

Women, Gifting, Leadership, and HNW

Summary

The following study is submitted from a position of humility and a desire to understand the Scriptures and their position regarding women and their role in the church. Our investigation of this topic has encompassed a variety of positions, scholars, and opinions. Suffice it to say, there are a number of godly and learned individuals who have reached different conclusions on these matters.¹ Our position is in no way intended to be a polemic against others and their differing opinions but rather to communicate the position we believe interprets the Bible in a fashion consistent within itself and with what we understand regarding the earliest churches.

Furthermore, this study is not submitted so that our church would align with cultural trends or in order to make the church culturally more palatable. In fact, our conclusions will, in some respects, go against prevailing cultural norms. We continue to believe that God “made them male and female,” and we continue to believe that God has a specific design for men in the family and in the church.

Houston Northwest Church (HNW) believes the Bible teaches the inherent worth and value of women, declaring them to be image bearers of God, equal to men. The New Testament church experienced a significant shift with regard to the role of women, particularly in comparison to the practices of the synagogue as outlined in the Old Testament and the rest of the ancient world. At HNW, we strive to model the practices of the New Testament church with regard to the women in our congregation. Our best efforts at study and interpretation lead us to conclude that—based on the New Testament and practices of the ancient church—women can serve in a number of roles in the congregation, including, but not limited to: deacon, teacher, and minister. The same course of study of Scripture and ancient church history leads us to conclude that the role of elder/pastor is reserved for men.

Detailed Explanation

According to the Bible, there are two swaths of human history that are sinless—the very beginning and the very end. The beginning is the Garden of Eden. It is there we learn a great deal about who God intended humans to be. The ending is the Heavenly

¹ It would be impossible to comprehensively list scholars who hold to a different opinion, be they further on the complementarian scale (HNW is a complementarian church with a more mutualistic perspective than some who prefer a more patriarchal view) or egalitarian, but some scholars worth noting are Tom Schreiner, Tim Keller, D.A. Carson (all of whom are more strictly complementarian), Lucy Peppiatt, NT Wright, and Scot McKnight (all egalitarian). John Piper and Wayne Grudem’s book, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Good News: 1991) is still considered the watershed text in this discussion, even 30 years after publication. Although we arrive at a conclusion different from that of Piper and Grudem, their work must be acknowledged because it, in many ways, continues to shape the conversation today. HNW’s position is in line with the Baptist Faith and Message. JD Greear, while serving as President of the SBC, read an earlier version of this paper and gave it a positive review after inviting Elyse Fitzpatrick onto his platform at Summit Church in 2019.

City. It is there we see the creation restored to its intended glory. ***The New Testament church, in living the Kingdom of God, is to live with a Garden and City mindset in the midst of a broken world. Consequently, we look to those texts as guiding targets in our interpretation and understanding of the Bible.*** This Kingdom way of reading the Bible helps us to navigate passages that are sometimes difficult or, at first glance, apparently contradictory by helping us to remember the way in which God is redeeming all of creation.

In the Garden: Genesis 1-3

The creation of humanity tells us a good deal about God's intended plan for the relationship between male and female. Humanity is, as best we can tell, the capstone of creation. Only humans are called "very good" by God, while the rest of creation is called "good." Only humans are animated by the very breath of God. Only humans are described as being made in God's image. When God searches all of creation for a suitable helper for Adam, none of the animals will do. Instead, God fashions another human—a woman, Eve—to be Adam's partner. He fashions her from Adam's side, symbolically representing that she is to be his equal. And then, in case there might be any confusion, he declares that they are both made "male and female" in the image of God. Eve is described as a "helper" to Adam. Lest some might think this is a code word for "subordinate," the very same Hebrew word used to describe Eve as a helper (**ezer**) is used to describe God as a Helper or a Rescuer multiple times in the Old Testament. This is no category of subordination, this is an exclamation of her essential role in the pre-Fall Garden. She, along with Adam, is commissioned to have dominion over the Earth, to cultivate the Garden.²

Though equal, Genesis is clear in its portrayal of humanity as "male" and "female," embracing the concept that—in their differences—men and women exhibit different qualities of God's character. They are created to complement one another. These qualities of God's character are not explicitly listed in Genesis, but we gather impressions of them as we read the whole counsel of Scripture. For example, God seems displeased with Adam's **passivity** during Eve's encounter with the Serpent and her subsequent decision to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Hebrew literally says that Adam was "at her elbow" as she ate the fruit. He did nothing to stop her, and then later, when confronted by God, he attempted to blame Eve for his own decision to eat from the Tree. Early on, we perceive that **men are to reject passivity and accept responsibility for their families**, in contrast with what Adam chose to do in Genesis. Likewise, Eve's Garden transgression begins when she does not consult with Adam when approached by the serpent. Early on, we perceive that **wives are not to seek to act without regard with their husbands**. Mutual

² The Scripture seems to indicate that the subduing of creation can only be done together. The command to do so is given to both male and female. Consequently, as we interpret the Bible's perspective on women, we see elevation and partnership. Specific tasks are not always clear. The woman described in Proverbs 31, for example, takes on any number of ways to be a help to her husband. In other words, it is not always the tasks that are of greatest import but rather the posture of partnering together to bring about God's command—whether in marriage or in church.

cooperation is intended to be the center of the marriage relationship. According to the Genesis narrative, God gave His instruction prior to her creation. Adam's sin begins in his passivity, both in not telling his wife what God commanded and in not stepping in when the Serpent was tempting Eve; his sin continues when he listens to his wife's voice over the voice of the Lord. Eve's sin begins when she attempts to act as an individual apart from her husband, not clarifying about what God commanded, acting without consultation. ***In both sins, Adam and Eve reject the command to "become one flesh"—Adam through passivity and blaming; Eve through acting without regard of her husband.***

We are left with male and female—both created in the image of God, both equal, and both having sinned in their unique ways.

