

**Timeless Yet Timely:  
An Examination of the Biblical Principle of Headship and Its Applications**

by

Kristen A. Meyer

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Master of Arts Degree in Theological Studies

Graduate Studies

Martin Luther College

New Ulm, MN

April 2022

**Signature Page**

Date:

This thesis paper has been examined and approved.

Review Committee:

---

(Name typed below line), Chair

---

(Name typed below line)

---

(Name typed below line)

Approved:

---

John Meyer  
Director of Graduate Studies

## ABSTRACT

The biblical roles of head and helper were established in the Garden of Eden before sin came into the world and therefore still exist today. However, the application of these roles changes from time to time, place to place, and culture to culture.

A careful examination of the principle of headship and its applications separates the “timeless” from the “timely” and helps distinguish unchanging doctrine from changing applications. Case studies of four women in Acts and the Pauline Epistles give a glimpse into the service of women in the earliest days of the Christian church and provide valuable context for women’s service in the church today. A look at my own experiences (both positive and negative) related to the principle of headship and its applications demonstrates how this principle plays out today and offers the perspective of a confessional Lutheran female serving her church in a variety of roles.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing of this thesis has been a labor of love from start to finish, and words are inadequate to express how privileged and blessed I am to be able to write both academically and personally on a subject so near and dear to me.

Thank you to Pastor Kyle Bitter, who spent countless hours discussing the principle of headship and the roles of men and women with me. You pushed me to examine, clarify, and refine my thinking on the subject, and for that I am eternally grateful. You also never failed to have time to answer a question or engage in a discussion, even when I am certain you had many other ministry tasks occupying your time. Your comments and editing have made this a better thesis, and your roles as my pastor, my friend, and my partner in ministry have made me a better worker in God's harvest field.

Thank you to Professor Steve Pagels, who planted the seed of writing Chapters 3 and 4. Without that suggestion and prompting, this thesis likely would have turned out vastly different and significantly inferior. I am so grateful for your insistence that my personal insights, struggles, and experiences were indeed appropriate for an academic thesis and for your prompting to intentionally highlight my unique perspective as a confessional Lutheran female.

Thank you to the (current and recently former) pastors of St. John's Lutheran Church in Wauwatosa, WI—Joel Leyrer, Eric Schroeder, and Kyle Bitter—who have supported and encouraged me both in my MATS studies and in my service to St. John's.

It is a privilege having you as my shepherds, and I thank my God every time I remember you.

Finally, thank you to the members of my committee, Dr. Rich Gurgel and Prof. Paul O. Wendland, and especially to my advisor, Dr. Keith Wessel. The newness of the MATS program made the writing of this thesis an interesting ride, and I am so thankful for all your assistance and guidance during the process.

## Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>CHAPTER I: THE DOCTRINE OF HEADSHIP.....</b>	<b>12</b>
Hermeneutical Approaches.....	13
<i>Ezer</i> and Headship.....	20
The Order of Creation and 1 Timothy 2.....	27
Headship and 1 Corinthians.....	31
“Head and Helper” Revisited.....	40
<b>CHAPTER II: WOMEN IN ACTS AND THE PAULINE EPISTLES.....</b>	<b>48</b>
Lydia: Head of a House Church?.....	50
Priscilla: A Teacher of Men?.....	55
Junia: A Female Apostle?.....	60
Phoebe: Deaconess and Patron?.....	65
Deaconesses: Women Teachers and Preachers?.....	71
One Final Historical Caution.....	75
<b>CHAPTER III: THE BLESSINGS OF HEADSHIP.....</b>	<b>78</b>
Guiding Principles.....	80
At My Congregation.....	84
At Wisconsin Lutheran College.....	88
Across the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS).....	93
<b>CHAPTER IV: WHERE’S THE FENCE? (IS THERE EVEN ONE?).....</b>	<b>99</b>
Guiding Principles, Part 2.....	100
Voters’ Assemblies.....	104
Other Leadership Roles.....	111
Headship at WLC.....	119
Sticky Situations in the WELS.....	125
Can vs. Should Revisited.....	130
What? So What? Now What?.....	133
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>141</b>

## INTRODUCTION

In the midst of all things pandemic, an anniversary passed relatively quietly in the summer of 2020. On August 18, 1920, Congress ratified the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment and gave women the right to vote. Just over 100 years later, we live in a time and place where women enjoy unprecedented freedom. Congresswoman, stay-at-home mom, CEO, astronaut, doctor, nurse, teacher, lawyer, engineer, and even vice president—never before have women had so many paths available to them.

