The text does not make sense according to a literal, “straight-forward” or “face value” reading.
3. The text contains an unusual number of obscure terms.
4. The text has produced a large number of diverse interpretations.
5. The text is particularly difficult to apply in concrete, contemporary situations.

Some theologians and philosophers might want more criteria, and others less. But we should agree, for example, with Piper and Grudem when they condemn “a principle that says, if a text is disputed, don’t use it” (2006:91). The mere fact of controversy and debate is not enough to relegate a text to “Category B.” None of the above criteria are sufficient *by themselves* to do this.

But if a text meets several—and especially if it meets *all five* criteria, it would be absurd to suggest that it should be treated as “clear teaching.”

So, the question is, does 1 Timothy 2:9-15 qualify for any (or all) of these criteria?

7.1.2 Premise 2: Why 1 Timothy 2:9-15 Falls Under Category B

The first question is, has the meaning of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 been highly disputed, and is it still disputed? Anyone familiar with the debate over women in ministry will answer with a resounding *yes* (cf. Blomberg 2005:168). It is simply unnecessary to prove this point any further. All sides of the debate can agree that the meaning of the text is highly disputed (more disputed than the majority of other scriptural texts) and has been for some time (at least a half century, probably longer). One could provide a bibliography to prove this point, but even that would be an equally immense and unnecessary task.

The second question is, does 1 Timothy 2:9-15 make sense according to a literal, straightforward reading of the text? Sarah Sumner masterfully answers with an unequivocal “no”:

“A prime example of a biblical text that cannot sensibly be taken at face value is 1 Timothy 2:8-15...

“But women shall be preserved [saved] through the bearing of children.” A straightforward reading of this line of the Bible is clearly unacceptable to the born-again Christian mind. Evangelicals don’t believe that women’s souls are saved by motherhood. Moreover, it is counter to the gospel to insinuate that childless women are going to hell because they are childless. Therefore, theologically, this verse can’t mean what it sounds like it means. The Bible says that no one can be saved by anything other than grace. How is the average reader supposed to figure out that “saved through the bearing of children” means “saved through the blood of Jesus Christ”? (2003:210-211)

She goes on to make the same observation in another part of the same passage, and brings it directly to bear on the exegesis and application of complementarians:

“But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” Here we face the same difficulty. There’s no way to interpret this verse at face value unless we’re ready to say that it is sinful for a man to learn about God from a woman. Of course most of us hold a more modified view. But that is the point. We hold a view that differs from a straightforward reading. We say, for example, this verse restricts women from teaching the Bible “with authority” to men “publicly at the main church service in a pulpit on Sunday morning.” In other words, we add extra phrases to the biblical text in order to make sense of the verse.

Specifically, we add the part about women being limited on Sunday mornings because at any other time of the week, most of us welcome women’s teaching. This explains why so many of us have heard of Elizabeth Elliot. We know who she is because she’s been teaching us the Scriptures for decades. Over the years we’ve invited her to teach us whether at churches, conferences, and seminaries or through magazines, radio, and books.

Strikingly, John Piper and Wayne Grudem likewise celebrate her ministry. Openly they believe that the biblical injunction in 1 Timothy 2 does not constrain all women entirely. Rather, as they see it, it constrains most women to employ “impersonal” and “indirect” communication to men whenever the gospel is proclaimed.

Here again the driving point is that Piper and Grudem, like everybody else, nuance their reading of 1 Timothy 2. They respond to 1 Timothy 2:12 as if Paul had said, “I do not allow most women to teach men in person, but I *do* allow for exceptions, and I *do* allow for women to teach men through other mediums as books and radio because that mode of communication is more impersonal and indirect.” (2003:210-213)

1 Timothy 2:11 is also not an exception, Sumner points out:

“Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness.” Again, the verse is unpalatable to Christians if we accept it at face value. Does Paul want women to be entirely compliant as they receive instruction from men? If so, then it logically follows that Paul does not want women to be “noble-minded” (Acts 17:11) in the same way as the Bereans who examined the Scriptures to see if Paul’s teaching was true. How many evangelicals believe that women should not ask questions or challenge the biblical accuracy of their teachers? Moreover, how many of us count it as sinful for a woman to wear braids, gold or pearls? And yet, the apostle Paul says, *“Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim of godliness.”* Contemporary evangelicals almost unanimously

believe that as long as women today dress modestly, they are free to wear braids *and* costly clothes *and* gold rings. We are too pragmatic to accept a more rigid interpretation. (2003:210-213; cf. Nicole 1986:47-48).

The third question is, does 1 Timothy 2:9-15 contain an unusual number of obscure terms? Yes, as it was demonstrated in chapter three, Paul uses several words in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 used only once in the NT (*hapax legomena*). How significant is this?

There are 138,020 total words in the Greek NT (NA27) and 1,934 *hapax legomena* (Mardaga 2012:264-274; cf. Baldwin 2005:39). That means a *hapax* is used 1/71 times for every total word used in the NT (or 1.4% of the time). There are 82 words and 6 *hapax legomena* in 1 Timothy 2:9-15.¹ That means Paul uses a *hapax* 1/13.6 times for every word in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 (or 7.3% of the time). When one compares the 1.4% NT average with the 7.3% figure of 1 Timothy 2, we realize that Paul uses *hapax legomena* in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 521% more often than the NT average.

However, Paul uses more rare terms more often than any other NT writer, so it is only statistically significant to compare 1 Timothy 2:9-15 with the rest of Paul's writings. Out of the 138,020 words in the NT, Paul wrote 32,407 of them (assuming Paul did not write Hebrews), making Paul's words comprise 23.5% of the total NT word count. 529 *hapax legomena* are found in Paul's writings.² Thus, on average, Paul uses a *hapax* 1/61 times (or 1.6% of the time). We therefore compare this average to the 1/13.6 times (or 7.3% of the time) Paul uses a *hapax* in

¹ καταστολή (2:9, clothing), αιδώς (2:9, modesty), πλέγμα (2:9, braided hair), θεοσέβεια (2:10, godliness), αὐθεντέω (2:12, give orders to/dominate), τεκνογονία (2:15, bearing of children).

² Credit to "Mark Barnes" and Paul-C" from the online Logos forums for publicly posting data on *hapax legomena* that allowed me to produce these numbers.

1 Timothy 2:9-15, and we conclude that Paul uses *hapax legomena* 456% more often in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 than in the rest of his writings.

One may complain that these numbers are still statistically insignificant because the *Pastoral Epistles* use *hapax legomena* more often than the rest of Paul's writings. Therefore, to prove that 1 Timothy 2:9-15 uses rare terms to a significant degree, we must compare 1 Timothy 2:9-15 with the rest of the Pastoral Epistles. So, the Pastoral Epistles are comprised of 3,488 words (or 2.5% of the NT). There are 138 *hapax legomena* in the Pastoral Epistles. Thus, Paul uses a *hapax* 1/25.3 times in the Pastoral Epistles (or 4% of the time). But this is still smaller than the 7.3% figure of 1 Timothy 2:9-15. Indeed, Paul's use of rare terms in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 is nearly twice as much as his average for the Pastoral Epistles.

It should also be remembered (see chapter 3 above) that the meaning of the specific *hapax* ἀθεντέω in 1 Timothy 2:12 greatly affects the meaning of the passage, and this term is used not only once in the whole NT, but *only once in any Greek literature available to us in nearly a half-century before and after the writing of 1 Timothy*. Therefore, we find embedded within the controversial passage a term that is rare in both biblical and extra-biblical contexts.

In summary, then, Paul *does use* obscure terms unusually often in 1 Timothy 2:9-15—at least when compared with the Pastoral Epistles, writings of Paul, and NT as a whole. Additionally, at least one of these obscure terms is rare in extra-biblical writings, making it all the more difficult to decipher.

Fourth, has 1 Timothy 2:9-15 produced an unusually large number of diverse interpretations? For many, this question is as obvious as the first question: *yes*. There certainly are an unusual number of interpretations of the text—and for almost every passage in 2:9-15. Here are a handful of *recent* interpretations of *just verse 12*:

- A. “Is Paul prohibiting women from all teaching? We do not think so...he allows women to teach other women (Titus 2:3-4), but prohibits them to teach men...Clearly, then, Paul’s prohibition of women’s having authority over a man would exclude a woman from becoming an elder in the way this office is described in the pastoral epistles” (Moo 2006:186-187). Moo here provides the interpretation that Paul is making universal prohibition of women teaching (anything) and exercising authority (of any kind) over (any) man at church. By extension, this precludes women from being elders, since it is their job to teach and exercise authority over all of the church congregation. What is meant by “in church” or “at church” is not necessarily clear.
- B. “If our interpretation of passages like 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is correct, then women cannot publicly exercise their spiritual gift of teaching over men” (Schreiner 2006a:218). Schreiner’s view is virtually the same as Moo’s above, although he adds the qualifier “publicly.” This is probably intended to add clarity to the interpretation, but it is doubtful whether this can soundly be found in the text, especially since (see the previous chapter) the distinction between “public church” and “private church” was not so cut and dry in either the early church in general or in 1 Timothy instruction.
- C. A few pages later, Schreiner’s interpretation appears to evolve: “1 Timothy 2:11-15 prohibits only authoritative teaching to a group of Christians within the church, not

evangelism to those outside the church” (2006a:223). Here, Schreiner leaves out the “publicly” qualifier and delineates the type of teaching (“authoritative”) and the context (“group of Christians within the church”)—suggesting that women church planters are morally acceptable but, “as soon as [the church] is established” “men should assume leadership roles in the governance and teaching ministry” (2006a:223).

- D. Patterson also mentions teaching to a “group,” although she insists that “...the reference here is probably to the teaching of a *group* of men” (2005:162). In theory, then, if a particular Sunday morning service had a low attendance of 14 women and 1 man, a female teacher would be acceptable since she would only be teaching and exercising authority over a man (and not a “group of men”).
- E. “Women are not permitted to publicly teach Scripture and/or Christian doctrine to men in the church (the context implies these topics)” (Packer and Grudem 2008:2328). This is the view of the *ESV Study Bible*, which is edited by Packer and Grudem. It is suggested that what Paul is really addressing is *only certain kinds of teaching*: (a) public teaching, and (b) doctrinal teaching. The addition of these two qualifiers was probably meant to soften the universal ban by making it narrower in scope. There are other complementarian perspectives that vary from this view, suggesting that 1 Timothy 2:12 is only forbidding “public” teaching (and *all* teaching), while others says it is only forbidding “doctrinal” teaching (whether public or private). Other views insert different qualifiers altogether...
- F. “[1 Tim 2:12] reserves to men the kind of teaching which is an exercise of authority over men or over the community as a whole. However, there remain serious questions of application” (Clark 2006:139). Like Schreiner’s second position, Clark is qualifying the

type of teaching by saying it is a kind that exercises authority. This is essentially the same perspective as D. A. Carson, who says, “a strong case can be made for the view that Paul refused to permit any woman to enjoy a church-recognized teaching authority over men (1 Timothy 2:11ff.)” (2006:152).³ Carson adds the qualifier “church-recognized” (which Piper and Grudem have added at times as well; see 2006:85) and speaks of a “teaching authority,” so that, like Clark’s view, “teaching” modifies “authority.” It is not clear what this means; complementarians disagree over what makes some teaching authoritative and other teaching non-authoritative (e.g., the office? Content? The person’s qualifications? Church context? See the quote of Mickelsen below). But, what is clear is that this view differs from Köstenberger and others who forcefully argue that “teaching” and “authority” are to be kept separate (2009:37-40); the type of authority is *not* necessarily a *teaching-kind* of authority. It is also not clear what Carson means by “church-recognized” (given a title? Approved for a position by the elder board, the congregation, or male leaders in the church, or a combination of these? See Sumner 2003:228).

- G. “As unofficial teachers, women have as much right and obligation as anybody to edify their fellow believers, whether men, women, or children...She is not forbidden to teach, or even to teach men; she is only forbidden to occupy the special office [in 1 Timothy 2:12]...May she stand behind the pulpit as she exhorts the congregation from the Word of God? Scripture does not forbid that” (2008:639). John Frame, like Packer, Grudem,

³ Carson also said the following at a conference in 2009: “Is this authoritative teaching or is it teaching *or* having authority? . . .In the NT authority is exercised in the local church as we see in the following verses. Authority is exercised in the local church and the first instance, through elders, pastors, overseers/bishops, three words with one referent, three words referring to one person, primarily through the teaching of the Word. In other words, it’s not that I am the pastor and therefore I have the authority by virtue of my position. Rather, the authority is exercised primarily by faithfully teaching and preaching the whole counsel of God. That’s why we still continue to say *Christ* is the head of the church. So although you might refer to two components of all this (“teach or have authority”), in fact the two are tied together in the NT.” D.A. Carson, “The Flow of Thought in 1 Tim. 2.” Lecture, Different by Design Conference, Minneapolis, MN, February 2, 2009.

and Moo, is another member of CBMW and original signer of the Danvers Statement. He asserts here in his *Doctrine of the Christian Life* that all Paul is really doing in 1 Timothy 2:12 is banning women from the office of elder, not necessarily from the functions of the elder. This is also the view of Craig Blomberg: "...the only thing Paul is prohibiting women from doing in that verse is occupying the office of overseer or elder...When one recognizes the biblical restrictions on women exclusively to involve an *office* (or specific position or role), it becomes clear there are no *tasks* or ministry gifts they cannot or should not exercise—including preaching, teaching, evangelizing, pastoring, and so on" (2005:170, 182). Other members of the CBMW openly contradict this position, saying that Paul is *not* addressing the office of elder. For example, Köstenberger says, "...reducing the issue solely to that of 'no women elders/overseers,' may be unduly minimalistic...1 Timothy 2:12 is grounded in more foundational realities than a mere surface prohibition of women occupying a given office" (1994:259-283). Additionally, Saucy in *Women and Men in Ministry: A Complementary Perspective* writes, "...it is probably impossible to be dogmatic in limiting Paul's prohibition to a certain office holder" (2001:307). George Knight III, likewise says, "It is thus the activity that [Paul] prohibits, not just the office (cf. again 1 Cor. 14:34, 35)" (1999:142). James R. White, in his discussion of 1 Timothy 2, says, "Paul is not in this text even addressing the issue of the eldership" (2013:116).

- H. "A woman, then, may have the gift of pastor-teacher, apostle, evangelist, and prophetess (as Philip's four daughters—Acts 21:9), while, scripturally speaking, she cannot hold the office of an elder or bishop....Therefore, a church may feel free to ordain a woman in recognition of her gift or gifts with a clear understanding that her ordination is not a

recognition of office” (2007:770-771). This perspective by Harold Hoehner is almost identical to Blomberg and Frame’s view (above). But the argument is based on slightly different premises (regarding gift/office distinction) and has slightly different results (e.g., approving of some form of ordination).

- I. “This passage does not prohibit women from ever doing public teaching, but it does make the point that the doctrinal purity of the church is ultimately in the hands of the elders....The passage is therefore drawing the line on a takeover of church government by women” (2009:127). Morhew then elaborates this conclusion in a footnote: “My conclusion is that a women-only and women-dominated church leadership is prohibited by Scripture (as per the local heresy). This does not mean that women, in the same with men, is prohibited by Scripture or that a woman cannot lead a local church” (2009:127). Thus, Morhew’s interpretation is that women elders are allowed—just not a *majority* of them in the local church.

This is only a sampling of the complementarian/traditionalist-leaning interpretations of verse 12. Egalitarian interpretations of this verse are no less varied. As it was already shown in chapter 3, some egalitarians believe Paul was addressing false teaching, others the particular behavior of certain women in classroom kind of settings, others the status of uneducated women, and on and on it goes. It is difficult to say whether one side of the debate has offered more interpretational unity than the other. But it is *not* difficult to say that there are an unusually large number of diverse interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:12—irrespective of whether one is for or against women pastors. The same can be said about interpretations of verse 11 and 13, but, again, it is simply unnecessary to exhaust the point.

The fifth and final question we must ask is, is 1 Timothy 2:9-15 particularly difficult to apply in concrete, contemporary situations? Again, for many the answer to this question is an obvious, unhesitant *yes*. The applications of these verses in Scripture—even if we are only addressing verse 12—are endless. This was evident enough in the brief survey above of complementarian interpretations. In theory, the text is clear and easy to understand (more on this below). But if that were the case, how can one signer of the *Danvers Statement* say that it is OK for a woman to exhort the congregation from the Scriptures behind the pulpit on Sunday morning and another signer of the *Danvers Statement* condemn this very activity?