As a result of their sin, God pronounces a curse over men and women. For men? The curse is with the toil of his hands. He will work harder and harder, and it will not be easy or joyful. Every moment his work is difficult, ***he will be reminded of his passivity***—not interceding on his wife's behalf, listening to her voice instead of the Lord's, and casting blame upon her. For women? Childbirth becomes painful and she will be put in a relationship with her husband in which her desire is for her husband—***her sin puts her in a more dependent position.***

It is important to remember that these are ***curses***. This is not what God *desires* for humanity, but it is rather a sign—a ***reminder***—of sin. Within the redemptive work of Christ, the curse can be broken—to a point.³

In the Heavenly City: Men and Women After the Resurrection

There is not much mentioned regarding the males and females, specifically, in the Heavenly City. We do read, however, that the relationship of marriage—given as one of the examples of Christ's love for the church here on Earth—will not continue. In fact, when questioned about marriage after the resurrection, Jesus said, "*For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.*" (Matthew 22:30). Humans do not become angels, but they are like them, in that they are now in an unmediated relationship with the Creator. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "*Now we see but a dim reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*" And John agrees in 1 John 3:2, "*we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*"

Why will marriage end? When Christ returns and the Resurrection takes place, marriage will end, for the church will be given in marriage to Jesus. The Bride of Christ will, in that moment, have met her bridegroom. Our full devotion will be given to Him.

³ The curse cannot be completely undone until Christ returns. So, despite redemption in Christ, work is still toilsome at times and childbirth remains painful. The Kingdom is not complete until Jesus fully institutes it upon His return.

In the resurrection, there will be no more marriage, no more sex, and no more childbirth.

Likewise, the church will be perfected, entering into the perfect rule of Jesus. Those who have been trusted as under-shepherds on Earth will now be able to rest in the perfect care of the Great Shepherd. In that time, the church will transition to those ruling with Christ. Revelation 4:4 speaks of 24 thrones around the throne of the Lamb. Those thrones probably represent the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles—the completion of God’s redemptive work among his people and their co-reigning with him into eternity.

In the Meantime: The Church and the Kingdom

Between the Garden and the City, believers live the Kingdom as church. The church is intended to be a sign, a precursor of Heaven, anticipating the fully realized rule and reign of Jesus. ***As part of this, men and women live, as best they can, in rejection of the cursed reality of the Fall and in full expectation of the reality given us in Jesus. Our church’s vision for women is based on our best understanding of the Kingdom.***

In the Home

Christian Singleness: Some Christians will anticipate the reality of the Kingdom by living a life of singleness. This way of life is modeled by Jesus and is extolled by Paul. In fact, Paul exhorts those who can live without marriage to do so, in order that he/she might give greater attention to serving Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 7:8, he writes, “*To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am.*” Later, in verses 32-35, he goes further. “*I want you to be free from anxieties. 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. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.*”

In short: Paul celebrates those who choose to remain single in order to be fully devoted to the Lord.

Christian Marriage: For those who cannot live a life of singleness, Paul describes how marriage is given as a picture of Christ’s love for the church. The picture of marriage given in Ephesians 5 is the antidote to the problems described in the Garden. Husbands, Paul says, are intended to love their wives as Christ loves the church—sacrificially, willing to give up his life. Wives, Paul says, are to submit to their husbands, following this sacrificial love and to respect their husbands. This relationship is an undoing of the Curse and the original sins that plagued the first couple. Men, by loving their wives to the point of sacrifice, ***demonstrate they are no longer passive or***

casting blame, but are now **accepting responsibility** for the one that has been put with them as one flesh. **Wives, by submitting and respecting, are undoing the curse of Eve acting independent from her husband in the Garden**, and are freely choosing to follow their husband, in spite of the freedom given her in Christ. In other words, both choose to serve one another in ways that are not always instinctive.⁴

Although our modern ears may not recognize it, this marriage relationship was radical in the ancient world. Men did not necessarily love their wives in the ancient world; they essentially owned them as property. Women did not choose to submit to their husbands; they had very few rights in the ancient world. In reading this subversion of Roman household codes, we get a small taste of the voluntary, love-based, grace-grounded culture of the earliest churches.⁵

Important: Women submit to their husbands freely because their husbands love them as Jesus does. **Women are not called to submit to all men**; wives are called to submit to husbands. **No man in the church community is to use his male-ness to attempt to domineer over a woman.** Likewise, this passage is not to be weaponized to be used as an excuse for domestic abuse. Men are to love as Jesus did—sacrificially and lovingly. Physical harm against a spouse would be a direct rejection of Scripture, and abuse should be rejected out of hand within the church.

In the Church

There is little disagreement that women held influential positions of leadership in the earliest churches. The New Testament mentions that Jesus had several women followers (radical in that time and place), that women were the first to proclaim the Resurrection, and that the women were present praying with the apostles in the upper room awaiting the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. We also read names such as Mary, Martha, Priscilla, Lydia, Phoebe, and Junia in the earliest Christian writings. This gives

⁴ John Stott, in *The Message of Ephesians*, writes, “We picture the ‘authoritative’ husband as a domineering figure who makes all the decisions himself, issues commands and expects obedience, inhibits and suppresses his wife, and so prevents her from growing into a mature or fulfilled person. But this is not at all the kind of ‘headship’ which the apostle Paul describes, whose model is Jesus Christ. Certainly, ‘headship’ implies a degree of leadership and initiative, as when Christ came to woo and to win his bride. But more specifically it implies sacrifice, self-giving for the sake of the beloved, as when Christ gave himself for his bride. If ‘headship’ means ‘power’ in any sense, then it is power to care not to crush, power to serve not to dominate, power to facilitate self-fulfillment, not to frustrate or destroy it. And in all this the standard of the husband’s love is to be the cross of Christ, on which he surrendered himself even to death in his selfless love for his bride.”