And yet, there is often a sharp contrast between a society that offers seemingly endless possibilities for women and a church body where it can feel as though more doors are closed for women than are open. When I tell people that I belong to the WELS, I commonly hear, “That’s the church that doesn’t let women vote, isn’t it?” Passages like 1 Corinthians 14:34 (“*Women should remain silent in the churches...*”) and 1 Timothy 2:12 (“*I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man...*”) can sound archaic and outdated to our modern ears.<sup>1</sup>

These certainly aren’t my favorite Scripture passages, and I struggle with my sinful reaction to them. Part of this struggle is internal, coming from my personality, gifts and abilities, and callings and vocations; part of it is external, coming from various voices and entities across the WELS. As a female who is generally not hesitant to speak up on matters I feel strongly about, I have difficulty balancing 1 Corinthians 14:34 with my

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quoted passages come from NIV84. It is true that NIV84 uses male-dominated language in places where this language is not necessary; a primary example is the translation of ἀδελφός (*adelphos*) as “brothers” rather than “brothers and sisters” throughout the New Testament (as NIV2011 opted to do). However, NIV84 also retains male-dominated language in places where this language is crucial to nuance in the text. One such example can be seen in Galatians 3:26, where υἱοὶ (*yhios*, “sons”) brings to mind the legal rights and inheritance given to a male heir. Using “children,” as NIV2011 does, loses this concept of inheritance.

desire to express my thoughts and opinions in the church. As a college professor and department head, I have difficulty balancing 1 Timothy 2:12 with my chosen profession and the authority which I have been given. As a female blessed with gifts of leadership, I have difficulty balancing papers written by WELS theologians that assert “man was created first for leadership”<sup>2</sup> or that “a leadership role [was] assigned to man before the Fall,”<sup>3</sup> with my desire to use my gifts of leadership but still live within my helper role. And as a female who always wants to know “why?”—yet desires to serve in the fullest way possible—I have difficulty balancing seemingly “unnecessarily restrictive” practices in my local congregation and across the synod with my certainty that these practices are indeed faithful applications of the biblical principle of headship, although perhaps not the *only* faithful applications.

So what is this WELS female, one who loves her congregation and her synod but still desires to serve more fully than she is currently permitted, to do? First and foremost, time needs to be spent in the Word. Examining the relevant Scripture passages on the doctrine of headship is a valuable exercise, especially through a Lutheran hermeneutical lens. When we treat all Scripture as God-breathed—as writings verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit—and allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, we can view all of Paul’s writings as authentic and teaching the same message rather than “an increasingly reactionary movement from the original Pauline context to the more restricted setting of a later

---

<sup>2</sup> Carl J. Lawrenz, “The Role of Man and Woman According to Holy Scripture,” n.d., 4, <http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/2951/LawrenzRole.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Wayne Mueller, “The Role of Women in the Church with Special Reference to Genesis 1-3,” 1980, 4, <http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/3379/MuellerWomen.pdf>.



generation.”<sup>4</sup> When we employ the historical-grammatical method and treat Scripture as history and as literature by understanding the historical setting, cultural context, and structure and flow of the text, we can better see why, for example, we no longer hold to Paul’s directives on head coverings and length of hair but do hold to his directives on women exercising authority. And when we differentiate between principle and application, we can both subscribe to “scholarship [that] asserts that this text [1 Timothy 2:13-14] is a teaching for all time”<sup>5</sup> and still allow for different churches applying this timeless text in different ways.

Studying women leaders in Acts and in Paul’s epistles is another antidote to my struggle. Some women appear prominently throughout the pages of these letters, such as Lydia and Priscilla. From Luke and Paul’s writings, we can learn much about these women’s roles and responsibilities in the early church, roles and responsibilities that have relevance for women in the church today as they both reflect and transcend culture. Some women are mentioned only briefly, such as Phoebe<sup>6</sup> and Junia.<sup>7</sup> Here, we are faced with the task of making conjectures on the roles they might have played while still rejecting the idea that these texts “need to be rewritten...to remove the bias of male historiography and to make visible the dim or hidden figures of women in the church’s story, including the astonishing roles they played in leadership.”<sup>8</sup> And some women are not named at all

---

<sup>4</sup> Dorothy A. Lee, *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament: Reclaiming the Biblical Vision for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 100.

<sup>5</sup> Lee, *Ministry of Women*, 122.

<sup>6</sup> Romans 16:1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 16:7.