Many efforts have been made to simplify the teaching *behind* the text. For many theologians, 1 Timothy 2:12 is just an extension of a more basic moral principle, namely, that male headship should not be violated. Schreiner is particularly clear in his writings that women can do anything in church that doesn't "violate male headship" (2010:45; 2006:216, 358). This is supposedly the argument in 1 Timothy 2:13-14; men were created first and women were deceived first, so it is God's will that men always "call the shots." If women lead men, men's leadership or "headship" is "violated." Indeed, what is meant by "male headship" means little more than that men must remain in ultimate control in a hierarchy of power and authority (all in a loving manner, of course). Women, on the other hand, must remain in positions of quiet submission and subordination. In Saucy's words, men must always have "ultimate responsibility and leadership" in the church (2001:162, 167, 170). Or, as Piper and Grudem put it, "We would say that the teaching inappropriate for a woman is the teaching of men in settings or ways that dishonor the calling of men to bear the primary responsibility for teaching and leadership" (2006:70).

The problem is that what “violates male headship” and dishonors “the calling of men” is notoriously subjective. This has led Piper to repeatedly speak of men and women’s feelings and their inner “sense” of being male or female. At one point, Piper says,

“To the degree that a woman’s influence over a man is personal and directive, it will generally offend a man’s good, God-given sense of responsibility and leadership, and thus controvert God’s created order...[influences of women on men are] non-personal and, therefore, not necessarily an offense against God’s order” (2006:51).

In other words, men should not be personally and directly influenced by women, and women are allowed to do whatever doesn’t upset the male ego. So if I happen to find it offensive that my wife is giving me driving directions to the newest coffee shop in town, then she is sinning against God by violating my headship. If I am not offended, then she is not sinning against God because she is not violating my headship. Thus, even with additional qualifiers like “personal” and “direct” influence, the theologian has entered into more subjectivity; what one man finds personally and directly influencing on him may not be the case for another.

The arbitrary application of 1 Timothy 2:12 and its supposed principle of maintaining “male headship” is fairly evident. The “headship principle” can be applied in countless ways. Women may be allowed to teach men at “unstated” church meetings, but not at “stated” meetings. For other churches, women may teach men at church on the basis of other qualifiers like, “It was Sunday evening, not Sunday morning” or, “there was an elder present; she wasn’t a woman by herself,” and so on. In more extreme situations, women are not allowed to talk to the pastor without having a male representative present with her, or women are not allowed to pray in the presence of men at church.

Linda Belleville demonstrates the subjectivity of drawing lines in her response to the November 1995 edition of the CBMW newsletter:

“According to the CBMW, it is okay for a woman to direct Christian education in her local church, but it is not okay for a woman to direct Christian education for her region or denomination. On what basis? The *perceived* degree of governance involved. Yet, in a congregational context, it is actually the local church that makes the decisions, not regional or denominational boards or councils. Also, CBMW says it is okay for a woman to be a Bible professor on a secular campus but not on a Christian campus. On what basis? The *perceived* degree of teaching authority. (A secular school has “no church-authorized authority or doctrinal endorsement.”) Then too, it is okay for a woman to do pastoral ministry with a denominational license but not with denominational ordination. On what basis? The *perceived* degree of public recognition” (2000:150-151).

This is all to demonstrate that “Drawing lines in an arbitrary exercise” (2000:150). Of course, drawing lines in and of itself is not *wrong*. The ethics of many situations often demand some kind of positive and negative response, even if they are based on the temporal, limited, earthly discernment of human beings. Where the Christian should be weary is when these human lines morph into dogma, or worse, divine law. Drawing lines is one thing, drawing lines and condemning those who reject them (in the name of God no less!) is another. It is just as misguided and harmful to “absolutize the relative” as it is to “relativize the absolute” (Groothuis 1997a).

Alvera Mickelsen addresses this topic in the 1989 publication *Women in Ministry: Four Views*. She believes that authority and biblical teaching isn’t even the issue as much as it is church tradition and women’s *visibility*. She also argues that many who forbid women elders on the basis of 1 Timothy 2:12 do not consistently apply their beliefs in actual church practice. This once again highlights the particular difficulty in applying the text:

“A close look at traditional restrictions on women shows great inconsistency. In even the most traditional churches, women often function in “authority” over men and in “official

or liturgical teaching and leading.” For example, women are usually in charge of church kitchens, where they tell men how and where to set up tables and chairs for church functions. They recommend equipment that is needed and decide how it should be arranged. Women are usually in charge of church nurseries. They usually have primary authority over policies regarding the nursery—policies that affect fathers as much as where they plan and oversee any men who help (and how much those men are needed!). When women sing solos or duets in worship services, they surely are ‘leading’ the congregation in worship. And the messages of their songs teach—we hope!

On the other hand, many activities that involve no authority are limited to men. The most classic example is serving Communion. What ‘authority’ or ‘teaching’ is involved in passing the elements to members? Yet women are usually restricted to preparing the elements in the back room, while men serve them. In traditional churches, we rarely see women ushers. Do ushers have some significant authority over those who come? In traditional churches we rarely hear of a woman reader the Scriptures or lead prayer in a worship services. What authority is involved there?” (1989:61-62).

Sometimes complementarians concede on the slippery nature of applying the principle of male headship. Piper and Grudem say:

“We recognize that these lectures and addresses *could* be delivered in a spirit and demeanor that would assault the principle of male leadership. But it is not necessary that they do so. This is most obvious when the woman publicly affirms that principle with intelligence and gladness. We also recognize the ambiguities involved in making these distinctions between the kinds of public speaking that are appropriate and inappropriate. Our expectation is not that we will all arrive at exactly the same sense of where to draw these lines, but that we might come to affirm together the underlying principles” (2006:85).

It is very difficult to believe that the authors are content merely by sharing the same “principles” with others, especially since they so forcefully apply their own “lines” in various publications on the subject of women in ministry and gender roles.

Whatever the case, the bigger problem is that the “lines” have become so radically diverse that talking about having the same “underlying principles” is rather meaningless. Is it really fair to look at one church that forbids women from praying with men in the same room on Sunday

morning and look at another church that has women teachers leading all-member Bible studies on Sunday evening and say that both are committed to the same “underlying principles”?

Consider Craig Blomberg’s application of 1 Timothy 2 and the biblical “principle” of headship:

“...Today, however, for a whole host of reasons, it is perfectly possible for a husband and wife to each pastor their own congregations. It is possible for one of the two to be the lead elder in one congregation while the other worships in and submits to the authority of an entirely different church nearby. When times of services in the two congregations vary sufficiently, such dual allegiances need not prevent one or both partners from also attending the congregation in which the other has “membership” in an act of support for their spouse. One can certainly debate the merit of such arrangements, but they are by no means impossible or unheard of. Thus a married woman who feels led to become a senior pastor may have opportunities to do so without violating Paul’s principles for the role relationships in a marriage” (2011:59).

At least at one point in history, Schreiner called Blomberg’s view “Complementarian” (2001:24-30). But it is doubtful that many other “complementarians” would consider Blomberg’s “underlying principles” the same as their own. (Perhaps this is why Blomberg can say, “Most of the time I just feel like I’m sitting on an uncomfortable fence, getting shot at from both sides!” 2011:50). Indeed, there *are* more fundamental disagreements at play.

Recall when Piper and Grudem said that the “most obvious” sign that a woman is not making an “assault on the principle of male leadership” is “when the woman publicly affirms that principle with intelligence and gladness.” Would this include the woman who preaches from the pulpit to the church congregation? According to some complementarians, yes, others, no. In either case, what the particular woman says or how she appears doesn’t actually matter; the men in charge of the church will ultimately decide if she is violating somebody’s headship or not. So by shifting the focus to a woman’s attitude about male leadership, the complementarian only dives further

into the realm of subjectivity. After all, is what “violates male headship” really determined by the motivations of a woman’s heart and attitude, and if so, what is the process of determining these internal motivations?

For the same reason, it is also useless to say that the “prohibitions [are] intended to be *permanent* and *universal*” (2001:296) and that the prohibition is ultimately based on the “creation order.”

Sumner observes:

“It is said that women are prohibited on the basis of the general principle of the order of creation. But the words of this claim fail to correlate with the way this general principle can be practically applied. If the order of creation is a general principle, then it ought to be applied across the board. Instead, it’s applied inconsistently and selectively as if it were specific, not general” (Sumner 2003:227).

Even if critics of women elders could agree on the meaning of “not allow a woman to teach or *authentain*,” there is yet another curve ball in the word “man” (ἀνδρός). This was briefly pointed out in Dorothy Patterson’s interpretation (above) which suggested that Paul is really only talking about “groups” of men. But it gets more complicated when one tries to apply the text in church: what is the difference between “a man” and, for example, “a boy”? Some who condemn women elders answer, “everything,” while others answer, “nothing.” Many churches allow women to teach boys in Sunday school until fifth grade, while for others, the cutoff is a certain age like 12, 16, or 18. It becomes even more difficult to apply the text when one takes into consideration the actual maturity of certain men/boys—which, we would suspect would be more important than just biological status. In either case, the question must be answered: at what point does a male person possess “headship” that can be violated? When they’re married, or just old enough to be married? Mature enough to be a pastor? Mature enough to recognize their “manhood”? Developed enough to “rule”? Old/mature enough to be a “leader” at home, at work, or at church?

Or is such headship active whenever they are ruling at their own home, workplace, or church? Who gets to determine when that vital point has been reached, only the male rulers of his local church, or someone else?

If headship is an attribute of maleness (i.e., all males are “heads” and have a particular authority that women do not just by virtue of their biology), then there is no “age” of “gaining” or “receiving” headship. A man’s headship can be violated from the womb. In that case, there is no place for any regular women teachers at church—except for those who teach female persons. This would be quite unfortunate, since men and women probably have a lot to learn from each other.

In summary, critics of women elders argue on a continually shifting foundation—at least when it comes to the prohibition in 1 Timothy 2. 1 Timothy 2:12 is *not* clear enough to settle the debate, so the principle of headship (or “creation order”) is used as the deal-breaker. But this principle (and what violates it) is not clear enough to settle the matter either. All that’s left are the subjective opinions of church leaders and of women who, at least in the eyes of men, appear unthreatening to the establishment.

Much more could be said, but hopefully it has at least been made clear that there is tremendous disagreement of both interpretation and application of 1 Timothy 2:12—*especially* for those who forbid women elders. We have also seen four other reasons why 1 Timothy 2:12 is one of the more “obscure” and “difficult” passages. All of this requires a substantial degree of humility and caution when formulating and applying doctrine on the basis of the text.

7.1.3 Premise 3: Reading the Obscure in Light of the Clear

This third portion will confirm that both sides of the debate generally believe that readers of Scripture should interpret passages in Category B in light of those in Category A.

Two of the most respected and widely known confessions of Reformed and Reformed Baptist churches are the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646) and *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith* (1689). Countless entities, whether independent churches, independent theologians, denominations, or seminaries, hold to one (or both) of these historical documents.

Section 1.9 of both Confessions state the following:

“The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.”

This principle may have originated from Tertullian, the second-century Latin apologist:

“Since some passages are more obscure than others, it is right...that uncertain statements should be determined by certain ones, and obscure ones by statements that are clear and plain” (Tertullian cited in Allison 2011:122).

It is important to note that this principle does *not* suggest that the Christian should only pay attention to one set of texts and ignore the others. And it is not “a principle that says, if a text is disputed, don’t use it” (Piper and Grudem 2006:90)—especially since interpretation and theological methodology is what it addresses, not scriptural *application*. To interpret obscure texts in the light of clearer texts does not immediately address how either should be applied

(though it would seem obvious that drawing applications from the obscure texts should be done with an extra degree of humility and caution). As Irenaeus explained:

“No question can be solved by another which itself awaits solution. Nor...can an ambiguity be explained by means of another ambiguity, or enigmas by means of another great enigma. But things of this kind receive their solution from those which are manifest, consistent, and clear” (Irenaeus cited in Allison 2011:122).

Although the logic of this principle is fairly straightforward, it is somewhat difficult to expound since, as it was observed above, what speaks “more clearly” is relative. Are the Confessions telling us to go to “places that speak more clearly” *to me?* *To my denomination?* *To church history in general?* We are not told.

It is probably best to think of this teaching in a broad sense where what is “clear” and what is not clear points to the whole church in general, but the principle can have multiple contexts—the individual, the local church, the denomination or churches of a particular confession, the global church, the historical global church, etc. Perhaps this is why the Confessions speak in the third person: “it must be searched and known...” This is not an activity that excludes any Christian or group of Christians. This principle of hermeneutics applies to any believer or group of believers who seek “the true and full sense of any Scripture.”

Packer summarizes the principle in the following way:

“...what appears to be secondary, incidental, and obscure in Scripture should be viewed in the light of what appears to be primary, central, and plain. This principle requires us to echo the main emphases of the New Testament and to develop a Christocentric, covenantal, kerygmatic exegesis of both Testaments; also, to keep a sense of proportion regarding what are confessedly minutiae, not letting them overshadow what God has indicated to be the weightier matters” (1992:350).

Common seminary textbooks echo the same idea, such as the authors of *Let the Reader Understand*:

“In general, any interpretation begins life as a hypothesis that accepts some things which appear to be clear, and then proceeds to build on that base. There is a little bit of danger, however, because one text may be “obscure” only because an ostensibly “clear” text has been misunderstood, but if the interpreter is aware of this danger and maintains humility with respect to the interpretation, he or she can make progress up the hermeneutical spiral by using the clear to look at the obscure” (McCartney and Clayton 2002:170).

In addition to all of these scholars who deny the legitimacy of women elders, the complementarians Andreas Köstenberger and Richard Patterson make the same point in their book *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*: “In building a theology, we must go to those passages that clearly touch on the issue and avoid drawing principles from obscure passages” (2011:493). White says something similar: “When believing Christians face what appears to be a tension in a Bible text, they turn to the context, language, and the consistent teaching of the entirety of Scripture. They first examine those portions that address the topic at length, and interpret less clear passages in light of the longer, more direct ones. That is how biblical exegesis is done...” (2013:153). Schreiner also concurs, saying, “[Egalitarians] say that clear texts must have sovereignty over unclear ones. Who could possibly disagree with this hermeneutical principle when it is abstractly stated? I also believe clear texts should have priority” (2005b:269).

As Schreiner indicates, Christian egalitarians agree to the same principle. In the 1986 publication *Women, Authority, and the Bible*, Robert Johnston provides eleven rules of Bible interpretation and the eighth is “Insight into texts that are obscure must be gained from those that are plain...” (1986:31). Along the same lines, Rebecca Groothuis says, “...unclear and/or isolated passages are not to be used as doctrinal cornerstones, but are to be interpreted in light of clear passages

which reflect overall biblical themes” (1997a:113). Gretchen Gaebelein Hull asserts the same in her book *Equal to Serve* (1998:188-89).

Therefore, whether one turns to popular Reformed Confessions or to the testimony of individual theologians from both sides of the debate, there appears to be a substantial amount of agreement regarding this particular principle of hermeneutics. The question now is, who is consistent in its application?

7.1.4 Premise 4: Reading 1 Timothy 2 in Light of the Clear

We have established that 1 Timothy 2:9-15 is one of those “obscure” texts that need to be read in light of those that “speak more clearly.” We have also established that both sides of the debate generally agree that the obscure texts must be read in light of the more clear. But, do both sides of the debate treat 1 Timothy 2:9-15 (or verse 12) as such?

Unfortunately not. Against all evidence to the contrary, many against women elders do not concede that the text is obscure. In fact, (for obvious reasons) it is actually asserted that the text is one of the more clear verses that should govern our interpretation of others! Even though Moo says in an essay on 1 Timothy 2:12, “We must be very careful about allowing any specific reconstruction—tentative and uncertain as it must be—to play too large a role in our exegesis,” Schreiner cites 1 Timothy 2:11-15 as “The clear teaching of Paul” that “must be the guide for understanding the role of women...” (2006a:218; cf 221, and 2005b:269). This is particularly

troublesome since both Moo and Schreiner made these statements within the same published volume.

Similar to Schreiner, Susan Foh says 1 Timothy 2:12-14 is “a relatively clear command” (1989:103). Likewise, Stephen Clark says, “The difficulty in applying the passage does *not* arise from an unclarity in the meaning of the passage...” (2006:139). Alexander Strauch says in his book *Biblical Eldership*, “First Timothy 2:11-14 should alone settle the question of women elders” (1995:59). And finally, White says on 1 Timothy 2:12, “The text, then, seems to be quite clear in its meaning. In the context of handling the sacred truths within the teaching ministry of the church, Paul’s apostolic practice was not to allow women to enter that role” (2010:117).

In contrast, Christian egalitarians *are* consistent in applying the hermeneutical principle to 1 Timothy 2. They see the text as being unclear and difficult—*because it is*. Walter Liefeld directly responds to Foh by saying:

“...that the clearer passage interprets the less clear...sounds self-evident. We must sometimes ask, however, whether one passage may *seem less* clear only because we need more information from context or background circumstances and whether another passage may seem *more* clear only because it contains apparently transparent words or phrases that in actuality do not mean what they seem to on the surface. 1 Corinthians 11:1 and 1 Timothy 2:12 are in the latter category” (1989:113-114).