⁵ Household codes in the ancient world appear in a number of documents, but the most common model is that found in the writings of Aristotle, specifically in Book I of his *Politics*, dating to the fourth century before Christ. The New Testament uses similar language to Aristotle, but clearly subverting the Aristotelian structure through equality in Christ rather than retention of human power. Paul was clearly familiar with both Hebraic and Greek thought, so it would not be surprising to find an Aristotelian (or Platonic) reference (or two) in his writing. Although not part of this discussion, Paul has several phrases which are likely intended to subvert the Platonic/Aristotelian mindset of much of the Hellenized ancient world.

us a clue that women were elevated in the New Testament church in a way that was culturally surprising, particularly among the Jewish communities of the first century.

Furthermore, we can deduce that women took on a more significant role after the Resurrection simply by observing the way that the enemies of the church treated them. **Prior** to the Resurrection, women came to the cross and the tomb without fear while the Twelve hid, fearing arrest. **After** the Resurrection, however, we read that Saul was arresting **both** men and women. Clearly women were seen as influential at that point in church history, whereas previously they were considered mere observers to the work of the men. Additionally, we know that archaeological discoveries of early church art reveals women serving in some sort of liturgical office, some of the pieces dating to the 5th century.⁶ What, then, were the roles of women in the church based on the New Testament? And what about women at HNW?

Baptism: There are several passages about baptism in the New Testament, but none of them give instructions on who can or cannot perform one. The pattern seems to have been that the one who led an individual to Christ was the one to baptize that individual. Seeing no limitations in the New Testament, we conclude that women are free to perform baptisms, especially those they lead to faith in Jesus.

Lord's Supper: Likewise, there are several passages about the Lord's Supper, but there are no specific instructions regarding who can administer the Supper. (As previously mentioned, archaeologists have discovered frescoes and carvings from the 5th century featuring women serving the Eucharist/Communion.) Seeing no limitations in the New Testament, therefore, we believe women are free to serve the Lord's Supper.⁷

Teaching: One of the questions regarding women in the church centers around teaching. There are some passages that appear to say women were teachers in the New Testament, while there are others that appear to say women are not allowed to even speak. A general rule of biblical hermeneutics is that clear passages should be used to interpret less clear passages. Some of the clear examples of women speaking/preaching in the New Testament include the women being the first to proclaim the Resurrection to the apostles, the daughters of Philip prophesying, the exhortation of women prophesying to keep their heads covered in 1 Corinthians, and the example of Priscilla teaching Apollos. Additionally, we read in 1 Corinthians 14 that when the churches come together that each one is to use his/her gifts. We know, then, that early

⁶ Several news articles available online detail these findings with a variety of interpretations. At the very least, the frescoes illustrate women involvement in early Christian worship.

⁷ Some churches limit the leadership of the ordinances of the church to members of the clergy. Baptists have historically had a variety of positions on this particular issue, but, generally, have downplayed the difference between lay members and clergy members to some degree. For example, it is a very common practice for family members to baptize another family member who has received Christ at HNW. This is not to be seen as a devaluing of the clergy, but rather an elevation of the responsibility and role of the laity. Our understanding would be that pastor/elders would always participate in the oversight of ordinances in some way (if reasonably possible), even with laity participation. This allows the ordinance to be seen as a function/expression of the church rather than an individual act that takes place with no regard for the overall community.

Christian worship included women in the gatherings (unlike the synagogue in the Old Testament), and we know that women participated.⁸

How do we rectify the seeming tension between texts? In full disclosure, any project to do so will be staking—to some degree—an opinion rather than knowing for **certain** what precisely is being discussed. Nevertheless, if the Scripture is indeed inspired and authoritative, we must seek a consistent approach to the text. We believe Paul was not confused or inconsistent in his theology and instead was completely in line with Jesus' perspective towards women.

What, then, of the passages that seem to say a woman cannot speak or teach?

Let's begin with 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35. The ESV translation reads:

As in all the churches of the saints,⁹ 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.

At first glance, this text appears to clearly restrict women from teaching, even speaking in church. Unfortunately, readers of an English translation cannot see what is happening in the original language of 1 Corinthians.

This passage is particularly difficult for at least two reasons. First, the passage represents what is known in New Testament studies as a “gloss,” that is, a section of the Scripture in which the verses appear at different places in different manuscripts, thereby leading to a series of questions about its authenticity. Some manuscripts place verses 34-35 after verse 33. Other manuscripts place the verses after verse 40. It is likely that these two verses were added to the margin of a manuscript of 1 Corinthians—probably in the second century. Scribes who copied the letter for distribution then later made decisions about where to insert this marginal comment. One school of thought added the comment after verse 33; the other school of thought added the comment after verse 40. Hence, there are two divergent streams of extant manuscripts of 1 Corinthians.

Given the fact that the 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is a gloss, some have immediately discounted these instructions, arguing that they are not Paul's words.

A second point of difficulty surrounding this passage is that its command is in clear contradiction to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:5 regarding the ability of women to

⁸ I found Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher, *Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women* (Minneapolis: Bethany), 2020, to be immensely helpful in this discussion. Fitzpatrick and Schumacher are complementarians who argue for the amplification of female worth of female voices within the church. Fitzpatrick spoke on a Sunday morning at Summit Church with Pastor JD Greear in 2019 as part of this discussion. Fitzpatrick and Schumacher argue that 1 Corinthians would allow for the speaking of women in a worship setting.

⁹ This clause could possibly go with 1 Corinthians 13:33a from a grammatical perspective, thus reading, “For God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”

prophecy in the church's gathering. If Paul has argued that women can freely use their gifts, including the act of prophesying, it makes little sense that Paul would later say women cannot speak. Some take this to mean the gloss passage is certainly not authentic to Paul.

Another possible reading is a more recent theory in textual scholarship, but it does potentially make sense of the passage in its context. This theory says that rather than forbidding women from teaching, this particular section of Paul's letter was more likely an example of an ancient rhetorical device in which an author would quote his opponent's viewpoint and then provide his own refutation. Such a device can be difficult to spot, even in Koine Greek, primarily due to the absence of quotation marks and the often unavailable source material the author is refuting.¹⁰

Fortunately, a number of individuals who have studied 1 Corinthians have noted that Paul spends a great deal of time quoting his opponents throughout this letter, and, much of the time, he denotes he is doing so by employing a Greek particle—*ἤ*. There are a number of examples of this taking place in 1 Corinthians that are readily agreed upon by translators and scholars.¹¹ When Paul wants to demonstrate that he is quoting his opponents, he uses this particle as a sort of exclamation, pointing out the absurdity of their claims. It might be like him saying, "What??" or "Nonsense!" In fact, Paul uses this particle in such a way fourteen different times in 1 Corinthians.¹² Each time he does so, he draws attention to a perspective he disagrees with.¹³

It appears that rather than limiting the speaking of women in church, this passage was Paul quoting the Judaizers in the Corinthian congregation who were using the oral Torah as a qualification for those who wanted to participate in the church. As Galatians well documents, Paul strongly disagreed with the Judaizers, calling it a separate gospel. Consequently, we conclude that Paul was quoting his opponents, exclaiming his disagreement using the *ἤ* particle, and then stating his point.

¹⁰ This device is mentioned, for example in Douglas Campbell's commentary and ensuing work on Romans. The rhetorical device is also regularly used in interpreting contemporaneous texts of this time period. Lucy Peppiatt's *Women and Worship in Corinth* explains how this interpretive device is used throughout the body of 1 Corinthians, à la Campbell.

¹¹ For example, 1:12; 3:4—"I follow Paul/Apollos/Peter/Christ;" 6:12; 10:23—"All things are lawful for me;" 6:13—"Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food;" 6:18, 7:1, 8:1, 8:4, 8:8.

¹² It is now an almost consensus opinion in 1 Corinthians scholarship that Paul is indeed employing a quotation-refutation device throughout the epistle. The question is not whether or not Paul uses this quotation-refutation device but whether or not this specific passage (14:34-35) is indeed an example of this device. In this paper we briefly summarize the arguments in favor of viewing 14:34-35 through such an interpretive lens, but readily grant there are scholars who would also argue against such an interpretation. However, most scholars who oppose seeing 14:34-35 as a quotation-refutation device tend to see the passage as a gloss or scribal insertion.

¹³ This "Quotation/Refutation Device" is described in detail by Kirk MacGregor at: <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resources/article/priscilla-papers/1-corinthians-1433b-38-pauline-quotation-refutation-device>

This means such a translation of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-ff would read as follows:

[Paul, quoting the Judaizers,] *“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.”*

What? Nonsense!

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.

Given this reading of 1 Corinthians, we see Paul quoting his opponents in the first paragraph and then opposing that line of reasoning in the final paragraph, by chiding the Corinthian church for not heeding his (apparently previously sent or proclaimed) teachings regarding the proper format for worship in the churches—which were being formed and decided at the time. (For example, Paul’s statement: “He should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.”)¹⁴

If this interpretation is correct, the 1 Corinthians passage is not a prohibition of women teaching, but instead a defense of the practice. While we cannot know for certain, this reading makes sense of the passage in light of 1 Corinthians 11:5.¹⁵ Given the fact that this passage is both a gloss and the fact that this passage stands in direct contrast to the instructions given in chapter 11, we feel confident in saying that it is, at the very least, not a universal explicit prohibition against women speaking when the church gathers. Consequently, we feel comfortable in saying that 1 Corinthians may have been speaking to a specific argument or may have been a scribal addition, but it was most likely not a prohibition against women teaching.

¹⁴ It is worth mentioning that another common reading of this passage argues that Paul is addressing women who were unaccustomed to attending the worship gathering, as women were not allowed to attend the synagogue and wanted to ask clarifying questions. Paul, in this interpretation, wanted those women to wait until after the worship service to ask questions so as preserve order. This reading makes good sense in English but does not take into account Paul’s use of the ἥ particle in this particular passage—at least not in any scholarly source we found. Perhaps there is some interpretation that takes into account both the ἥ particle and the women not asking questions, but we have yet to discover it. In our minds, the reading that focused on the Greek grammar made the most sense. Either interpretation, however, is plausible.

¹⁵ Although not without its own scholarly difficulties, we prefer the Quotation-Refutation reading of 1 Corinthians over the notion of not taking vv. 34-35 as authentic to Paul, simply because those who translated the Scriptures into English and had access to the oldest extant manuscripts decided to include the verses in the body of the text, unlike other New Testament gloss passages. If, of course, the verses were not written by Paul, then this renders this specific passage moot in this discussion.

Besides the 1 Corinthians passage, there is another text in the New Testament that seems to restrict women from teaching: 1 Timothy 2:8-15.