Liefeld’s concluding assertion is particularly valid since (as Sumner has demonstrated) the passages do not, in fact, “mean what they seem to on the surface.”

Groothuis also agrees:

“...it is important to maintain interpretive consistency with the rest of a biblical author’s writings as well as the whole of Scripture. Toward this end, unclear and/or isolated

passages are not to be used as doctrinal cornerstones, but are to be interpreted in light of clear passages which reflect overall biblical themes. This hermeneutical principle prohibits building a doctrine of female subordination on 1 Corinthians 11:3-6 and 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15, for these texts are rife with exegetical difficulties. Principles clearly expressed elsewhere in the Bible must inform one's interpretation of such "proof text" passages" (1997a:113).

When Johnston and Hull refer to the principle of hermeneutics that says the clearer texts should interpret the obscure, both cite 1 Timothy 2:12 as an example (Johnston 1986:31; Hull 1998:184-187). In his discussion on 1 Timothy 2, Ronald Pierce says, "...caution should be used when applying conclusions drawn from the specific data that are not as clear instead of from the clearer concerns of the text" (1993:345). Thus, the Reformed Baptist scholar Roger Nicole concludes one of his essays by saying, "The suggestion that the passage is perfectly plain and admits no other interpretation than that it disqualifies women for the office of elder or pastor is simply not acceptable" (1986:46). (He then provides eight specific difficulties in dealing with 1 Timothy 2.)

In summary, there is an undeniable double-standard of hermeneutics when it comes to complementarianism and 1 Timothy 2. It is believed that Christians should interpret the obscure texts in light of the clear texts, but 1 Timothy 2:12 is an exception—or worse, it is asserted that the text is "clear," perhaps the clearest on the subject of women in ministry.

7.1.5 Premise 5: Better to Err on Which Side?

It is better to err on the side of allowing women elders than to err on the side of forbidding them. Why? Because of the difficulty in interpreting and applying 1 Timothy 2:12, and because the nature of the prohibition—for it is one that could (and does) undermine the proclamation of the

gospel and the internal health of the church. We have seen that “It isn’t even entirely clear what Paul was prohibiting” (Groothuis 1997b:215) in 1 Timothy 2. We have also seen the importance and centrality of the proclamation of the gospel in the previous chapter. The Spirit-driven church of the first-century had little concern for “gender roles” and when such a concern was expressed, there were no permanent, universal rules prohibiting one gender from doing certain spiritual work in the church. When questions came up about what to do in uncertain situations, the church did whatever they were gifted to do and whatever was edifying. As we learned in the previous chapter, Paul had this attitude and repeatedly taught churches to have the same.

2 Corinthians 3 may be relevant at this point:

“[God] has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life....Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:16, 17).

Perhaps the church should take heed the words and attitude of one complementarian: “One way or another, however, gifts given must be used, or the Holy Spirit is quenched” (Packer 1986:296). One simply cannot be dogmatic about applying an interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12 because of its difficult, complex, and uncertain nature—especially if the interpretation results in a universal, permanent ban. It is better to include women in Christian ministries than excluding them from those same Christian ministries.

7.2 Marriage and the Church

One of the most common theological arguments against women elders has to do with the extension of marital roles into the church. It is asserted that in marriage, a husband has a personal

and permanent authority over his wife, and as such, the wife is to exhaustively submit and obey her husband (unless such submission and obedience involves sinning against God, which in that case, the wife is exempt from doing what her husband requires). This hierarchy in marriage naturally extends into the church; only male Christians are to be elders, and women are to submit to and obey the elders' authority. In short, the home is a model (or *the* model) for the church, and since the home is hierarchical with male leadership, so the church must reflect the same authoritarian, hierarchical structure with male leadership.

This subsection will show that this argument is, at best, half right: yes, various relationships and characteristics of the home may extend into the sphere of the church, but the marriage relationship does *not* involve the kind of hierarchy that traditional theology has supposed. Rather, marriage is fundamentally egalitarian, not hierarchical. This lends further support to women elders if it can be established that the principles of marriage extend into ecclesiastical affairs.

Our discussion will proceed along the following lines:

1. Scripture does not ultimately teach that marriage is fundamentally hierarchical where the husband has a permanent, personal authority over his wife (that she does not likewise have over him) where she must submit to her husband (and where he does not also submit to his wife).
 - a. The creation account
 - b. Evaluating “patterns of male leadership” in the Bible.

- c. Properly interpreting the “submission texts” (Col 3:18-4:1; Eph 5:18-33; 1 Pt 2:15-3:8; Tit 2:5).
- 2. Rather, marriage is fundamentally egalitarian—a mutual relationship of Christlike love where both husband and wife have authority over each other, both submit to each other, and both use their particular capacities and gifts for God’s glorification and/by the well-being of each other.
 - a. The creation account (revisited)
 - b. The Song of Solomon
 - c. 1 Corinthians 7
- 3. To whatever degree that the marital relationship extends into the realm of church leadership, this only supports women elders since marriage is fundamentally egalitarian.
- 4. Conclusion: Egalitarianism: a mark of the New Covenant Community.

7.2.1 Evaluating the Traditional Theology of Marriage

There are many admirable and biblical features of what might called the “traditional theology of marriage.” It promotes heterosexuality, monogamy, and the importance of the family in God’s creation (see Köstenberger 2010). But, the traditional theology of marriage is also hierarchical, patriarchal, and androcentric. It is hierarchical in that one spouse is viewed as being in a personal, permanent position of authority over another. It is patriarchal in that the one spouse who has that authority is always male. It is androcentric in that the man (and not the woman) is thought to be represent the marriage and household as a whole, mainly because he is the ruler of both.

This theology of marriage (henceforth “hierarchical theology of marriage”) is typically based on three theological foundations: the doctrine of creation, male leadership patterns in the Bible, and the “submission texts” in the New Testament. Although it is beyond the scope of this work to examine each of these topics with equal attention and detail, we will draw preliminary observations for each of these three areas and offer reasons why they are not compelling.

7.2.1.1 The Creation Account

Genesis 1-3 is highly compressed. The basic dangers facing the interpreter of this kind of literature are naturally two-fold: asserting too little, or asserting too much (Bird 1981:129-159). Especially since the precise genre, date, and occasion for the writing of Genesis 1-3 are disputed, and since there are only a handful of direct references to these chapters in the NT, a tremendous amount of caution must be used when drawing interpretive conclusions. It would be an error, for example, to speak about how “the order of creation in Genesis defines gender roles” along “precise lines” (Lingenfelter 2001:266). It is questionable that the author of Genesis intended to outline permanent, universal gender roles, and even more questionable to say that they are defined along *precise* lines.

Without such caution, however, the gender wars are off to the races. Clearly (one might say), woman is superior to man. Woman was made from the supreme creature of creation (human being), while man was made from dirt (does not origin determine nature?). Woman was made last in a creation order that progresses from inferior to superior, while man was not. Woman was

tempted by Satan because of her representative and supreme position of authority (note the use of the plural “you” in 3:1), while man was not because of his secondary position. Woman was created to be man’s עֵזֶר (“succor” or “helpmate”) and man was not. Woman was to have man leave his family to cleave unto her, and not leave her family to cleave unto him.

But, clearly (one might say), *man* is superior to woman. Man was the origin of woman, not woman the origin of man. Man was made first, and woman last. Woman was tempted by Satan because of her intellectual and spiritual inferiority, while man was not. Woman was created to be man’s עֵזֶר, and man was not. God went to Adam first after they sinned, not woman first. Adam named Eve, and Eve didn’t name Adam.

The point is, if a theologian wants to argue from Genesis for the superiority or hierarchical position of one sex over another, it is easy to do. There are only so many words in the text, and there are a mountain of opportunities to fill in the gaps. But why anyone would want to establish the primacy of one gender over another from Genesis 1-3 in the first place is difficult to understand—especially given how challenging it is to justify this concern by the immediate context and authorial intent. Yet, this appears to be the very approach of those who forbid women elders: in every possible way, pushing the rules of exegesis to its limits, male primacy and authority *must* be found to exist in the creation account. But, as numerous authors have shown through the years, the text simply will not have it (Groothuis 1997b; Hess 2005; Keener and Belleville in 2005b). Permanent female subordinationism and permanent male authority over woman must be read *into* instead of *out of* the narrative.

As tempting as it is to fully prove this assertion, it is beyond the scope of this work. There is time, however, for one example, and then we must move on.

Genesis 2:18 says, “I will make a companion for him who corresponds to him” (NET), or, “I will make him a helper as his partner” (NRSV). For centuries it has been argued that woman being created to be man’s “helper” (ESV, NIV, NASB) demonstrates her inherent subordinate position and his inherent superordinate position. (Whether this applies to other areas beyond the marital sphere is a point of dispute). Contemporary reformed and evangelical theology is no exception. In Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, the reason “Eve Was Created as a Helper for Adam” is second in his list of nine reasons why man has authority over woman and woman is subordinate to man (2000:461). In Schreiner’s essay in *Two Views of Women in Ministry*, “Eve Was Created to Be a Helper” is the third of six reasons why man has authority over woman and woman is subordinate to man (Schreiner 2005b:292). Ray Ortlund in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* says:

“...she was not his equal in that she was his ‘helper.’...A Man, just by virtue of his manhood, is called to lead for God. A woman, just by virtue of her womanhood, is called to help for God...It is the word ‘helper’ that suggests the woman’s supportive role” (2006:102-104).

In his discussion on women as “helpers” in *Women and Ministry*, Doriani says:

“To correct feminists, we say God designed men to need women, but *women must be willing to help*...In God’s world, subordination does not signify inferiority. God sovereignly appoints a place for everyone, and a subordinate post may have nothing to do with weakness” (2003:58).

Bruce Ware on the CBMW website, says:

“While it is true that this same Hebrew term is often used of God’s ‘helping’ people, it is clear that Paul understands Eve’s role as helper to require that woman ought to be under the rightful authority of man (see 1 Cor. 11:9-10...)”



Likewise, Werner Neuer says, “For if the woman has the responsibility to assist the man in his God-appointed responsibilities, that means that the woman has to be subject to the man” (1991:74). Susan Foh concurs:

“The wife is to help her husband. There is a functional subordination of the wife to her husband...the wife is to put her husband’s interests first and help him achieve his goals. He is the one who ultimately makes the decisions and sets the goals” (1979:62, 199).

Andreas Köstenberger teaches the same in his book *God, Marriage, and Family*: woman is man’s “associate or assistant” who is “placed under his overall charge” (2010:25).

The problem with this popular theology is that it is contradicted by the context and particular wording of Genesis 2:18-20. Victor Hamilton gives an accurate summary in his two-volume *International Bible Commentary* on Genesis:

“The last part of v. 18 reads literally, ‘I will make him for him a helper as in front of him (or according to what is in front of him).’ This last phrase, “as in front of him (or according to what is in front of him)” [פְּנֵיָיו] occurs only here and in v. 20. It suggests that what God creates for Adam will correspond to him. Thus the new creation will be neither a superior nor an inferior, but an equal. The creation of this helper will form one-half of a polarity, and will be to man as the south pole is to the north pole. This new creation which man needs is called a *helper* [עֹזֵר], which is masculine in gender, though here it is a term for woman. Any suggestion that this particular word denotes one who has only an associate or subordinate status to a senior member is refuted by the fact that most frequently this same word describes Yahweh’s relationship to Israel. He is Israel’s help(er) because he is the stronger one (see, e.g., Exod. 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26, 29; Ps. 33:20; 115:9-11; 124:8; 146:5; etc.). The LXX translation of [עֹזֵר] by *boēthós* offers further support for this nuance. The LXX uses *boēthós* forty-five times to translate several Hebrew words, and except for three occurrences (1 Chr. 12:18; Ezek. 12:14; Nah. 3:9) the word refers to help “from a stronger one, in no way needing help.” The word is used less frequently for human helpers, and even here, the helper is one appealed to because of superior military strength (Isa. 30:5) or superior size (Ps. 121:1). The verb behind [עֹזֵר] is *‘āzar*, which means ‘succor,’ ‘save from danger,’ ‘deliver from death.’ The woman in Gen. 2 delivers or saves man from his solitude” (1990:175-176; cf. Kidner 2008:70).

“The woman was hence created to relieve the man’s aloneness through *strong partnership*” (Belleville 2005b:27). Indeed, the “main point of the text...is overcoming loneliness or aloneness” (Hess 2005:86), not helping Adam for purely biological purposes of procreation. Thus, “a partner suitable for him” or “a companion for him who corresponds to him” is a better translation,⁴ since the English “helper” can often be confused for a subordinate “assistant.”

So, in yet another irony of interpretation, a text supposedly establishing women’s subordination ends up being a passage that undermines it. Of course, the very fact that woman comes from man (his “side” no less) is sufficient to cast doubt on any concept of permanent hierarchy (whether “functional,” “ontological,” or otherwise). The particular wording about Eve’s creation appears to contradict the traditional interpretation even more (Marrs 1995:20).

In moving from exegetical theology to the broader concerns of systematic theology, one encounters more problems. Can one who is “bone of bone” and “flesh of flesh” really be told, “You will always be under my control”? Or say, “you are always primarily responsible for our relationship as a whole” (see Piper and Grudem 2006:57; Ortlund 2006:86; Köstenberger 2010:23) or, “I will forfeit my will and do whatever you say, even if your decisions ultimately harm our relationship”? And why, given that both man and woman are created to represent God on earth, does woman not have the capacity to represent her own marriage and home in various earthly spheres, like church, state, and society?

⁴ “I will make a companion for him who corresponds to him” (NET); “I will make him a helper as his partner” (NRSV); “It’s not good for the Man to be alone; I’ll make him a helper, a companion” (MSG); “I need to make a suitable partner for him” (CEV); “I need to make a suitable partner for him” (AMP).

As it was argued in the beginning of this subsection, male authority and female subordinationism is easy to read into the creation text, and there are serious doubts about whether this aspect of the traditional theology of marriage can be established on it.

7.2.1.2 Patterns of Male Leadership in the Bible

Another theological reason that is commonly referred to when establishing the hierarchical view of marriage are patterns of male leadership in the Bible. Andreas Köstenberger says:

“A complementarian understanding of gender roles in the church does not depend on 1 Tim 2:12 but is based on the biblical theology of this subject throughout all of Scripture. Both Jesus and Paul confirmed the husband’s headship in the home, and both affirmed male leadership, Jesus by appointing twelve men as his apostles and Paul by grounding his teaching on the subject in the foundational creation narrative in the book of Genesis and by stating that elders in the church ought to be “faithful husbands,” implying that only males were eligible for such a position” (2010:18).

Along the same lines, John Piper and Wayne Grudem say:

“We believe the Bible makes clear that men should take primary responsibility for leadership in the home and that, in the church, the primary teaching and governing leadership should be given by spiritual men.....the pattern of male leadership that pervades the Biblical portrait of family life is probably not a mere cultural phenomenon over thousands of years but reflects God’s original design, even though corrupted by sin” (2006:57, 80; cf. Lingenfelter 273).

It is interesting to note a degree of ambiguity by the use of the term “probability.” But it is a wise choice, for it *is* difficult to discern what phenomena in any area of life is natural (creational by God’s original design) or fallen (corrupted by sin). Sometimes Scripture directly says what is “original” and what was corrupted by sin. For instance, is the diversity of languages a result of sin, or was it God’s original design for people to be multilingual? Genesis 11:1-9 answers clearly: the multiplicity of human languages is, indeed, the result of sin.

This topic is central to feminist theory, theology, and hermeneutics. It is common to hear feminists and Christian egalitarians speak about “patriarchy” in a negative way. As it was observed in chapter four, patriarchy usually refers to a social relationship of oppressed and oppressor, with woman as the oppressed and man as the oppressor. But patriarchy (originating from the Greek term *πατὴρ*, “father”) may also refer to a situation, society, or sphere of life that is marked by male control. Thus, Merriam-Webster on their online dictionary (www.m-w.com, accessed November 22, 2013) define patriarchy as:

“A social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line; *broadly*: control by men of a disproportionately large share of power.”

“Patriarchy,” then, may be bad, or it may not be bad.

Sometimes it is not easy to distinguish between these two kinds of “patriarchy,” especially when moving from the micro level (e.g., a particular case study of a small group) to the macro level (e.g., historical trends of societies). It may be for various cultural, anthropological, or sociological reasons that one gender for a period of time is inclined to possess certain abilities over another. For example, women in ancient Judaism were not as literate as men. Why? Often because men, and not women, were expected to know Torah law. Similar examples could be given for mathematical knowledge in American men and women prior to the 1900s and the rise of gender-inclusive education, or literacy of Muslim women in today’s Islamic cultures. Does women’s incapacity to read and perform various math problems in such historical contexts point to a universal law of creation (or “nature”) about gender roles—man’s role to do the “intellectual” stuff and woman’s role to do other stuff? No. Does it have anything to do with sin?

Not necessarily (Although, it could be argued that in a perfect world, all people would have access to good education).

The point is, one must be very careful in attributing certain trends, behavior, or phenomena (real or apparent) to a particular gender since it may not have anything to do with gender in the first place. One must be even more careful to attribute these trends, behavior, and phenomena with “God’s design” when they may in fact, be demonstrating a *corruption* of God’s design.

Notice, for example, the following argument for male authority and female subordinationism in church government:

“There has never been an epoch, to my knowledge, or denomination, or revival, or other Christian movement, in which women have remained over substantial period of time as the primary highest authoritative teachers of Scripture. For good or ill, charismatic authority gives way to institutionalization; specially called and gifted figures move or pass on, and supernaturally inflamed movements calm down as routine and respectability set in” (2011:60).

Blomberg’s point is that it is God’s design in nature for men to be the teachers of the church, and this is proven by historical trends.

Nicola Hoggard-Creegan aptly responds:

“...I would say, yes it has always been this way, but *why*? Craig himself considers but dismisses the idea that this is the result of the contingencies of history. There are indeed two possibilities. One is that this is how men and women are meant to be. The other is that there are natural human tendencies which are ubiquitous but wrong—the making of war, for instance. There has never been a time of sustained peace. There is an enthusiasm for war that has persisted through human history, at least since our ancestors made their way to the ends of the earth in the second African Diaspora. Is war then a part of the natural God-given order? I would hope not” (2011:67).

Another way of putting it is that Blomberg's argument commits the "is-ought" fallacy. Men have always been the primary teachers of the church. That's that way it is and has been, so that's the way it *ought* to be. But the reason this type of argument is fallacious is because an *is* (a state of affairs) does not necessarily amount to an *ought* (a moral norm).

Making judgments about what is natural or unnatural is particularly difficult in evaluating historical trends—especially since history itself (the telling of the narrative of events, people, places, etc.) is a product of human thought—and usually, *male* human thought. Mainstream feminist theologians are known for pointing this out. Schussler-Fiorenza puts it this way:

“[Because of patriarchy and male domination] Western science, philosophy, and theology have not known the world as it is. Rather, they have created it in their interest and likeness as they wished it to be. Therefore, feminists/womanists insist that it is possible for liberatory discourses to articulate a different historical knowledge and vision of the world” (2013:106).

Perhaps it is a stretch to say, “Western science, philosophy, and theology have not known the world as it is” just because men have generally ruled the world throughout history. (Would Planck's Constant or the laws of physics really have been known differently if women dominated society instead of men—and to such an extent that we can accuse the Western world of being under a massive delusion?) However, feminist theology *does* legitimately point out that, to some degree, our knowledge of the past may be skewed because the story-telling has primarily been left in the hands of male persons (and imperfect ones, no doubt). There may have been cases, for example, where entire narratives lack female characters (and female leaders) simply because the historian does not find them worthy of mention, interesting, or relevant to the story they're telling. “Patterns” of male leadership, then, is not as reliable and/or significant as the theologian might think.

Moreover, even if history was free from any kind of gender bias, it is not always clear what constitutes a “pattern.” There are enough words and characters and dates in the Bible to superficially “connect the dots” and draw a “principle” from redemptive history. Furthermore, even when one has established a possible “pattern” in the Bible, one still has to evaluate what significance it has. It is a pattern that God revealed Himself *only* in ages where societies had not yet discovered electricity. Whether one turns to the Old Testament period or the New Testament period, no electricity can be found. Is this significant? Probably not. It is a pattern that Jews dominate church leadership in Scripture. Whether one turns to the Old Testament or the New Testament, the priesthood or the twelve apostles, Jews are the primary leaders of God’s covenant people. Should we suggest from this that Christians today should prefer the Jewish pastor candidate over candidates of other ethnicities? Probably not. Why, then, is it argued that the male priesthood, male apostolate, etc. are grounds for a male pastorate only? Again, maleness is not always as significant as it seems.

Where both sides of the debate can agree is that male leadership and control in virtually every sphere of life (church, state, family, etc.) is, indeed, present in biblical history. As far as biblical account is concerned, there are more men as prophets, kings, priests, teachers, and apostles than women. The disagreement comes as to whether this pattern is indicative of God’s original design at creation, or indicative of an imbalance/corruption of God’s original design, or a demonstration of the contingencies of history, or any combination of these.

Our concern for the moment is male authority and female subordinationism in *marriage*.

Returning to the words of Piper and Grudem:

“.....the pattern of male leadership that pervades the Biblical portrait of family life is probably not a mere cultural phenomenon over thousands of years but reflects God’s original design, even though corrupted by sin” (2006:57, 80).

One ought to be particularly suspicious about this claim for two reasons. First, we have already seen the difficult nature of judging large-scale patterns of human behavior, relegating one group of phenomena to “creation” and another to “fall.” If a creational pattern can be identified simply by (for example) tallying up major occurrences (or lack of occurrences) in Scripture, then polygamy, slavery, and concubinage should “probably” be thought of as a creational design instead of the result of sin. This is theologically untenable. Second, the immediate curses stemming from the fall of humanity directly disjoint the marital relationship: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gen 3:16b). Egalitarians believe that this is the introduction of hierarchy between husband and wife (and consequently, between man and woman in general) while complementarians believe that this introduces the *corruption* of a hierarchy that already existed between husband and wife (see CBE 1988 and Danvers 1987). Regardless of what exactly the text means, what is clear and what matters for the moment is that *the marital sphere is particularly affected by sin*. Things will never quite be the same between husband and wife. It is therefore particularly dangerous to broadly look at the past (whether using the Bible or any other document as a historical reference) and then judge how “things are supposed to be,” especially when talking about the relationship between man and woman.

Those who forbid women elders are aware of these problems. They know the pitfalls of socio-cultural-historical analysis and the risk of concurring with some of feminist theology’s core

proposals (e.g., that patriarchy and/or androcentrism is a result of sin). Thus, there is a concession to probabilities and an attempt to substantiate the claim about male leadership patterns on a more straightforward basis—namely, the submission texts in the NT. To this topic we now turn.

7.2.1.3 The Submission Texts in the New Testament

There are several texts in the New Testament that instruct women to submit to their husbands, namely, Ephesians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:18, Titus 2:5, and 1 Peter 3:1. Combined with the fact that there are no inverse texts that instruct husbands to submit to their wives, it is argued that husbands stand at the top of a hierarchy of power and authority while women, because of they are female, are permanently and personally required to obey their husbands in absolutely everything (unless the husband's command requires her to sin; see Piper and Grudem 2006:38; cf. Hurley 1981:154). This structure of male leadership is then argued to extend into the church, which is why elders should not be female. Thorvald Madsen II summarizes this argument nicely:

“For Paul, male leadership begins in the home and extends to the church. The one implies the other, even from a practical standpoint. If women could serve as the pastors of local churches, they would exercise headship over their own husbands, which Paul forbids (cf. Titus 2:5). Likewise, this arrangement sends a mixed signal even in cases where an *unmarried* woman is the senior pastor. If women may oversee churches, why should they not oversee households and husbands? Against these possibilities, Paul's view is quite consistent: men are to lead households and churches, taking particular responsibility for the secure transmission of doctrine and practice” (2010:234; cf. Köstenberger 2010:243).

But there are two fatal assumptions in this line of thought. First (A) is the faulty assertion that husbands/men should never submit to their wives in the way that the Scriptures talk about wives submitting to husbands, and second (B), is the faulty assertion that Scriptural instruction for one

gender doesn't necessarily apply to the other gender. (In Madsen's case, for Paul to command wives to submit to their husbands is tantamount to saying that men should never submit to their wives and that this activity is *forbidden*.) These two points deserve brief attention.

Regarding (A), is it really true that men are never instructed to submit to their wives in the Bible? No, if the interpreter carefully understand all the relevant data. In the Old Testament, "God said to Abraham, 'Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you'" (Gen 21:12). Although this is not a universal command for everyone to follow today, it does not fit the hierarchical theology of marriage where *woman* should do everything a man commands. When one turns to NT instruction, there are a number of texts that address submission and subjection, and they inevitably apply to married couples. As it was observed in chapter four, Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:16 commands the Corinthians to "be subject to such as these [other Christians like Stephanus], and to every fellow worker and laborer." And as it was argued, there is little reason to believe that there were no (married) female laborers and workers like the ones mentioned here. It is natural to conclude that this command might sometimes involve a husband submitting to a wife. One recalls that Priscilla and Aquila are both called "fellow workers" in Romans 16:3, and that they were married (Acts 18:2). Must theologians twist Paul's command in 1 Corinthians 16 so that he is only saying, "subject yourself to every fellow worker and laborer—unless she's a woman, or unless she's your wife"?

Galatians 5:13 also says, "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love" (NIV). Ephesians 5,

likewise, says, “be filled with the Spirit...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (5:18, 21). Do these commands involve husbands serving and submitting to their wives? Again, there is no immediate indication to think otherwise. It is unlikely that the Apostle envisioned his ethical commands for the church to be understood with a continual “except for marriage” or “except for women” qualifier.

It is also noteworthy that Paul bases his teaching of subjection and submission (commonly called “mutual submission”) on the teaching and life of Christ. Jesus said “whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all” (Mk 10:43-44). He also said of himself, “For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). Unsurprisingly, Paul says that Jesus took the “form of a slave” and was “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:6-8). Besides his death, Jesus demonstrated his service, submission (Padgett 2011; Payne 2009), and servanthood in washing the feet of His disciples (Jn 13:13-14)—“a role reserved for slaves in the ancient world” (Padgett 2011:64). Surely this behavior and command (“For I have given you an example,” 13:15) is not restricted to one sex or another. *Everyone* should follow Christ’s example.

It is also important to note that women, even in Scriptural times, can be legitimately praised for *not* submitting to their husbands. Abigail, who directly and intentionally contradicted the actions of her husband (behind his back) is a case in point. Old Testament scholar Walter Kaiser Jr. rightly summarizes:

“[God was not] displeased with an Abigail (1 Sam. 25), who showed more discernment and wisdom than her foolish husband Nabal, who almost led that whole household into

mortal danger had not Abigail intervened. Not only did King David praise her for preventing him from acting foolishly, but Scripture attests to the rightness of her actions over against those of her husband Nabal by saying that, ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal down and he died” (2005:6-10).

It is clear, then, that submission should not be thought of as an inherently feminine attribute. It would be more accurately referred to as a *Christian* attribute. All Christians are to submit—to God, to each other, and even to the governing authorities (Rom 13) just as Christ did and Scripture commands. Submission between husbands and wives is no exception.

Regarding (B), it is argued that wives are told to submit to their husbands and not vice versa, so husbands do not have to submit to their wives. But is this legitimate? If the Bible gives a command to one gender and not another, is it safe to assume that the command cannot be applied to the opposite gender?

Definitely not. Consider the Ten Commandments, where only husbands are forbidden to covet their neighbor’s “wife” (Ex 20:17). It is doubtful that Moses allowed wives to covet their neighbor’s husbands. In the qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-12, male deacons must not “addicted to much wine,” “not greedy for dishonest gain,” and “managing their children and household well.” But the “women” in 3:11 (probably women deacons, though they could be deacons’ wives; see Hübner 2013a) lack these specific qualifications. Are we really to believe that Paul allowed women deacons (or wives of deacons) to be addicted to wine, greedy for dishonest gain, and managing their children and household poorly? Of course not. In 1 Peter 3:3 and 1 Timothy 2:9-10, the authors tell women that their adorning should not be external. There is no parallel command for men. Does this mean that it is acceptable for men to go overboard with their external adornments? Of course not. In Ephesians 5:33 and 1 Peter 3:2 the authors tell

wives to respect their husbands. There is no parallel command given for husbands. Does this mean it is acceptable for husbands not to respect their wives? Of course not. Several times Paul tells fathers not to “provoke their children” (Eph 6:2; Col 3:21), but he issues no such parallel command for mothers. Does this mean it is acceptable for mothers to provoke their children? Again, not at all.

Why then, when readers get to Ephesians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:18, 1 Peter 3:1, and Titus 2:5, the principles of hermeneutics and systematic theology suddenly change? It is argued that when husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loves the church and wives are to submit to their husbands, these commands should never, *ever* be reversed (Foh 1979:200; Köstenberger 2010:26, 59). All of a sudden, universal gender roles are being established—permanent female subordinationism, and permanent male authority. Even though Christlikeness is gender-inclusive (on the maleness of Jesus, see Grenz and Kjesbo 1995:208-210; Groothuis 1997b:91-120; Jewett 1980; Habets and Wood 2011) and even though the verb for “submit” isn’t even found in Ephesians 5:22 but depends on the occurrence in 5:21 (“submitting to one another”; see Stackhouse 2005:69; Payne 2009:278), this text is continually used to affirm the traditional, hierarchical view of marriage. Loving a spouse like Christ loves is restricted to the male sex, and respectfully submitting to a spouse is restricted to the female sex. This is an unfortunate position since it is more likely that Paul is once again teaching on the basis of Christ: the Christian should love one another sacrificially (Jn 15:12-14) and submit and serve one another with respect and humility (Jn 13:13-14; Mk 10:45) as Christ did. In fact, Ephesians 5:2 explicitly commands *both* men and women in the church to “live a life of love, just as Christ loved us.” Titus 2:4 also calls wives “to love their husbands.” It is truly a wonder, then, how it can be argued that Paul, in

Ephesians 5 (or elsewhere), is really asserting that Christlike love is something only men should do and that Christlike submission is something only women should do.

Were Paul intending to establish the traditional, hierarchical theology of marriage, he probably would not have prefaced his statement about wives submitting to husbands with the egalitarian command to “be filled with the Spirit...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Even in the popular “submission” and “headship” texts, there is almost always some presence of egalitarian thought. In addition to Ephesians 5, in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul reassures his audience that “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman” (11:11); 1 Peter 3 reads, “and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life” (3:7); in Colossians 3, after wives are told to submit to their husbands, we read, “Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them” (3:19).

Secondly, were Paul intending to establish the traditional, hierarchical theology marriage, he probably would have followed all of his commands for wives to submit to their husbands with a command for their husbands to exercise authority over their wives. But he never does. In fact, he shocks readers with a command for husbands to *love* their wives. This is important because it is often missed that “love” is not the opposite activity of “submit.” Scripture never teaches “wives, submit to your husbands...husbands, exercise authority over your wives,” which is what one would expect if the author were laying down such a simple, permanent hierarchy. Rather, husbands are told in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 to “love” their wives (and again, love is hardly a “masculine” attribute by anyone’s theology).

Furthermore, *love*, at least how Christ defined it, almost always involves some kind of submission. That's why Paul explains the love of husbands as a Christlike act of life-giving, sacrifice, completely surrendering self for the sake of another. Wives must also love as Christ loves (5:2). But Paul (for reasons that are explored below) chooses the submission aspect of Christlikeness and doesn't explicitly mention Christ in wives' conduct towards their husbands. In other texts, like 1 Peter 3:1-2, husbands are only told to "live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman..." (1 Peter 3:7a), but, again, never to rule over them (note Keener 2004:11).

Two questions quickly emerge at this point in the discussion: First (1), how can it be argued that men are to rule and exercise authority over their wives in a way that wives never can exercise over their husbands when (a) none of the "submission texts," nor *any* of the New Testament actually commands husbands to do so, and (b) husbands are commanded to behave in a way that seems to *undermine* the very basis of marital hierarchy? Second (2), if Paul and Peter's commands for each sex can be applied to both sexes, why did they distinguish between the two?

Regarding (1), this question is a serious problem for critics of women elders. If the submission texts don't accomplish what they're supposed to accomplish, egalitarianism of some kind needs to be considered. That is, if a permanent, personal authority of husband over wives cannot be demonstrated from the submission texts (and the rest of Scripture), then the grounds for importing such a structure into ecclesiastical affairs is severely diminished.

There are two towers of retreat that are typically used when the debate reaches this critical point. The first is to retreat into the statement about husbands being the “head” (κεφαλή) of their wives (Eph 5:23). This specific metaphor is said to be the basis for permanent, personal, male authority of husbands over wives in marriage. However, as it was already pointed out in chapter six, there remains considerable doubt whether “head” should be interpreted this way—especially given how Paul then explains what this “headship” involves (e.g., sacrifice). Husbands being the “head” may or may not be a legitimate point of retreat; research has shown that to understand “head” as simply “authority” is more unlikely than likely. Exegesis of the text has made this particularly clear:

“Paul places ‘savior’ in apposition to ‘head,’ showing that he intends ‘head’ to be understood as equivalent in meaning to ‘savior.’ Recognizing this apposition is crucial in interpreting ‘head’ since, apart from this explanation, Paul’s intention would not be clear. The appositional structure is evident, for example, in the ASV: ‘Christ also is head of the church, *being* himself the savior of the body’; in the NASB: ‘Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body’...If Paul had intended to convey ‘head’ in the sense of authority, he should have used an appositional phrase like, ‘he the authority of the body,’ but instead, he explained it with ‘savior.’ His subsequent description of Christ’s relationship to his body, the church, states nothing about Christ’s authority either, but says that Christ loved and gave himself for the church (Eph 5:25), to make her holy, cleansed without stain, and blameless (5:26-27), feeding and caring for her (5:29). These are his actions as savior, the source of life and nourishment of the body, the church. Paul calls the husband to imitate Christ’s actions in relations with his wife (5:28-31, 33), not to assume authority over her” (Payne 2009:284).