The ESV translation of that passage reads:

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

Although this text appears to be clear in English, like 1 Corinthians 14, there is a good bit happening in Greek. In fact, one commentator¹⁶ has declared that this passage is exceptionally difficult to translate, finding difficulty in translation at almost every single turn. As with 1 Corinthians, grammar and context are essential to our proper understanding of the text.¹⁷

We know that Timothy pastored in Ephesus, home of the Artemis cult. The Artemis temple was the largest structure in the Hellenistic world and one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. This temple and its cult affected every aspect of the society and was the focus of fierce civic pride. For a whole month each year the city stopped work and devoted itself to the Artemis cult. (Acts 19:23-41) The goddess Artemis was depicted with many breasts, a symbol of fertility. Her worship was overseen by eunuch priests. Under them were male and female priests who were attended by thousands of young women. The church Timothy was pastoring was in the shadow of this great temple and was certainly affected by its cultic worship in which women and eunuchs played the major role.¹⁸

One helpful piece of context is found in the literature of the day. In the first century, a popular Greek story called *Ephesiaca* described a love between two young people who meet in the Aphrodite temple worship in Ephesus—the very same city where Timothy is

¹⁶ JT English, on the Village Church’s podcast, “Knowing Faith,” May 20, 2019. English, along with Jen Wilkin, argue for women to teach in mixed Bible study settings in this particular episode. The speakers are all complementarian and make specific reference to the difficulties in knowing where, precisely, to “draw the line” in the roles of men and women within the church.

¹⁷ Aimee Byrd, in Part I of her book, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 2020, talks about the need to resist “Biblicist” interpretations of these passages in order to understand the New Testament’s vision for the church. Byrd, a complementarian, wants to argue for a more holistic approach to these passages in order to create a space for the voice of women in the church—not as pastors or elders, but instead to model a more healthy vision of the Scriptural church as family (Part III of her book).

¹⁸ There are a number of sources describing Artemis worship in ancient Ephesus. I found the work of Kenneth Bailey to be particularly helpful.

ministering when Paul sends him the letter.¹⁹ *Ephesiaca* matters because it gives us language that describes what, exactly, transpires during a processional of young women during Artemis worship. The writer, Xenophon, tells us that the young ladies enter in a procession with a particular hair style and adorned with gold.

This description in *Ephesiaca* matters, for it corresponds directly to the scene Paul sets when he asks women not to worry about their physical appearance. In describing hairstyles, he uses the word πλέγμασιν—the word for braided hair. This is the same word Xenophon uses to describe the identical hair styles each young woman had as they entered in processional for Artemis worship. Further, Xenophon describes the women gold or pearls in the processional; Paul chooses to highlight the very same items. Why does this matter? Paul is likely (in using the same language from Xenophon) describing women who would have been converted out of the Artemis cult and into the church. In other words, Paul is not against braids and gold *per se*, but rather is against any confusion surrounding the women of the church. This is why he discusses their physical appearance with such specificity. He does not want them to be confused with the members of the Artemis cult simply based on their physical appearance.

If Paul is speaking of women coming out of the Artemis cult in verses 9-10, then it makes sense he would be doing the same in verses 11-15. Women in the Artemis cult were domineering, ruling over men in a way that was reminiscent of violent or sexual rule.²⁰ It appears Paul is explaining that the church is to be the antithesis of the Artemis cult and to simultaneously push back against the more legalist Jewish factions of the early church. One of the most important interpretive keys for this particular passage is to remember the radical nature of simply allowing women to attend and participate in the gathering of the church. While our modern sensibilities easily forget, Paul's command, "Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness," was a radical one. He was arguing for the **full inclusion of women in the church**. Why in a submissive manner? Two reasons: First, **women had never previously been allowed to learn in the gathered synagogue, so they initially needed to take the posture of learner**. Secondly, Paul was writing to the church in Ephesus, home to the worship of the goddess, Artemis. As we have already noted, Artemis worship was denoted by strong female personalities and priestesses in the ancient world, along with sexual rites involving female prostitutes. Paul wants to denote the *difference* between the Christian church and Artemis worship. How would he do so? **By asking women to be freely submissive in learning**.

With these two ideas in mind, the rest of the passage begins to look different. Paul's concern regarding a woman exercising authority over a man takes on new dimensions,

¹⁹ This connection between *Ephesiaca* and 1 Timothy is made in detail in Gary G. Hoag, *Wealth in Ancient Ephesus and the First Letter to Timothy: Fresh Insights from Ephesiaca by Xenophon of Ephesus*, Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement, Eisenbrauns, 2015.

²⁰ Kenneth Bailey writes, "The focus of all this was a goddess whose worship was controlled by virgins who shared leadership with males only if they were castrated. In such an atmosphere what kind of female-male relations would have developed? What kind of female attitudes prevailed in such a city? Castration being the ultimate violence against the male, would not anti-male sex-ism in various forms have been inevitable?"

particularly when you realize that the Greek word used in this verse—αὐθεντεῖν—is **only used once in the entire New Testament** and that Paul chose to use this word instead of the word typically translated “exercise authority”—ἐξουσία. ἐξουσία is used over 100 times in the New Testament. Clearly Paul was attempting to express something unique by choosing to use αὐθεντεῖν instead of ἐξουσία. But what?