Even if the text was not as clear, this fact only puts the brakes on those who would so quickly retreat to this term in support of the traditional theology of marriage. The British sociologist Elaine Storkey points this out:

“There are always great dangers in building a theology on a metaphor, especially if there is any confusion about the meaning of the metaphor. Yet, most of these writers [who forbid women elders] see no ambiguity at all. Ignoring the fact that Paul is using a careful literary device here, they nail the meaning down. They decide that “head” must mean “authority,” construct the notion that “headship” means “male authority,” and see it as a

general creational mandate. In two quick stages, we have moved from a gentle metaphor to a universal principle!" (2001:103).

The second tower of retreat is simply an argument that says, "Men have authority and are expected to use it over their wives precisely because women are told to submit to them; it makes no sense to tell one group of people to submit to another group if this other group doesn't have some kind of special authority that the first group doesn't have. Submission presupposes hierarchy and inequality of authority." This is essentially Grudem's argument in *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (2004:198). It appears to make sense on the surface. If children are told to obey/submit to their parents, it is assumed that the parents have authority over the children in a way that the children do not have authority over their parents. If slaves are told to obey/submit to their masters, it is assumed that the masters have authority over the slaves in a way that the slaves do not have authority over the masters. So, if wives are told to submit to their husbands, why not assume that husbands have authority over their wives in a way that wives do not have authority over their husbands?

First of all, this type of argument begs the question regarding gender imperatives and hermeneutics. It has been shown that specific commands in Scripture for one gender *can* and often *should* be applied to the other gender. Second of all, if one is to use master/slave and parent/child relationships as comparables, one must note that they are not permanent. Slaves are not necessarily born slaves and remain slaves the rest of their lives. Children are not always children, but will someday (likely) move away from home and be parents themselves. Women,

however, are *always* women, from birth to death.⁵ Sex does not (and should not) change like the status of slave/free and child/parent. Hence, Payne remarks:

“The risk of interpreting “the husband is the head of the wife” as establishing an authority structure in the context of these other “household codes” is that one thereby embraces “a very odd understanding of what marriage is: a relationship in which a wife is basically a person controlled by her husband in every respect in the same way as children and slaves” (2009:273).

Third of all, it is perfectly possible for one to submit to an equal or a subordinate. Payne provides five examples from the New Testament:

1. “The spirits of the prophets are subject to [ὑποτάσσω] the control of the prophets” (1 Cor 14:32).
2. First Corinthians 16:15-16 urges the “brothers” in Corinth to “submit” (ὑποτάσσω) to the household of Stephanas, who devoted (τάσσω) themselves to the service of their fellow Christians. It is to those who have so submitted themselves for service that Paul calls the Corinthians to “submit.” It is virtually inconceivable that no one in the church had higher authority than anyone in the household of Stephanas. There must have been at least one woman, slave, or other person in the household of Stephanas in a lower position of authority than some other church member.
3. First Peter 2:18-3:1 presents Jesus as an “example” of “submitting” (ὑποτάσσω) even to unjust treatment. Jesus submitted himself by washing his disciples’ feet (John 13:1-17) and by serving (Matt 20:25-28; Luke 22:25-27).
4. Luke 2:51 shows that Jesus at age twelve voluntarily submitted (ὑποτάσσω) himself to Joseph and Mary.
5. Eph 5:21: “Submit [ὑποτάσσω] to one another.” Each of Paul’s “one anothers” addressed to the entire church and applies to all believers, never to selected segments only.

...Since “submitting to one another” in Eph 5:21 is “voluntary yielding in love,” and since the verb of 5:22 is borrowed from 5:21, the wife’s submission naturally carries the same sense of “voluntary yielding in love.” Since subjection to another’s authority is not voluntary, mutual submission does not require but is in tension with subjection to another’s authority” (2009:282-283).

⁵ I reject the legitimacy of modern-day “sex changes.” Sex, in my perspective, is not limited to the biology of sexual organs, but extends to the chromosomes of the organism—and chromosomal sex-changes require the death of the organism.

This point is bolstered by the fact that husband and wife are explicitly said to exercise authority over one another in 1 Corinthians 7:4. Mutual submission conversely involves mutual exercise of authority.

Therefore, these two towers of retreat appear to be insecure. Ultimately, the submission texts (esp. Eph 5) cannot be used to uphold the traditional, hierarchical theology of marriage. The only question remaining is (2) why Paul issued certain commands to one gender and not another.

Scholars have offered a number of explanations. Perhaps due to the fall (Gen 3:16), it is particularly difficult for sinful women to submit and respect their husbands, and particularly difficult for sinful men to love to their wives. (In reading the immediate narrative from Genesis 4 to the end of the book, this would seem to be true.) Paul might be trying to curb this natural (unnatural) tendency. Or, perhaps, like many of the gender-specific commands in the Bible, Paul is addressing the particular tendency of the genders during his time. The early Christians were tempted to abuse their newfound freedoms (Sterling 1995:91). The radical departure from contemporary gender roles that Jesus introduced, combined with the egalitarianism characteristic of the church (Acts 2), may have easily led women to forget that, even though they have authority over their husbands (1 Cor 7:4), their husbands still have authority over them (1 Cor 7:4). They must still respect and honor their spouses. Or, consider the command for male deacons and elders not to be addicted to too much wine and the lack of this command for women deacons (1 Tim 3:11). It is likely that, in the first century, men generally had more trouble with alcoholism than women. Thus, Paul addresses this topic for the male church “officers” but not for the female “officers,” even though the teaching actually applies to both.

Or, there is a third possibility. Perhaps Paul is simply outlining what it means to be Christ to the world in the social structures of first-century society, and he wants that world to see and experience Christ through such believers (Davids 2005:238). In Titus 2:5, Paul says, “being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored” (NASB). Similarly, a few verses later Paul commands slaves to “be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” (Tit 2:9). The phrases “so that that the word of God will not be dishonored” and “so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” may point to general Christlikeness in the context of the first-century, not permanent slave and gender roles.

“In both [Colossians 3:18-19 and Ephesians 5:21-33], Paul guides believers in how they should live in obedience to Christ within these fundamental social structures. He writes against behaviors that would bring discredit to Christ and the gospel and advocates behavior that will advance the testimony and freedom of believers living within those social structures. One of the motivations for encouraging slaves to respect their masters is ‘so that God’s name and our teaching may not be slandered’ (1 Tim 6:1) and to make the gospel ‘attractive’ (Titus 2:9-10)” (Payne 2009:272; Cf. Sterling 1995:91-92; Keener 2004:232-233; Stackhouse 2005:71-72).

Any of these options (or combination of them; note Payne 2009:277) could be right. What is clear is that NT commands for one gender or another can (and often should!) apply to both genders. This must be consistently applied to the texts that speak about marriage.

7.2.2 Marriage is Fundamentally Egalitarian

Hopefully some of the poor arguments regarding marriage and hierarchy have been cleared away. Now it's time to provide positive evidence for an egalitarian theology of marriage. Since many of these topics were already addressed in the previous section, we can be brief.

First, it must be defined what is meant by "fundamentally egalitarian." A fundamentally egalitarian marriage is essentially a relationship of equals. There is no permanent and personal hierarchy of authority, no permanent and personal "chain of command," and no primacy given to one sex over another. Ultimately, husbands and wives have equal authority over each other and (should) have an equal attitude of submission towards each other. This does not mean, however, that there cannot be limited, temporal hierarchical arrangements for various purposes. The Anglican scholar Kevin Giles explains what this means in terms of authority and sexual differentiation:

"Differing authority does not categorically differentiate human beings. In differing contexts and at differing times someone's authority can change. For example, a man or woman may be the managing director of a large company with many hundreds of people under their authority and be in the reserve army on the weekends, where they are under the authority of officers "above." And one day the managing director may lose their position and have now one under them. And when it comes to men and women, authority certainly does not categorically differentiate them. In a marriage the authority exercised can change. In many a marriage, in the early days when the man is insecure and finding his way, he may insist on having the final decision on important matters but thirty years later may be quite happy for his wife to make all the major decisions. It is true that once men held the reins of power and this differentiated them from women. But this is no longer the case. Today there are women presidents, prime ministers, governors, judges, managing directors, bishops, and generals of the Salvation Army. Women seem to be very competent at exercising authority and do so well as a general rule" (2012:232-232).

This fundamental egalitarian nature of marriage is indicated in the creation account in several ways, such as in the single command for both to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it" (Gen 1:28, NASB), the fact that woman came from man's own body (demonstrating

their same, essential nature), and man's reciprocity towards woman's creation ("this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh"). One should also note woman's speaking on behalf of the married couple ("you" is plural in Gen 3:1-4), God's response and curses on Adam and Eve as individuals (Gen 3:8-19), and that both are banished from the garden—both who were responsible for working the ground/guarding the garden (Gen 3:23). Socially and biologically, man and woman need each other both to have community and to exist as God's images; neither sex can reproduce by itself. Both are dependent on each other. Both, in fact, *originate* from each other existentially, according to Paul: "in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God" (1 Cor 11:11-12). In other words, there is a fundamental balance and equality between the sexes on the most basic level of their being and nature.

Beyond the creation account, where should one turn when establishing the nature of the marital relationship? One cannot simply pick and choose texts that appear to support egalitarian marriage, for that would lead to an imbalanced and overly biased approach. Recall the advice of White: the Christian ought to "first examine those portions that address the topic at length, and interpret less clear passages in light of the longer, more direct ones" (2013:153). So, what portions of Scripture address the topic of marriage at length? Where is the nature of marriage addressed most thoroughly? Upon surveying the biblical books, a case can be made for the Song of Songs in the Old Testament and in 1 Corinthians 7 in the New Testament.

The Song of Songs comes in the middle of the Old Testament narrative as a kind of Eden-like, retreat for the story of man and woman (Lewis 1997:45; Carr 2009:37, 58; Köstenberger

2010:41-43). The curse of Genesis 3:16 had bore its terrible fruit for centuries in numerous ways, like marriages characterized by manipulation and control, cases of rape incest, and adultery, and the relentless domination of women by men. But then, somewhat unexpectedly, readers of the Hebrew Scriptures enter a world of marriage characterized by love, mutuality, and gender equality. Tremper Longman III accurately summarizes:

“The implication of a canonical reading of the Song is that the book speaks of the healing of intimacy...one of the most remarkable features of the Song is the confident voice of the woman as she pursues relationship with the man. The man responds in kind, and it is fair to characterize their relationship as egalitarian” (2001:66).

Arthur Lewis, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Bethel College, has identified a number of important themes in the Song of Songs that reveal this egalitarian tone. They include “equality of freedom,” “equality of initiative, and “equality of pleasure” (Lewis 1997). Space does not allow for a full explanation of each, but all of them go to support Longman’s claim (above) that “it is fair to characterize their relationship as egalitarian” (cf. Hess 2005:20-35).

If part of the reason God has given the Song of Songs is to demonstrate what godly erotic love is like (note Köstenberger 2010:32-43), then one must conclude that it is *egalitarian* as much as it is marital, monogamous, and heterosexual. The later King Solomon and other characters in the Old Testament betray this ethic in several ways, but the Song of Song preserves an image that harkens back to Eden where equality and peace reign as the just and true (Beale 2010:74). The clear differences between the sexes and the role they play (i.e., the inability to cross-apply lyrics regarding specifically male/female body parts and characteristics) harmonizes, not contradicts, this fundamental egalitarianism. Indeed, hierarchy and permanent authority structures based on sex is not required to differentiate between the sexes.

In line with the Song of Songs, Paul addresses marriage in 1 Corinthians 7 in egalitarian terms. Christians in Corinth asserted that “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman” (1 Cor 7:1). This over-generalized, inaccurate perspective provided Paul with an opportunity to address numerous aspects of the marriage relationship. In fact, 1 Corinthians 7 is the longest chapter on marriage in the entire Bible, and stands three times as long as any other text from Paul’s pen on the subject of marriage (Pierce 2009:8-12). But there are even more reasons why 1 Corinthians is particularly important:

“...[Paul] addresses no less than twelve related, yet distinct, issues regarding marriage and singleness—again, more than in any other text. Third, his rhetoric is explicitly, consistently, and intentionally gender inclusive—while at the same time reflecting a carefully balanced sense of mutuality. Fourth, written about the time of Galatians (a.d. 49-55), 1 Corinthians 7 applies to marriage Paul’s declaration that race, class, and gender are irrelevant for both status in Christ (Gal. 3:28) and relationships in the church community (Gal. 3:3; 5:1, 7, 16, 25). Thus, 1 Corinthians 7 should be considered a point of reference for later gender texts (1 Cor. 11, 14, Eph. 5, Col. 3, 1 Pet. 3, 1 Tim. 3, Titus 2) as a more comprehensive statement against which these should be interpreted...Though this chapter should not be used to nullify or diminish the clear teachings of other texts, it must be afforded its own voice in the evangelical dialogue” (Pierce 1997:8).

Pierce and Payne have done a tremendous job expositing 1 Corinthians 7 and establishing its significance. So at this point we may simply quote from portions of Paul’s letter to unveil his egalitarian attitude towards the marital relationship:

“...each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband...” (7:2b).
 “For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does” (7:4).
 “Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (7:5).
 “...the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife” (1 Cor 7:10a-11).

“...if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him” (1 Cor 7:12-13).

“For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband” (7:14).

“For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him” (1 Cor 7:16-17).

“The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband” (1 Cor 7:32-34).

This is simply not the kind of approach one would expect from a person who sees marriage as an exclusively male-led, female-subordinated institution.

Verse 4 is particularly significant for several reasons. First, it presents a view of marriage that is unparalleled in the ancient world (Payne 2009:106-107). Ciampa and Rosner in their Pillar Commentary assert that the mutuality in the verse was “revolutionary in the ancient world,” that it “clearly pointed to a radical and unprecedented restriction on the husband’s sexual freedom,” and “the only other place a similar thought is recorded prior to Paul is in the poetic notes of mutual belonging in the Song of Solomon (2:16a; 6:3a; 7:10a)” (2010:281). Second, it is the only passage in the New Testament that directly talks about one spouse having authority (ἐξουσιάζω) over another. This is important to remember anytime the subject of “authority structures” comes up in New Testament theology. This passage should be central in the discussion for this reason, and also because (as mentioned above) 1 Corinthians 7 is the most relevant place to talk about the nature of the marriage relationship. Third, the authority being talked about is an authority *of the same sense that is equally applied to both sexes*. As far as Paul is concerned, there is no

difference between the authority exercised by a wife or exercised by a husband. There is also no indication that one spouse simply has more authority than another by virtue of their sex.

Fourth and most important for this chapter, is that the authority is extremely personal, direct, and fundamental for human relationships: it is authority exercised over a spouse's body for sexual purposes. The first thing that God said after Genesis 1:27 was "be fruitful and multiply" (1:28)—an inherently sexual activity. Sex is a fundamentally *human* dimension and *human* activity. Sexuality is central to human nature; one only draws peripheral distinctions like believer/unbeliever, tall/short, married/unmarried, etc. after they have distinguished between the more fundamental distinction of male/female. Sexuality is also a fundamentally *marital* activity. Scripture is univocal that sex is reserved for the marriage relationship alone.

These truths hardly need to be proved. The centrality and importance of sexuality and marriage in creation is demonstrated in all corners of Scripture and in countless ways, whether in Mosaic law, family relationships, covenantal signs, or in the history of redemption itself: God is preparing a bride (Rev 19:7; 21:2; cf. Is 62:5; 2 Sam 17:3; Jn 3:29), and the consummation of all things is a wedding feast (Rev 19:7); God is likened to a female bear (Hos 13:8), a mistress (Ps 123:2-3), a hen with chicks (Mt 23:37), a mother (Hos 11:3-4; Is 66:13; Ps 131:2) who gives birth (Dt 32:18) and nurses a child (Is 49:15; 42:14); idolatry is synonymous with prostitution (Is 23:17; Ez 16:30, 35); rebellious Israel is presented as a wild whore who "spreads [her] legs to every passer-by to multiply [her] harlotry" (Ez. 16:25, NASB) while innocent/sanctified Israel and Judah are presented as a pure virgin (Jer 14:17; 18:13; 31:14; Lam 1:15) just as the church is (2 Cor 11:2); the whole Corinthian church are told to be strong like men are strong (1 Cor

16:13); wisdom in Proverbs is a beautiful, precious woman (Prov 1:20; 8:1-9:1), etc. In short, countless aspects of biblical theology are presented in terms of sexuality and marriage precisely because sex and marriage are so fundamental to human nature. The authors of Scripture use gender in its language, images, prophecies, teaching, and history because it is something everyone can understand.

Those against women elders fully agree. Sexuality is central to marriage and anthropology. John Coe in *Women and Men in Ministry: A Complementary Perspective*, says, “To say that gender is inessential to the human being is to deny and confuse the self, to split off self from self, to live a lie” (2001:189). In *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Piper and Grudem favorably cite the egalitarian scholar Paul Jewett:

“Sexuality permeates one’s individual being to its very depth; it conditions every facet of one’s life as a person. As the self is always aware of itself as an ‘I,’ so this ‘I’ is always aware of itself as himself or herself. Our self-knowledge is indissolubly bound up not simply with our human being but with our sexual being. At the human level there is no ‘I and thou’ per se, but only the ‘I’ who is male or female confronting the ‘thou,’ the ‘other,’ who is also male or female” (Jewett 1975:172 cited in Piper and Grudem 2006:21).

In his book *God, Marriage, and Family*, Andreas Köstenberger defines marriage as, “a sacred bond between a man and a woman, instituted by and publicly entered into before God (whether or not this is acknowledged by the married couple), normally consummated by sexual intercourse” (2010:78). He goes on to say that, “sex is a part of man’s calling to live his life to the glory of God,” “the purpose of sex...is rooted in the heart and creative purposes of God,” and “within the marriage bond, sex is the ultimate physical expression of deep, committed, and devoted love” (2010:80-82).

Both sides of the debate agree that sexuality is central to marriage and that both marriage and sexuality are a central aspect to human nature. But this presents a problem: acknowledging this theological truth in 1 Corinthians 7:4 directly undermines the traditional theology of marriage. As 1 Corinthians 7:4 teaches, man and woman have the same, equal authority over each other in the most fundamental way—their sexuality in marriage. *This is no different than saying that marriage is fundamentally egalitarian* (cf. Hull 1995:257). At the highest and deepest level of the marital relationship, where the unity and diversity of the sexes is most vividly and accurately displayed, there is equality and mutuality, not male-centered authority (Williams 2010:45, 64). How can it be that the fundamentally egalitarian relationship a husband and wife have in their intimate life fails to express itself in the rest of the marital relationship? In family life? In other words, if the sexual dimensions of marriage are egalitarian, then marriage is fundamentally egalitarian. The only alternative is to tortuously divorce sex and sexuality from marriage, which runs against human intuition, the testimony of Scripture, and (ironically) the theology of those who forbid women elders. It is therefore absurd to speak of man having “ultimate authority” in marriage and woman being “legally his subordinate” (Köstenberger 2010:30-31), for both sides can agree that man does *not* have ultimate authority in the act of procreation, and procreation is constitutive of the very purpose of marriage itself.

For all of these reasons, the teachings of 1 Corinthians 7 and 7:4 in particular are of immeasurable importance when it comes to discussing and understanding the nature of marriage. We have also seen the harmonious teaching of the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament, and how biblical theology genuinely teaches that marriage is fundamentally egalitarian. The question now is, does this egalitarianism extend into the church?

7.2.3 Home Leadership and Church Leadership

Is it right to say along with Madsen that “leadership begins in the home and extends into the church” (2010:234)? Does the authority structure in the home (parenting) extend into the authority structure at church (pastoring)?

To some degree. The case for this point can be made on two basic grounds. First, marriage is the fundamental institution for family and society and as such naturally influences and shapes the dynamics of human relationships in other (“secondary”) spheres. This isn’t to say that every authority structure in creation can or should be modeled after husband/wife or parent/child relationships, but only that the marriage and family relationships influence and inform, to one degree or another, the way individuals and societies go about developing other relationships. Second, in Scripture the family (which generally assumes an active marital relationship) is regularly used as a model for church life and practice (e.g., 1 Tim 3:5; 1 Thess 2; Eph 2:19). Parallelism between the family household and the spiritual household of the church is clear.

What, then, can we say about leadership in the home extending into leadership in the church? At the very least, we can say that if complementarians are right and the gender of leadership in the home determines the gender of leadership in the church, then women can and should be pastors—for as it was just demonstrated, marriage in the home is fundamentally egalitarian. Husband and wife “co-lead” the home; male elders and female elders “co-lead” the church.

However, there are limitations on these kinds of arguments for several reasons. Leadership presupposes a group who are being led, and this disjoins the parallelism between the home and church. It is easy to talk about “leadership in the home” and “leadership in the church,” but what is really being asserted is that the parent/child (or husband-wife, in the case of complementarianism) relationship parallels the pastor/congregation relationship, and this is where the parallelism disintegrates. Scripture does talk about church leadership in maternal and paternal terms (e.g., 1 Thess 2:7, 11-12), and it is true that Scripture parallels the household with the church, particularly in the phrase “the household of God” (Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pt 4:17). However, it is significant Scripture does *not* parallel the relationship of husband to wives with that of pastor to congregation—and for obvious reasons. How many pastors commit themselves to a single congregation for their whole lives? Must they according to Scripture? And, is leaving a church to be under the instruction of different elders on par with divorce? These are some of the dangers of pushing biblical analogies too far.

It is true that *Christ* is paralleled with husbands and the church with wives in Ephesians 5, but this is much different than paralleling husbands with pastors. Additionally, ecclesiastical metaphors are also limited. For instance, elders are called to “shepherd” the “flock” (1 Pt 5:2), but it seems a bit of a stretch to say the same about husbands (shepherds?) and wives (sheep?). Therefore, there may be some sense in which the marital relationship extends into the sphere of the church, but it is limited and cannot be pushed too far.

Furthermore, on a general theological level, roles in one sphere do not *necessarily* have to carry over into another sphere. The Winstons briefly address this topic in their exegesis of Galatians 3:28:

“Being a truck driver in civilian life does not mean that one will drive a tank in the army. Coming from high society doesn’t make one a part of the military general staff. And male power in the world does not automatically mean male headship in the church” (Winston and Winston 2003:260).

7.3 Women as Teachers, Prophets, Apostles, Deacons, and Elders

Depending on who is asked, those against women elders still acknowledge various functions for women in ministry. But there is disagreement on what “roles” women fulfilled in biblical times and what roles they should fulfill today. This was made clear enough above where we examined various interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:12. When those who support women elders debate *non-pastoral* roles in biblical theology, there tends to be two directions of movement. Either functions are opened up and women are allowed to be deacons, teachers of various kinds, etc., since these concessions are considered non-threatening to the male-pastorate. Or, there is movement in the other direction—towards more and more restrictions under the fear of a “slippery slope” towards male elders.

This final section of our chapter addresses both groups, but in different ways because each group has different challenges. For those who are more generous towards women’s roles in ministry, it must be demonstrated why the function/office of elder is so remarkably different than other church functions. Why? Because, as it will be demonstrated, women perform all other functions in Scripture. How can it be that God forbids women from just *one* position when all others are

available? For those who are more restrictive in women's ministry roles, they must face the fact that in Scripture one can easily find women who fill the role of deacon, prophet, and apostle. So, why should these roles be forbidden from women today if they fulfilled them in the first-century?

7.3.1 Women Preachers and Teachers

Chapter six established that women took part in the proclamation of the gospel—that is, teaching and preaching the good news about Jesus. The command for such proclamation was given by Jesus to men and women. There is no good reason to suppose that Anna stopped preaching and teaching when men were around the temple, that the Seventy sent out by Jesus were only men, that the women who witnessed Christ's burial and resurrection stopped proclaiming the good news after they told the male disciples, or that female "co-workers in the gospel" means anything less than preaching and teaching the gospel in the same way as Paul and other disciples, evangelists, and missionaries. Although it is possible, due to cultural factors, that most of the public proclamation of the gospel in the first-century was done by male Christians, preaching and teaching themselves are not delineated as "masculine" activities. As we have also seen, this is particularly clear in the gender-inclusive, gift-oriented nature of the New Covenant community known as the "church." Acts 2 and Paul's letters were particularly helpful in outlining these themes. Believers are also told (regardless of gender) to desire the higher gifts, which include being "teachers" in the church (1 Cor 12:28-31).

More could be said, but there is little need to establish this point any further—especially given the countless books and essays that are dedicated to making this very argument.

7.3.2 Women Prophets

Chapter six briefly touched on the topic of women prophets. Women Christians are called “prophetesses” and there are women who are said to “prophesy.” Complementarians have shored up four major arguments aimed at undermining the significance and role of women prophets. These must briefly be responded to if the fact of women prophets are to have any significance at all.

7.3.2.1 Women Prophets: “Official” or “Unofficial”?

The first argument asserts that there are two distinctive categories of prophets (“official” and “unofficial”) and should not be confused. Official prophets prophesy because they are in the regular office of prophet, while unofficial prophets are simply Christians who happen to occasionally prophesy. In other words, just because a person prophesies doesn’t mean they are a “prophet,” just as you wouldn’t call a boy shooting hoops a “basketball player,” or the person who occasionally makes bread a “baker,” or a person who teaches Bible at church a “theologian.” Might the boy be a basketball player, the person a baker, and the teacher a theologian? Yes, but not necessarily. So the argument goes.

The distinction appears legitimate to a degree. But it is questionable how hard it should be pressed, especially since we often don't know whether one is prophesying because it is something they regularly do in and for the church or if it's happening somewhat sporadically. Philip's daughters are a good example. All that Luke says is "and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied" (Acts 21:8-9). Most scholars would agree that these daughters should be called "prophetesses," but not all agree that they are *official* or *regular* prophetesses. Some say they were, and others not—irrespective of their view regarding women elders. As we observed in chapter six, it seems that Luke is probably mentioning this fact as proof of the prophecy by Joel in Acts 2: sons and "daughters" will prophesy in the day of Pentecost, and this is something significant for the character of the church and the church-age. Of course, in that case, one would have to go back to Acts 2 and establish what kind of prophesying the women are doing there in order to understand Acts 21:9. (Unfortunately, the meaning of "prophesy" in Acts 2 is just as contentious among exegetes as their understanding of Philip's daughters!)

Whatever the case, it is difficult to argue that there were no "official" or "regular" female prophets in the New Covenant era given that they appear to have existed in the OT (e.g., Deborah) and at the dawn of the New Covenant (e.g., Anna). This is further established in the way women prophets are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11, and in the fact that Paul conflates gifts/offices instead of viewing them as separate categories (1 Cor 12:29, 31; cf. Eph 4:7, 11). Furthermore, the biblical authors are clear that prophesying is something that not all Christians do because it is a gift that not all Christians have. In that way, prophecy is special. Thus, Paul says that the Christian should desire this special gift: "Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be

eager to prophesy...” (1 Cor 14:39, NIV; cf. 12:28-31); “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially [μᾶλλον] that you may prophesy” (1 Cor 14:1). We might ask, if women could not prophesy in this sense, why would Paul urge them to desire such a gift?

7.3.2.2 Women Prophets: Less Authority in the New Testament?

Another argument that attempts to undermine women prophets is by saying that New Testament prophecy is less authoritative than Old Testament prophecy. So even if there were women prophets who were spiritual leaders in the Old Testament, this does not legitimize the same practice and function for women in the New Covenant age.

Schreiner summarizes this point in his essay on women ministry and male leadership:

“Wayne Grudem has argued that the gift of prophecy in the New Testament is not the same as the prophetic gift in the Old Testament. Old Testament prophets spoke the word of the Lord, and what they said was absolutely authoritative—no part of it could be questioned or challenged. Every word was to be received as God’s very word. But the words of the New Testament prophets do not have this kind of absolute authority. Paul calls on the church to sort and sift the good from the bad in prophetic utterances [1 Thess 5:20-21; 1 Cor 14:29-33a]...New Testament prophecies are handled not as authoritative words from God but as spontaneous impressions or insights that may or may not be, either in whole or in part, from God” (2006a:217).

Grudem (2000b) wants to hold on to the gift of prophecy in the New Covenant period, but at the same time realizes it would be unorthodox to believe that prophecy exists today exactly like it existed in the Old Testament period (“thus saith the Lord”)—opening the door for new, additional books to the Bible. So he attempts to argue that prophecy is less authoritative than Old Testament prophecy because New Testament prophecy, he contends, can be erroneous. But, how can it be erroneous if it has origin in God? Grudem’s solution is to distinguish between receiving

revelations from God and *words* from God. In the Old Testament, prophets received both, but in the New Testament, prophets only received revelation. So if something is amiss in a particular New Testament prophecy, God didn't fumble in giving revelation; the prophet simply used the wrong words in describing the revelation.

This argument, which is no representative of all critics of women elders, has suffered a substantial amount of criticism in the past two decades. Although Richard B. Gaffin Jr. is perhaps best known for his critique of Grudem's theory, the most concise and persuasive refutation is perhaps found in Edmund Clowney's chapter "The Gift of Prophecy in the Church" in his book *The Church* (1995). Space does not allow for a full summary of Clowney's position, but it is sufficient for the moment to say that he shows Grudem's theory to have substantial problems.

7.3.2.3 Women Prophets: Less Authority Than Teaching?

The third argument undermines female prophets by devaluing prophecy in comparison to teaching. Schreiner, for example, says that "Even though prophets declare the word of God, the gift of prophecy should not be equated with the regular teaching and preaching of God's word" (2005b:277). He elaborates by saying:

"Prophecy is a passive gift in which oracles or revelations are given by God to a prophet. Teaching, on the other hand, is a gift that naturally fits with leadership and a settled office, for it involves the transmission and explanation of tradition. I am not arguing that prophecy is a lesser gift than teaching, only that it is a distinct gift" (2005b:279).

Perhaps there is a sense in which prophecy is more “passive” than teaching—*if* one understands prophecy to be nothing more than receiving revelation (this is contestable; see Ciampa and Rosner 2010:611; Thiselton 2000:1015-1018). But, two problems immediately arise from this paragraph. First, why is teaching contrasted with prophecy in that teaching “is a gift that naturally fits with leadership and a settled office”? How can it be argued that these aspects of teaching do not apply to prophecy? Schreiner himself already concedes that there was such thing as a regular prophetic “office,” and it would be erroneous to argue that this office in both Testaments was not “leadership.”

Second, Schreiner’s words, which come from 2005, appear to contradict his words from 2006 (2006a:217): “the gift of prophecy is not as authoritative as the gift of teaching.” How can one say this and also say, “I am not arguing that prophecy is a lesser gift than teaching, only that it is a distinct gift”? Either authority has nothing to do with the real worth of spiritual gifts, or Schreiner is waffling positions.

In contrast to the view of both Grudem and Piper, Belleville provides a straightforward analysis on these key issues:

“Some argue that early church prophecy was merely an impromptu movement of the Spirit and not a recognized leadership role in the church. Yet Luke makes it clear that the prophet was just such, when he identifies the leaders of the church at Antioch as “prophets and teachers” (Acts 13:1-3). Nor was prophecy, as some would claim, an activity valued less than other forms of ministry. This is evident from Paul’s identification of prophetic speaking with “revelation” (*apokalyphthē*, I Cor 14:29:29-30) and his naming apostles and prophets together as the “foundation” of the church, when speaking of it metaphorically (Eph. 2:20). He even goes further and puts apostles and prophets in a category by themselves. It is to “God’s holy apostles and prophets” that “the mystery of Christ...has now been revealed by the Spirit” (Eph 3:4-5)” (2005a:123-124).

Christian egalitarians are also right to press the fact that prophecy in the New Testament is consistently ranked above teaching:

“And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:28).

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,” (Ephesians 4:11-12).

“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul” (Acts 13:1).

“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you” (2 Peter 2:1a).

As it is clear, every time both prophets and teachers are mentioned in the New Testament (the above list is exhaustive of this), prophets come first. Surely this is not a coincidence given how 1 Corinthians 12:28 explicitly states that God has appointed prophets “second” and teachers “third”?

From these texts (esp. 1 Cor 12), Aída Spencer rightly concluded in 1985 that “Paul does seem to be indicating that these positions are crucial and they do include authority” (1985:97). How can the theologian today conclude otherwise? How can it we say “the gift of prophecy is not as authoritative as the gift of teaching”?

7.3.2.4 Women Prophets: The Prophetess Deborah in the OT

Finally, the last major attempt at undermining women prophets is to re-write the history of Old Testament prophetesses—namely, the prophetess Deborah. If it can be shown that this tremendous Old Testament prophetess was less significant than it appears, then it is easier to downplay the significance of NT prophetesses.