By examining other ancient Greek texts, we can deduce that αὐθεντεῖν was primarily used to describe murder, violence, deceit, or some other sort of dark activity. Although we are not precisely certain what Paul meant, it seems reasonable to deduce, given the Artemis cult’s propensity to use domineering women, that Paul was talking more about a domineering/deceitful/violent behavior due to the local Artemis worship than he was a general use of “authority.” Consequently, since Paul was already encouraging the women to come in and quietly study (contrary to the Judaizers²¹), it would make sense that he was encouraging them to be modest as he describes in verse 9 (unlike the Artemis cult), as well as willing to come alongside men instead of domineering them (contrary to the Artemis worshippers).²²

What was Paul’s basis for this argument? Adam was created first and *heard* the command of God.²³ Eve did not, and she was subsequently deceived. This is not, as some argue, a command for men to teach because of the order of creation. In fact, the creation story is building with each step, finishing with humanity—the capstone of creation. If this was about the order of creation as Genesis 1 progresses, women would be the higher created being, since they were created last! This, however, is not about created order, but about the role of those who have heard the word of God (in this case, trained men) being sure to pass that on to others (in this case, untrained women).

If they receive the word of God from these trained men, they will be brought into a saving relationship with Jesus. That is what verse 15 describes: Women will be saved by “*The Childbearing*” (there is a definite article in verse 15 before the

²¹ Those who wanted to force Gentile Christians in the ancient church to adhere to Jewish Law and traditions. Since the oral Torah forbade women in the synagogue, Judaizers would have argued that women could not attend the gatherings of the church, either. Paul’s gospel was in direct contradiction to the Judaizers, arguing that nothing was needed apart from faith for salvation in Christ. Consequently, Paul subverts common practice by allowing women to enter and to learn quietly.

²² Hoag offers an alternative rendering of αὐθεντεῖν, suggesting a better translation would be “author of.” He argues the Artemis cult viewed women as the “author of” men, so Paul was arguing that women were not the author of men but instead that God was. Hence, Paul notes that men were created first.

²³ Genesis 2:15-17 says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Only Adam hears the command from the Lord. Eve is not created until verse 18.

Greek word, τεκνογονία²⁴)— namely, the birth of Jesus, if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. We know that this is **not** about these new women in the faith giving birth and raising children, since Paul exhorts women to remain unmarried in service to Jesus in other passages.²⁵ This statement is about the Incarnation of Jesus and its saving power.

So a clearer translation might read as such:

*Allow [such] a woman to learn quietly in submissiveness. I'm not allowing [such] a woman to teach or violently domineer over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet a women will be saved through The Incarnation—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.*²⁶

Interpreting 1 Timothy 2 as such makes sense historically, given the Artemis cult and previous lack of women learning in the synagogue; it preserves the equality between men and women we have seen is prevalent in the New Testament; and it makes clear the salvation of women is not tied to having children (which makes no sense if Jesus and Paul extol the virtue of celibacy and singleness) but instead to the birth of Jesus himself. Instead, it appears Paul is encouraging women to first learn quietly before they would be given permission to teach.²⁷

Given these interpretations, it makes sense that women could in fact teach in a variety of settings in the church. Women are to learn and are not forbidden to speak in the way the English translation appears to—at first glance—declare. Granted, **this is not indisputable, no matter which interpretive approach is used**. After much study, we have opted to proceed with a more generous view in

²⁴ τεκνογονία is only used in this verse in the New Testament, demonstrating Paul is speaking about something unique.

²⁵ cf. Paul's exhortation to remain single in 1 Corinthians 7. If Paul thought childbearing was salvific, he would have commanded marriage and childbirth. Instead, he encouraged those who could remain single to do so.

²⁶ By using the phrase "The Childbirth," it seems Paul is making a direct reference back to the Curse in the Garden. Part of Eve's curse was the pain of childbearing. Now women are saved through "The Childbearing," or Incarnation, of Jesus.

²⁷ John Stott (a longstanding complementarian), in *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) wonders if there is a universal application of headship yet a local application of silence, meaning that no longer applies today. (p. 349) He goes on to say, "If God endows women with spiritual gifts (which he does), and thereby calls them to exercise their gifts for the common good (which he does), then the church must recognize God's gifts and calling, must make appropriate spheres of service available to women, and should 'ordain' (that is, commission and authorize) them to exercise their God-given ministry, at least in team situations." (p. 353f) Stott instead advocates a team-based approach in which women's gifts are used and cultivated.

this particular area, believing this most accurately represents the ministry of Jesus and the pattern of the Kingdom in the New Testament.²⁸

It is important to note that the elders/overseers of the church are charged to be able to teach in their qualifications (1 Timothy 3). It seems reasonable, given the charge to the elders to be able to teach that Paul and other apostles assumed that the oversight and delivery of teaching to the body would be handled by the elders of the congregation. The teaching function of the church is never explicitly relegated **solely** to the elders of the church, but the text implies that the preponderance of teaching will be carried out by the elders of the church and that all theological content would be overseen by the elders of the church. Because the pulpit of HNW is available by “invitation only,” we believe that qualified men or women who have gifting to teach can be invited by the leadership of HNW to fill the pulpit, but in practice, it would be more common to find one of the elders of HNW teaching from the pulpit, as this is one of their primary responsibilities. If the role of elder is reserved for men (which we believe), the Senior Pastor of HNW will be male, and he will perform the bulk of teaching and preaching from the pulpit. Consequently, while a woman may be invited to teach on occasion, the vast majority of teaching of the church will be handled and overseen by the elders.²⁹

Some have argued that since elders are to be men **and** are required to be able to teach that all teaching done in the church is to be done by elders. The New Testament, however, never says all teachers must be elders. It says that those who are selected to be elders must be able to teach. The implication seems to be that if one is selected to be an elder, he will be asked to teach regularly so must be able to do so effectively and should be able to oversee the teaching of

²⁸ Self-proclaimed “broadly Complementarian” scholar John Dickson comes to a similar conclusion regarding 1 Timothy 2, but uses a different interpretive approach in his book, *Hearing Her Voice: A Case for Women Giving Sermons (Fresh Perspectives on Women in Ministry)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014). Dickson argues that the ancient practice of “teaching” is differentiated from the modern act of delivering a sermon in a local church context and therefore is within complementarianism and the New Testament boundaries of women’s roles in the church. J.I. Packer—who previously disagreed with women preaching—described Dickson’s work as compelling enough to invite a “rethinking of practice.”