Although Barry Webb is a complementarian (and member of TGC), his *New International Commentary on Judges* provides an accurate reading of the narrative that challenges the perspective of his colleagues who reject women elders. He says that Deborah “holds a position of authority and takes the initiative in relation to the prospective male hero,” “acts as a war prophet, calling and commissioning Barak to lead men in battle, giving a promise of victory, and issuing the order to attack when the time is right,” “acted as a final court of appeal for the settlement of more difficult issues,” “to judge in the sense that she was doing it was to be the effective ruler of the nation as a whole,” that “there is no hint in the narrative or elsewhere in Scripture that her exercise of such a role is contrary to God’s purposes, or a breach of his declared will in the way that the irregular worship practices of the period were,” and that her “sitting” under a palm tree “is probably meant to be understood in the formal sense of presiding, in her case as a judge” (2010:184-189; cf. Chavalas et. al. 2000:250).

In contrast to this straightforward interpretation, Schreiner in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* forcefully misconstrues the text so that, supposedly, “Deborah did not prophesy in public,” “did not exercise leadership over men as the other judges did,” and her “sitting” under the palm tree means that “Deborah did not go out and publicly proclaim the word from the Lord. Instead, individuals came to her in private for a word from the Lord” (2006a:216). This is a

prime example of when the desire to find and affirm preconceived patterns in Scripture come at the expense of sound exegesis.

Like many complementarians, Grudem believes that Deborah was used to shame the men of Israel:

“Something is abnormal, something is wrong—there are no men to function as judge!...in ‘The Song of Deborah and Barak’ in the next chapter, Deborah expresses surprise that no man had stepped forward to initiate Israel’s rescue from the oppressor, but that a *mother* in Israel had to do this....It is not that God does not use her and speak through her, for He does. But something is not quite right: There is an absence of male leadership in Israel” (2004:134-135).

But, how is it possible for Deborah to shame the men of Israel for being a leader that Grudem says she never was? According to Grudem, Deborah isn’t even exercising a masculine leadership that would offend men to begin with:

“This is not a picture of public leadership like that of a king or queen, but private settling of disputes...If we decide to take this as an example for today, we might see it as justification for women to serve as counselors and as civil judges. But the text of Scripture does not say that Deborah ruled over God’s people. Deborah is never said to have taught the people in any assembled group or congregation...Deborah was never a priest...Deborah refused to lead the people in military battle, but insisted that a man do this...Deborah encouraged the male leadership of Barak” (2004:133-134).

Again, how is a woman who never publicly or privately ruled Israel, and never functioned as a priest or military leader, supposed to shame an Israelite male and encourage men to “step forward”? Grudem appears so anxious to shore up responses against egalitarianism that he doesn’t appear to realize that his critiques are incompatible with each other.

The complementarians Hurley, Foh, and Webb rightly critique Grudem’s position:

“It has sometimes been suggested that Deborah’s calling as judge and prophetess constituted a shaming of Israel. The evidence for such a view is simply lacking in the text” (Hurley 1981:47).

“There is no indication that the men were slothful in Deborah’s or Huldah’s time” (Foh 1979:84-85).

“...there is no hint in the narrative or elsewhere in Scripture that her exercise of such a role is contrary to God’s purposes, or a breach of his declared will in the way that the irregular worship practices of the period were” (Webb 2010:84-85).

Ultimately, Deborah was a godly leader over Israel. God thought so highly of the arrangement that it was put to song and included in the Old Testament canon for all to read, enjoy, and recollect (Jdg 5).

7.3.3 Women Apostles

Being an apostle in the post-resurrection world was a significant position. The Apostle Paul says that “God has appointed in the church first apostles” (1 Cor 12:28), and even goes as far as to say that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph 2:20). What does he mean by “apostles” in these texts, and might they include women?

Lexicographers tend to agree that the term ἀπόστολος has two senses: (1) a generic messenger, delegate, or envoy; (2) a particular messenger, delegate, or envoy of God/Christ. Scholars draw out the distinctiveness of this second sense by calling it a “special” (Swanson 1997), “extraordinary” (*BDAG*), or “sacred” (Liddell 1996:132) kind of messenger. Thus, this second sense is usually translated as “apostle,” while the first, generic sense is usually translated “messenger” (Phil 2:25; 2 Cor 8:23; John 13:16).

The second sense of “apostle” is by far the most common usage in the NT. It is used to describe the Twelve (Mt 3:14; 10:2; Mk 3:14; Lk 6:13; 22:14), Paul (in the first verse of nearly all his epistles), Barnabas (Acts 14:14; cf. 15:2), James the brother of Jesus (Gal 1:19), Andronicus (Rom 16:7), and Junia (Rom 16:7). The Gospel authors tend to reserve the use of ἀπόστολος to the Twelve. Paul, however, usually uses the term to a wider group simply because of the temporal nature of the Twelve (Kittel et. al. 1977:432) and because there were other disciples of Jesus who witnessed the resurrection and Jesus commissioned to proclaim the gospel (Lk 24). Nevertheless, Paul does seem to be selective when using the term ἀπόστολος in his letters (Murray 1997:230).

“It is to be noted that although Barnabas of the original community (cf. 1 C. 9:5 f.), James the Lord’s brother and Paul’s compatriots Junias and Andronicus (R. 16:7) are called ἀπόστολοι as well as Paul, this is not true of Apollos, although it would have been natural for Paul to give him this title in 1 C. 3:5 ff. Again, Timothy is not an ἀπόστολος, although he is actively and successfully engaged in missionary work (e.g., in Thessalonica). Instead he is called an ἀδελφός (2 C. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Phlm. 1), a δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ (Phil. 1:1), and even a συνεργός τοῦ θεοῦ (1 Th. 3:2). But these are no substitutes for the title of apostle” (Kittell et. al. 1977:423).

The significance of being an apostle in the New Covenant era is also highlighted when the apostles chose someone to replace Judas in Acts 1:21-26. There was an important qualification, namely, being someone who has “accompanied [the apostles] all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these *must* become a witness with us of His resurrection” (Acts 1:21-22, NASB). Paul also seems to indicate that seeing the resurrected Lord was part of what makes one an “apostle” (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8f; note Kittel et. al. 1997:431).

Thus, there is nothing in principle that prohibits women from being apostles. In fact, it is inevitable that many *were* apostles because of these criteria. Junia was apparently an example:

“...it is...clear that Paul, in his letters, feels compelled to defend his apostleship (especially in 2 Cor 12:11-12), which he does vigorously, making it highly unlikely that he would employ the term “apostle” loosely when applying it to others. When Paul defends his apostleship—and thereby defines what apostleship means—he implies that to be an apostle involves encountering the risen Christ (1 Cor 9:1; Gal 1:1, 15-17) and receiving a commission to proclaim the gospel (Rom 1:1-5; 1 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1, 15-17), and in the process strongly emphasizes (a) that being an apostle involves “the conscious acceptance and endurance of the labors and sufferings connected with missionary work,” and (b) that apostleship is certified by the results of such toil, namely, “signs and wonders, and mighty works” (1 Cor 15:9-12; 2 Cor 12:11-12). Unless Paul recognized these traits in others, he would not deign to call them “apostles,” but Andronicus and Junia obviously met and exceeded his criteria, for—though Paul does” (Epp 2005:69-70).

Bauckham makes the same point, noting the women disciples who are explicitly said to have witnessed the resurrection and were commissioned by Christ in Luke 24 (2002:188):

“...the women disciples are included in the gathering of “the eleven and those with him” (24:33), to whom the risen Christ appears and whom he commissions to be witnesses of his resurrection (24:36-49). This means that, according to Luke’s Gospel, Joanna, Mary Magdalene, and other women disciples fulfill the conditions Peter specifies in Acts 1:21-22: they have “accompanied us [the eleven] during all the time that the Lord Jesus went out in and among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us.” These are the conditions to be fulfilled by the person who is to replace Judas among the twelve, and clearly they are designed to describe one who is qualified to be an authoritative witness to Jesus. However, Peter’s words also make clear that any candidate for this position must be male (1:21).⁶ Presumably because the twelve are the symbolic heads of the new Israel, corresponding to the twelve phylarchs of Israel’s founding generation (Num 1:4-16), it is taken for granted that they must be male. But this does not preclude the role of other witnesses, including the women, who in the nascent Christian community still have their place alongside the twelve (cf. Acts 1:14) just as they did during the ministry of Jesus (Luke 8:1-3). Like Matthew (10:2) and Mark (3:14; 6:30), Luke uses the word “apostle” only of the twelve (Luke 6:13; 9:10; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10; Acts 1:1; etc.). In Luke’s terminology Joanna and the other women cannot be called apostles, but Luke’s account of them makes them apostles according to Paul’s use of the

⁶ Contrast with Spencer (2005:136-137) and Schussler-Fiorenza (2013:229). Note also, Jewett (1980:58-60) and Bilezikian (1997:74-79).

term, which includes himself, Barnabas, and the brothers of Jesus (alongside whom Luke places the women in Acts 1:14).”

So, it is no surprise that Paul refers to a woman as an apostle, especially since Paul calls her a “fellow prisoner” and says that she was “in Christ before” him. What *is* surprising is that Junia (along with Andronicus, presumably her husband) is said to be “*outstanding* [ἐπίσημοι] among the apostles” (Rom 16:7, NASB).

Predictably, there have been a number of attempts at undermining the apostleship of Junia—some more intentional than others. Firstly, many theologians couldn’t come to grips with the fact that Paul called a *woman* an apostle, so it just was assumed (and later argued; see Wolters 2008) that he was referring to a man (“Junias”). The translations and/or marginal notes of some translations reflect this position. But this quickly became an utterly unsustainable assertion (Moo 1996:922 and Epp 2005:23-68) as Eldon Epp outlines in his book *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (2005:23-24; cf. Kruse 2012:564):

- a. Junia was a common Roman name for either noble members of the *gens Junia* (the clan of Junia) or for freed slaves of *gens* (or their descendants)—with the freed slaves more numerous than the nobles.
- b. Junia was how Ἰουνίαν was understood whenever discussed by ancient Christian writers of late antiquity “without exception.”
- c. Ἰουνίαν (so accented) was the reading of Greek New Testaments from Erasmus in 1516 to Erwin Nestle’s edition of 1927 (with the exception of Alford in 1852) and during that period no alternate reading (i.e., Ἰουνιᾶν) appears to have been offered in any apparatus (except Weymouth [1892]) (see Tables 1 and 2 below, pages 62-63).
- d. “All extant early translations (Old Latin, Vulgate, Sahidic and Bohairic Coptic, and Syriac versions) without exception transcribe the name in what can be taken as a feminine form; none gives any positive sign that a masculine name is being transcribed.”
- e. The feminine Junia is how Rom 16:7 was read in English translations of the New Testament from Tyndale (1526/1534) almost without exception (see Dickinson, 1833, and Table 3, below) until the last quarter of the nineteenth century.
- f. Neither of the alleged masculine forms of the name Junias has been found anywhere.
- g. The hypothesis of Junias as a contracted name has serious problems.

Consequently, the vast majority of scholars today (irrespective of their view of women in ministry) believe that Junia was a woman.

A more intentional effort at undermining Junia's apostleship is by translating the term ἐν as "to" (or "by") instead of "among." This would make Junia well-known "to the apostles" (herself not being an apostle),⁷ instead of well-known "among the apostles" (herself being an apostle).⁸ Inarguably, the most common meanings of ἐν in Koine Greek is "in," "on," and "among" (an "inclusive" sense).⁹ Nevertheless, on rare occasions, the term can mean "to" or "by" (an "exclusive" sense). Daniel Wallace and Michael Burer argued for this exclusive sense in Romans 16:7 in 2001 (2001). It was competently shown to be unsound by Bauckham a year later (2002) and again by Epp (2005) and Belleville (2005c) in separate articles in 2005 without subsequent refutation.

Burer did write a review of Epp's work in 2008 (2008), but it does not address the arguments of Bauckham, Epp, or Belleville at all (note Schreiner 2005b:287). Instead, he defers to the future, saying, "My schedule has not permitted me time to develop an indepth response to any of these reviews. What I can say at this point is that I have not read anything in any of them that has dissuaded me from the viewpoint Wallace and I advanced in the original article. (In the next few years I hope to develop a suitable response to these critiques.)" (2008:59). Over a decade has passed since the first critique of Burer's essay, and scholars are still waiting for Burer's response. How odd, then, to read complementarians make such bizarre claims as, "...Burer has recently responded to Epp's book and has shown the continuing strength of his and Wallace's original

⁷ ESV, NET, CEV, LB.

⁸ NASB, NRSV, RSV, NIV, NLT, ISV, NCV, WEB. Cf. KJV, HSCB, ASV, YLT, VOICE.

⁹ Also, "into" and "with."

thesis that Junia was ‘well known to the apostles’,” (Burk 2011). This is precisely what Burer’s review has *not* “shown.” These kinds of misleading dismissals only serve to further undermine the credibility of complementarian scholarship.

Even so, various complementarian scholars are finally getting comfortable to conceding that Junia was both a woman and an apostle. But, they can do so only by (once again) undermining the significance of her apostleship, this time by conveniently saying that it was “unofficial” (cf. the office of Phoebe in Rom 16:1-2 below). Schreiner essentially does this, saying that the term “apostle” is “not used in a technical sense” in Romans 16:7 (2005b:287). But this begs the question as to what such “technicality” or being “official” amounts to, and if it is even a legitimate category to begin with. Schreiner claims that, “the word ‘apostles’ here probably refers to ‘church planters’ or ‘missionaries’ and so does not place Junia and Andronicus at the same level as the twelve or Paul” (2005b:105; cf. Moo 1996:922). This is a desperate venture for several reasons. First, it does not realize the temporary, limited nature and purposes of the Twelve. By the very nature of the case, no apostle outside of the twelve are on “the same level of the twelve”—not even Paul (Kittel et. al. 1997:437). By the time Romans was read, the term “apostles” referred to a group far more expansive than the initial Twelve—and, as it was asserted above, this was typical of Paul’s use of the term.

Second, what does it mean to be on the “level of the twelve or Paul”? Scripture provides ranking of ministry functions/offices in terms of “prophets,” “prophets,” etc., but not ranking within the

group of apostles themselves.¹⁰ Such an argument for internal hierarchies within the apostolate of the early church would be precarious and superficial.

Third, how does Junia being a “church planter” or “missionary” subordinate her in relation to the Apostle Paul—who was precisely that? To define Junia’s apostleship as missionary work is to align it precisely with the work of the apostle Paul. Of course, one may point to the uniqueness of Paul’s apostleship in an effort to drive a wedge between Paul and Junia, but this uniqueness (e.g., his conversion on Damascus road, his writing of the numerous NT epistles, his past life as a persecutor of Christians) sets Paul apart from *all* of the other apostles (including the Twelve), not just Junia. Additionally, part of Paul’s intent is to align himself with Junia in the first place, calling her and Andronicus “my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners” (συγγενεῖς μου καὶ συναιχμαλώτους μου).

Fourth, Schreiner is ignoring Paul’s own qualifications for being an apostle (see Bauckham and Epp above). It makes particularly little sense to try and *demote* Junia to an unofficial/nontechnical “apostle” (whatever that means) when the immediate context *elevating* her among the apostles (Jewett 2007:963). As Paul says, Junia is “outstanding” or “well-known” among the apostles and “were in Christ before me.” Schreiner’s effort at de-elevating Junia runs counter to the authorial intent of Paul, who does not simply call Junia an “apostle,” but raises her above such apostles and then *distinguishes her in direct relation to the apostle Paul himself*. In short, it could not be more counter-exegetical to pit Paul against Junia in an effort to undermine the significance of Junia’s apostleship.

¹⁰ Paul does compare himself to so-called “super-apostles” in 2 Cor 11:5 and 12:11, but this is not a hierarchy purposed by NT theology or the Spirit of God (as in Eph 2:20 and 1 Cor 12:28).

In conclusion, Andronicus and Junia are apostles in the same “extraordinary” (*BDAG*), “sacred” (Liddell), and “special” (Swanson) sense as the Twelve, Barnabas, James, Paul, and all the others who are messengers/envoys of Christ. Perhaps they specialized in one area of ministry or another, but this cannot be known. Erecting a wall between these apostles and the apostleship of Paul is superficial, unnecessary, and contrary to the author’s original intent. Junia was a woman apostle, and there were likely others that the New Testament does not specifically name.

So, when Paul says “God has appointed in the church first apostles” (1 Cor 12:28), we know that Junia and other women are included since Paul is referring to the wider group of apostles beyond the Twelve (Morris 2008b:172; Ciampa and Rosner 2010:610; Fee 1987:620). As far as Ephesians 2:20 is concerned, Paul may have in mind the Twelve, or perhaps the Twelve and himself (O’Brien 1999:214) or perhaps the Twelve, himself, and all the other apostles (Bruce 1984:304). It is not clear. But there is no basis to assume that women apostles are automatically excluded.