²⁹ We anticipate, in practice, that a woman might be invited to speak to our church on a special occasion honoring women (i.e., Mother’s Day or the weekend of our Ladies Retreat) or if a uniquely qualified and/or gifted woman was able to teach our congregation on a particular topic the elders believed needed to be addressed.

the church. There may be many in the church who are gifted to teach but do not serve as an elder.³⁰

In our own denominational tradition, there have been times when women have been called to teach the gospel and the Scriptures in a variety of congregational settings. Most famously, Lottie Moon spent her life teaching the gospel in the mainland of China so that Jesus might be made known, and, over the generations, thousands of women have served with the International Mission Board to do the same. We receive an offering each Christmas named after Lottie Moon to honor these efforts made in the name of Jesus and his Kingdom. Many of these women have also returned to the United States to give testimony to what God has done around the world in a number of American churches. In our own local context, HNW has invited women such as Bertha Smith, Iris Blue, and women who were members of the congregation to speak, teach, give testimony, pray, and read Scripture in the course of a worship service. Given this practice, we reason that as long as the elders of the church continue to oversee and handle the majority of the teaching of the congregation, we remain well within the practices of a healthy New Testament church.

Deacons: As churches were started, two “church offices” seemed to emerge in the local congregations: deacons and elders. (Some argue for a third position—bishop—that oversaw groups of congregations, but the Greek in the original manuscripts is not always clear. It might have been the case in biblical times that there were “elders” overseeing house churches with “bishops” overseeing groups of house churches.)

The office of deacon was likely created in Acts 6:1-7 when a controversy arose surrounding the distribution of food to widows. The apostles believed their primary ministry was to the Word of God and prayer, so they had the church choose from among themselves seven men with good reputations and full of the Holy Spirit, to oversee this task. Most biblical scholars assume these were the first deacons.

When Paul wrote Timothy to aid him in the starting of new churches, he gave a list of qualifications for deacons. They are found in 1 Timothy 3:8-11. The ESV reads:

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear

³⁰ Some have argued that since the New Testament does not allow female elders and because one of the qualifications of elders is the ability to teach, this means that women cannot teach. This argument claims that the “office” of elder and the “function” (read: teaching) cannot be separated. We readily agree that all elders must be able to teach, as the Scriptures say, but we do not agree that only elders are able to teach. In Ephesians we read that God gave “apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers.” This passage in no way argues that those gifts are limited only to elders in the church. In other words, no one argues that only elders can prophesy. No one argues that only elders can evangelize. Consequently, it makes sense to interpret that list consistently and decide that those who are not elders can also teach—if they have gifting and good doctrine. Sam Storms is helpful and quite easy to read on this particular front. Cf. Sam Storms, “Is it Biblically Permissible For A Woman To Be Called a ‘Pastor’?”, October 28, 2019, <https://www.samstorms.org/enjoying-god-blog/post/is-it-biblically-permissible-for-a-woman-to-be-called-a-pastor->

conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Earlier in the same chapter, Paul discusses the qualifications of elders. But he never mentions qualifications for their wives. That's odd, given that elders are to oversee the church. Why would Paul choose to give qualifications to the wives of deacons but not those of elders? Upon study of verse 11, you discover that the word translated as "wives" (Γυναικας) can equally be translated as "women." Our conclusion is that Paul is, in fact, not addressing the wives of deacons but rather female deacons. This makes a great deal of sense in the logic of the passage, as Paul seems to be addressing (in order): elders, then male deacons, then female deacons, then all deacons. If you notice the qualifications given for female deacons in verse 11, they parallel the qualifications given for male deacons. Paul probably does not mention "one husband" in the description of female deacons in the way he mentions "one wife" with the male deacons, because while men might have multiple wives in a polytheistic culture, women would not.

Additionally, in Romans 16:1, Paul refers to Phoebe as a δῆκονος of the church. Many English translations render that word as servant, but the Greek can just as easily be translated "deacon." Phoebe was likely the one to deliver this letter to Rome—no small task—and one easily imagined as a task given to a deacon. Furthermore, there are several references in ancient church sources referring to female deacons;³¹ there are installation prayers attributed to the apostles referring to female deacons;³² Calvin refers to female deacons in his *Institutes*;³³ Spurgeon refers to female deacons in his sermons.³⁴ It seems the Bible and the early church made allowances for female deacons, so it makes sense for HNW to do the same.³⁵

³¹ In A.D. 111 Pliny, Governor of Bithynia, reported questioning, under torture, two women who called themselves deaconesses concerning Christian rites according to V. M. Sinton, "Deaconess," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 262.

³² *Apostolic Constitutions*, Book VIII, circa 500 AD gives such a prayer.

³³ Calvin: "For deaconesses were appointed, not to soothe God by chantings or unintelligible murmurs, and spend the rest of their time in idleness; but to perform a public ministry of the Church toward the poor, and to labour with all zeal, assiduity, and diligence, in offices of charity."

³⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 13 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1867), 589, and C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 51 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1905), 259.

³⁵ How, precisely, the introduction of female deacons would come about within the HNW church body is a matter of discussion and discernment yet to be had. Our task here is simply to demonstrate that the Scripture makes allowance for such a development. The elders and deacons of HNW will work together in determining how to proceed on this front.

Elders: Given all of the equality between men and women mentioned in this study thus far, ***it may surprise*** you to discover that our best understanding of the New Testament and ancient church history ***does not*** make allowance for female elders.

The same language that seems to clearly allow females to take part in teaching and serving as deacons has similar syntactical limitations that we believe makes it clear the role of elder is reserved for men. While Scripture never clearly says so, our best guess is that this limitation is somehow tied to the picture of marriage and family given in Ephesians 5 in its antidote to the curse, as we will discuss below.

In both places we read about the qualifications of elders—1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1—there is no grammatical concession given that could be translated to render female elders in the way there is regarding deacons. For example, there is not a reference to “the women” that could be taken to mean “wives of elders” or “women elders.”

Furthermore, Jesus—for all his radicality—never chose a woman to be a member of the Twelve. Yes, he allowed women disciples; yes, he allowed Mary to study at his feet in the house of Lazarus; yes, he interacted with women in ways that were shocking for his day and age, i.e., the Samaritan woman at the well. Given all of these intentionally provocative interactions with women, Jesus never chose to invite a woman to be a member of the Twelve. Some have argued that Jesus chose not to do this in order to give his movement credibility in the ancient world,³⁶ but this seems unlikely. Jesus had no problems choosing to be controversial in other areas, so it makes little sense for him to suddenly adopt a different approach with regard to women in the role of the Twelve. His decisions to invite female disciples yet only allow men to be part of the Twelve seems connected to some sort of division that, while not totally clear, we believe was intended to model leadership in the church.

Why is this?

Although the New Testament does not explicitly explain this reasoning, ***we believe the reasoning circles back to the Garden***. What better way to ensure ***men reject passivity and accept responsibility than to place them in a position of leadership in the church (in addition to their household)?*** In doing so, it models the position of responsibility given in the family in Ephesians 5, and it is a consistent redemptive reminder—men shirked their responsibility of leading and guiding in the Garden; they ought not do such a thing again. With male elders, the example of men rejecting passivity is placed before the male members of the local congregation, serving a model for men in their personal and family lives.

Likewise, by elevating women to previously unknown heights in leadership in the ancient world, the image of God is proclaimed in women through the use of their gifts (ministering, teaching, serving as a deacon, etc.) while simultaneously placing them in a position ***where they would be reminded to not act as if they are not part of a larger family of faith—just as in the family design from the Garden***. In doing so,

³⁶ N.T. Wright, for example.

both men and women exhibit qualities of God's character, help shepherd the church under the Headship of Jesus, and yet maintain the different redemptive paths God gave them to run until the Heavenly City descends.³⁷

Practically speaking, we take this to mean that the elders of HNW should model a family and lovingly shepherd the **entire congregation** by listening to the women of the congregation when important decisions are made that affect the entire congregation. This might include informal conversations or perhaps receiving insight from female staff members or inviting female church members into meetings and discussions to make certain no point of view is overlooked. The goal and role of elder is to model Christlike love and deference to one another, so we anticipate elders will engage in this sort of dialogue.

Staff Members: Given all of this, it seems abundantly clear that women can serve on staff at HNW, as long as they do not serve in the capacity of elder. They can lead and teach ministries that are deemed appropriate by the elders of the church, and they can use the gifts God has given them. Additionally, if the elders are making a consequential decision, it would be wise for the elders to consult these (and other qualified) women to make certain any decision rendered by the church would take the women of HNW into account. The elders of HNW celebrate the gifting of the women of our congregation and encourage them to use those gifts to fullest allowance within the New Testament.

Consequently, whatever titles are given to the staff members of HNW, they should be used to differentiate between those who serve in the function of elder and those who serve in other ministerial functions. Additionally, outside of the function of elder, titles should be common and not differentiated based on difference of gender.

At HNW, the men who serve as elders **and** in a clergy role will be given the title of Pastor.³⁸ This means that a limited number of individuals on staff at HNW will have the title of Pastor. Those who serve in a clergy role on staff but are not elders will have the title of Minister. This can be men or women.³⁹ These individuals may have shepherding or teaching responsibilities, but would fall under the watchcase and supervision of the

³⁷ This position of elder does not mean that only men have wisdom or that men alone can teach. Clearly teachers are mentioned in other passages (i.e., Ephesians 4:11) that are not identified synonymously with elders. So while all elders must be able to teach, all teachers must not be elders.

³⁸ In accordance with the bylaws of HNW, Article XIII, Section 2, (a).

³⁹ Sam Storms has convincingly argued that the word "pastor" should be seen as a function of the church leadership and not as a leadership title. Storms concludes that if we use the biblical term elder for those in leadership, then anyone could bear the moniker of pastor. Because our church has historically used "pastor" and "elder" synonymously (as laid out in our bylaws), we are opting to use "pastor" for those who are also elders and "minister" for other clergy members. His piece, "Is it Biblically Permissible For A Woman To Be Called a 'Pastor'?" from October 28, 2019 is available at: <https://www.samstorms.org/enjoying-god-blog/post/is-it-biblically-permissible-for-a-woman-to-be-called-a-pastor->

Elder Council of HNW. Consequently, any staff title at HNW is open to men or women, with the exception of Pastor/Elder.

Conclusion

Men and women are both supremely valued. They are the capstone of creation. God is not attempting to degrade women nor elevate men based on the roles given men and women in the church and in the home. Instead, He is working to create a culture of mutual love and submission that reflects the love given by God to humanity in Jesus. This means embracing the fact that men and women have equal worth and yet also have differences that ought to be embraced. Our hope is that HNW will live this loving pattern and that the church will embrace it as such.