7.3.4 Women Deacons

Many (perhaps even most) contemporary scholars who oppose the legitimacy of women elders affirm the legitimacy of women deacons. This is because they do not see the activities of deacons conflicting with their interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12. That is, they do not see women deacons as having to exercise authority and teach over men. Combined with the fact that female deacons

do appear in biblical documents, it is difficult to argue against the legitimacy of female deacons from a Reformed-Evangelical perspective.

As I noted in the introduction, I have already made a case for female deacons in a book by that title. So it is unnecessary to make this case here and now. I will, however, provide the argument outline from the book to provide a general understanding for why Christians on both sides of the debate affirm women deacons (Hübner 2013a:14-15; cf. forthcoming Wipf and Stock repub):

1. “(Primary Premise) The ban on women elders propounded by complementarians does not apply to women deacons; the Scriptures teach that teaching and exercising authority over men is neither a required ability nor necessary task undertaken by a deacon (whether “functional” or “official”).
2. (Primary Conclusion) Therefore, the office of deacon is not gender specific and qualified women are encouraged to occupy it.
 - a. (Confirming Argument A) The Bible further recognizes the existence of women deacons in Romans 16:1.
 - b. (Confirming Argument B) The Bible further recognizes the qualifications of women deacons in 1 Timothy 3:11.
 - c. (Confirming Argument C) Female deacons (“deaconesses”) are not foreign to church history. Rather, female deacons have been conceptually approved by Christian leaders and have actually existed in many churches throughout history.

(Final Conclusion) Therefore, the truthfulness of conclusion (2) is reaffirmed by divine revelation (namely, Rom. 16:1-2, 1 Tim. 3:11) and by those who bore witness to divine revelation throughout the development of the church.”

Two comments are in order.

First, no one really knows the origin of the diaconate, when it came into existence, nor why it came into existence. There are lots of theories both historically and exegetically. But it appears safe to say that the diaconate came into existence primarily because it was *needed* in the church. Particular conditions and circumstances gave rise to the “office.” Whether it was for table waiting (Acts 6), distributing the Lord’s Table locally or for absent church goers, baptizing new converts, providing housing, or something else, we may never know. The structure of the early

church was organic and quite flexible (Ladd 1993:388-389). Thus, even when complementarians come across verses favoring women deacons, there is an acknowledgment of this truth. Take for example Douglas Moo and his comments on Romans 16:1-2:

“But the qualification of ‘diakonos’ by ‘of the church’ suggests, rather, that Phoebe held at Cenchreae the ‘office’ of ‘deacon’ as Paul describes it in 1 Timothy 3:8-12 (cf. Phil. 1:1). We put ‘office’ in quotation marks because it is very likely that regular offices in local Christian churches were still in the process of being established, as people who regularly ministered in a certain way were gradually recognized officially by the congregation and given a regular title” (1996:914).

The Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Ridderbos raises a similar concern:

“Even if Phoebe were not a deaconess in the “official” sense of the word, there is in that fact, as we have repeatedly contended, no fundamental difference whatever from official appointment to the occupancy of such a ministry by the church. Nor is there any argument whatever to be derived from Paul’s epistles that it was only a non-official charisma that was extended to the woman and not regular office” (1997:461).

Thus, Walter Liefeld has said, “Function is more important than office” (2005:286).

This is an important topic because many who forbid women elders do not acknowledge such *development* of church offices, and for many who do, they do not see it as relevant for other theological topics. This is problematic because, as it has been observed multiple times, the same theologians often insist on prohibiting women from doing certain activities depending on whether or not they are “official.” This distinction can be as arbitrary as its application. So, for example, whenever the theologian wants our theology to limit women’s ministry to a certain point, we just look at the biblical examples and say, “it wasn’t official,” and if desiring to prohibit women elders, continue to say “so it doesn’t really contribute anything to a discussion about *official* eldership.”

In other words, to acknowledge that there is development in one point of the early church's doctrines and practices demands (if we are consistent) that we allow there to be development in other areas—such as the early church's view of gender and church leadership. It does no good to retreat into a biblicist attitude that says we can disregard all such development (“just do what the Bible says”) or to separate topics based on the artificial criteria of associating or not associating imperatives with “the creation order” (refer to Reaoch 2012 and De Young 2010 in chapter two).

As it stands, Phoebe in Romans 16:1-2 has all the hallmarks of what we would expect to find for an “official deacon.” Even if she did not, this does not detract from her function in the church, especially if it cannot be shown that (a) the official/unofficial distinction existed for the office of deacon at the time of Paul's writing Romans, and (b) shown that such a distinction is how the early church delineated between allowing and disallowing the ministry of female Christians.

The complementarian contributors to the *ESVSB* say that the teaching requirement for elders in 1 Timothy 3:2-3 is “the only requirement in this list that is not necessarily required of all believers” (2008:2329). But this is not the case. Paul does *not* require elders to teach; he requires those *aspiring* to be elders “to be *able* to teach” (διδασκτικόν, an adjective meaning “skillful in teaching”). As where Paul requires potential elders to *be doing* certain things (e.g., “keeping¹¹ his children submissive”; “manage¹² his own household well,” etc.), the elder must simply have the *capacity* to give good teaching. On any given month or year, an elder may be teaching or he may not be. But that does not detract from the fact that this elder is an elder.

¹¹ ἔχοντα, present active participle.

¹² προϊστάμενον, present middle participle.

Even if Paul *were* requiring all elders to teach and be teaching, it is not true that it is “the only requirement in this list that is not necessarily required of all believers.” Are all believers required to not “be a recent convert” (3:6)? No. That is not even possible (one is only a “recent convert” for a small period of time). This requirement can’t be met by all Christians, just like they can’t meet a number of other requirements for the eldership, like managing their household well (what if they’re not a household manager?), the husband (what if they’re not a man?) of one wife (what if they’re not married?), and keeping children submissive (what if they don’t have children?). So it is misleading and inaccurate to single out teaching in this way.

Furthermore, it is not as if the gift of teaching is just something that some people have and other people don’t have. Paul encourages *all believers* to have the gift of teaching in 1 Corinthians 12:28-31). Paul wants Christians to have the “higher gifts”—which explicitly include teaching.

All of this leaves us asking: Why, then, does the *ESVSB* insist on making teaching so significant? Precisely because it is *this* activity that, when combined with 1 Timothy 2:12, prohibits women from the office of elder. If Paul had not required elders to be able to teach in 1 Timothy 3, women might easily be elders since 1 Timothy 2:12 (in the eyes of complementarians) prohibits women from teaching and exercising authority in the church. The *ESVSB* puts it plainly a page earlier: “Since the role of pastor/elder/overseer is rooted in the task of teaching and exercising authority over the church, this verse would also exclude women from serving in this office (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2)” (2008:2328). The *ESVSB* (and complementarians) is right in that teaching is significant insofar as it is not required of deacons, but in error to overplay its significance.

The second comment in order is that female deacons are significant because they are paired together with elders—and paired together in different contexts. Paul opens up his letter to the Philippians by saying, “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons” (1:1). There appears to be an assumption here about the *two positions in the church*. In a totally different context, Paul lists the qualifications of these offices side-by-side with the same kind of assumption: “It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office¹³ of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be...Deacons must be (1 Timothy 3:1-13, NASB). These two texts strongly suggests that, at least at one point in the early church’s consciousness, there were two “main” or “primary” offices of the church: elders and deacons. Continue to “Women Elders” below for why all of this is significant.

7.3.5 Women Elders

Notice in 1 Timothy 3 that the qualifications for deacons and elders are virtually identical. The primary difference is that elders are required to be “able to teach.” If women were legitimate deacons according to Paul’s requirements, then it naturally follows *that these same women fulfilled the vast majority of the requirements for elders*; for the overlap between the two offices is great, and there is no reason to think that Paul meant something different for each group when he requires both to (for example) manage their households well.

But one can go further. Many female deacons likely fulfilled *all* of the possible necessary requirements for eldership, since all that would be required is their ability to teach. (Stephen, if

¹³ Translations supply this term. It is not found in the Greek text.

considered a “deacon,” appears to have had this ability in Acts 6-7). There is nothing *in principle* that keeps deacons (or any Christian from that matter) from possessing the ability to teach in the way Paul speaks of it in 1 Timothy 3:2. This applies for deacons and Christians today as much as it did in the first century. Thus, we may accurately say that *women can and have fulfilled all the requirements for the eldership listed in 1 Timothy 3*. By definition, there inevitably were female elders in the New Testament church if (a) one simply defines them as a person who meets the qualifications for eldership and (b) acknowledges that women can meet those qualifications.

Of course, most Christians do not call a person an “elder” or “pastor” simply because they are qualified to do so. What makes them elders is that they are actually performing as elders and pastors. On this matter the New Testament is not as clear, and given its limited scope and purposes, this is no surprise.

7.3.6 Conclusion

According to the biblical account, there were women teachers/preachers, prophets, apostles, and deacons in early church. There were likely women who qualified to be elders, but it is uncertain the early church recognized them as such. The point for this section (7.3), however, is that it is unlikely the early church would have objected to *women functioning as elders* since they performed every other major ministerial function. To object and claim that the function of eldership/teaching is unique—so much that women can perform every other function except this one—betrays (a) the developmental nature of church offices (i.e., the eldership was a later development that rested on the previous positions of apostle and prophet), (b) the radical

similarities between elders and deacons (noted by their qualifications), and (c) the anti-sexist attitude of the New Covenant Community, who never would have imagined (and show no indication of imagining) permanently forbidding women from doing general teaching ministry (i.e. teaching men and women) simply because of their femaleness. Given that the gift of teaching was not limited to men, it is particularly reasonable (not unreasonable) to assume that women, in theological principle, may be elders.

We have also seen the unfortunate, continual intrusion of the “official”/“unofficial” distinction. It appears that at almost every turn, where women are found as prophets, apostles, or deacons, their significance can be dismissed by critics through the convenient label of non-“technical” or “unofficial.” We have found this distinction somewhat arbitrary. What has not been established is that such a distinction was consistent (much less consistently *known*) throughout the development of the NT church. It has also not been established that this distinction is what legitimized or repudiated women from doing certain functions.

7.4 Conclusion

The first section in this chapter argued that the difficult nature of 1 Timothy 2:12 limits the church’s application of the text. We found that it was particularly inconsistent—both in light of NT theology and in light of complementarian assumptions—to establish a universal, permanent prohibition of women’s pastoral ministry on the basis of the text. The second section re-evaluated the traditional theology of marriage and found it fundamentally egalitarian instead of hierarchical and male-centered. This consequently supports the case for women elders if the

leadership structures of the home can be imported into the leadership structures of the church. Finally, the third section ventured to show that women fulfilled the most substantial functions of church ministry according to NT theology: prophets and apostles. Additionally, women were found to be commissioned by Jesus to preach the gospel and did so, and also fulfilled the function of deacon, which many critics of women elders admit was fulfilled by women.

All of these confirming arguments bolsters the conclusions of chapters five and six: women are not prohibited from pastoral ministry.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

8. Introduction

This chapter will briefly review the ground covered in this study. It will also briefly suggest practical ramifications for the Reformed-Evangelical community.

8.1 Recapitulation

Reformed-Evangelical Christians are torn over the debate of women in ministry. Different strands of different organizations, traditions, and associations put forward varying degrees of prohibitions for women's functions in the local church. Chief among these debates is the legitimacy of women elders (or pastors). Those in Reformed and Evangelical traditions tend to limit women from being pastors because of certain convictions regarding the centrality of Scripture in theology in combination with certain interpretations of key biblical texts.

After reviewing the literature on this debate and addressing methodological concerns, Chapter Five addressed these texts—namely, 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. The texts are riddled with difficulties that scholars have continually attempted to solve in the past quarter-century. Many great resources have been produced, but a proper interpretation of them was found to be lacking in several areas. One particular area was regarding the term ἀθηντέω, and

how those against women elders do not, in fact have the research “on their side.” In fact, they cannot even agree on what their own research is saying. It was finally shown in the chapter that, although difficult to understand, these two texts cannot ultimately be legitimately used to forbid women elders. Chapter Six followed up with a survey of the New Testament to see whether the (already critiqued) prohibition interpretation(s) of 1 Timothy 2:12 and its associated themes of “headship,” etc. could be found. They generally were not. Rather, the theme of gender equality as part of the character of the New Covenant community revealed itself consistently and powerfully—even as the patriarchal structures of first-century culture were still found at play. This portion concluded the “primary and secondary” arguments of the research.

Recognizing the need to address the other major concerns of the women-elder debate, Chapter Seven consolidated these concerns into three arguments of various theological interests: the first being hermeneutical in nature, the second theological in investigating marriage and its relationship to church government, and the third examining the role of women in early church ministry. The first of these revealed a double-standard of hermeneutics by those who forbid women elders on the basis of 1 Timothy 2:12. The second revealed that, even according to the hermeneutics of those who say marriage is hierarchical, marriage is fundamentally egalitarian. Finally, the last portion revealed just how prominent women were in the early church and how this demonstrates the unreasonableness of relegating pastoral (and/or “teaching”) ministry to a “male-only” zone.

Other than the particular order and arrangement of this argument, this research has made several new contributions to the debate. One area is in the study of the *hapax* ἀθηντέω in 1 Timothy

2:12. Scholars' interpretations of studies regarding parallel use of the term was gathered, graphed, and evaluated like never before. A connection was also drawn between lexical transparency and similar Greek terms that begin in $\alpha\upsilon$ -, which was also shown to bolster an egalitarian reading of the verse. Chapter Six placed the women of the first century in the context of the specific theme of Spirit-driven proclamation instead of the typical, broad category of "ministry." This raised new challenges about just how much women really did participate in the oral, public distribution of the good news. In Chapter Seven, Section 7.1 revealed a double-standard on behalf of complementarian hermeneutics (particularly regarding the use of "difficult" texts) more thoroughly than ever before. The following section (7.2) used complementarian hermeneutics to establish a method of theologizing about marriage, which was then shown to be fundamentally egalitarian instead of fundamentally hierarchical. Finally, in Section 7.3, the latest research about the legitimacy of female deacons was implemented into a discussion about the ministry roles women fulfilled in the early church.

8.2 Recommendations

There are already a number of denominations and organizations in the Reformed and Evangelical community that permit (and even encourage) qualified women to pursue pastoral ministry. But for those who do not, it is time to revisit the biblical and theological data once again to see whether women elders are truly a product of cultural trends, or a product of faithful Christian scholars applying the principle of *Semper Reformanda* (Always Reforming) to this area of theology.

Perhaps the greatest obstacles in this debate are (a) meaningful dialogue that avoids misrepresenting the other side and overstating the case; (b) authors who fail to read the primary sources of the side they are critiquing; (c) the chains of tradition.

Regarding (a), it is far too common to witness cases of overstatement and exaggeration that only irritates the other side of the debate. An excellent example is the conclusion to an essay written by Mark Dever, who says “love for God, the gospel, and future generations, demands the careful presentation and pressing of the complementarian position” (2008:24). Doesn’t this suggest that any person who objects to complementarianism does not really love God and the gospel? Another example is from Stinson and Duncan in the 2006 preface to *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (2006:12), where they say “egalitarianism must always lead to an eventual denial of the gospel” and associate the rise of egalitarianism with increase in divorce and homosexuality. Perhaps Carson’s advice for the gender-inclusive language debate can be applied to the debate over women elders as well, and it seems a much wiser approach:

“Let us avoid impugning the motives of the other side....Let us try to avoid entrenched positions that demonize the other side....I know the convictions on the issues are deeply held. But on the long haul, are we more interested in winning brothers and sisters to the truth as we understand it or in scoring points with our own constituencies?” (1998:195-1996)

Regarding (b), many popular Christian books on gender and women in ministry are substantially ignorant of Christian egalitarian scholarship. Sproul’s assertion about the “50-50 marriage” in his book *The Intimate Marriage* (2003), and Lewis and Hendricks’ assertion about the “fifty-fifty” marriage in *Rocking the Roles* (1991), are prime examples. Both appear to suggest that an egalitarian marriage is one that attempts to do everything equally, as if to live “role-less” lives. The fact is, few, if any, Christian egalitarian literature has ever made such a claim to role-less

marriages and absolute equal distribution of marital activity between the spouses. Unsurprisingly, none of these authors cite any literature from the view they are critiquing—much less show any awareness about what egalitarian scholars actually believe. This kind of basic ignorance will only lead to more misunderstanding.

Finally, regarding (c), the power of tradition must never be underestimated. There are many “closet-egalitarians” who believe that women can be elders. But, due to their faculty positions at (for example) Southern Baptist seminaries or pastoral positions at PCA churches, they do not voice what they believe is true. Jobs would be lost and relationships would be broken. It would be easier to fall in line with the local/historical traditions than to earnestly contend for the truth. One can only pray that more brave men and women will see themselves as historical persons that have a story—one that their children and grandchildren will remember and tell, and that their story will speak of a person who did not compromise when it came to proclaiming the gospel in every area of life, including the area of gender equality and the role of church eldership.

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