<sup>8</sup> Lee, *Ministry of Women*, 170.

but instead are grouped together under the general category of “deaconesses.” In these situations, we can turn to extra-biblical sources for guidance, such as the *Apostolic Constitutions*, which “spelled out the duties of deaconesses and included instructions for their ordination”<sup>9</sup> while still balancing the fact that these duties would have been carried out in harmony with the biblical principle of headship.

One additional antidote to this struggle is decidedly more personal and tailored to my unique situation. Without meaning to overstate my importance or role, through the various vocations I hold I am blessed to serve in a number of positions in the church (both my local congregation and the synod at large), including some positions of leadership. Through my MATS coursework now finding its culmination in this thesis, I have been blessed to sit at the feet of college and seminary professors and study various aspects of theology from both an academic and a spiritual perspective. Through my work on the WELS Women’s Ministry Executive team, I have been blessed to write on the subject of headship and share thoughts on this subject from the perspective of a confessional Lutheran female. And through open and honest relationships with my pastors, I am blessed to be in a congregational environment where questions on the roles of men and women are welcomed and conversation on this topic is viewed as an opportunity for growth for all involved rather than a challenge to authority or established practices.

All of these antidotes come together in the writing of this thesis—a thesis intended to be a marriage of academic and practical. Chapter 1 begins with the academic by looking at the key hermeneutical principles guiding this thesis, especially the concept

---

<sup>9</sup> Leanne M. Dzubinski and Anneke H. Stasson, *Women in the Mission of the Church: Their Opportunities and Obstacles throughout Christian History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 51.

of biblical principle vs. application. I will explore the Old Testament use of helper (עֵזֶר, *ezer*) and the order of creation and examine the relevant New Testament passages on the headship principle and the role of men and women. Chapter 2 brings together the academic and practical by studying women leaders in Acts and the Pauline Epistles, especially Lydia, Priscilla, Phoebe, Junia, and female deaconesses. Chapters 3 and 4 bring the practical to the forefront by reflecting on how the principle of headship plays out in today's modern society as viewed through my lens: the lens of a confessional Lutheran female serving her church in a variety of roles. Chapter 3 explores the blessings of headship that I've experienced in my various vocations, while Chapter 4 looks at some case studies—"sticky situations," if you will—in applying the headship principle. Through this marriage of academic and practical, I pray that this thesis gives voice to my struggles currently shared in various forms by other women across the WELS while still demonstrating a commitment to the underlying biblical principle as informed by well-researched study.

## CHAPTER I: THE DOCTRINE OF HEADSHIP

One of my pastors is growing his hair out. I don't mean he's going from a buzz cut to something slightly longer; I mean it's been about three years since he's had anything more than a trim, and his hair is now well past his shoulders. These lengthening locks have produced quite the social experiment at church—from jokes to a “pick the haircut date” pool to comments from more than one visitor expressing admiration and wonder that we actually have Jesus as a pastor of our congregation. But as far as I know, no one has reported my pastor to the district president for violating 1 Corinthians 11:14.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, we still hold to Paul's prohibition found in 1 Timothy 2:11-12<sup>11</sup>, a prohibition on women exercising authority in the church. Why? What's the difference?

In short, the difference is *hermeneutics*: the science and art of biblical interpretation. This concept is crucially important when it comes to the doctrine of headship.<sup>12</sup> When reading an author's take on a Scripture passage, when weighing an argument on the role a woman might have played in the early church, when determining in what roles a woman can serve today, the guiding principles and basic assumptions need to be made clear. If these guiding principles are not fully understood and these assumptions are not fully explained, defending one's position on the principle of headship and its applications turns into a “Because I said so” game. Before diving into

---

<sup>10</sup> *Does not the very nature of things teach out that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him...*

<sup>11</sup> *A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.*

<sup>12</sup> And, of course, crucially important when it comes to biblical interpretation in general.

study on the principle of headship, then, the various hermeneutical approaches to this topic need to be considered.

### **Hermeneutical Approaches**

In examining hermeneutical approaches, we'll begin on the far left end of the spectrum.<sup>13</sup> Although secular feminist writers do not all reach exactly the same conclusions, we can still speak in broad strokes and identify a number of overall guiding principles when it comes to how these feminist writers consider the biblical text—both the document as a whole and particular texts related to the headship principle.<sup>14</sup> First and foremost, men and women are to be considered as absolute equals. Feminist writers will point to passages like Genesis 1:26-27<sup>15</sup> and Galatians 3:27-28<sup>16</sup> to demonstrate the equality of men and women in God's eyes. This equality extends to all areas of church life, including but not limited to equality in the roles that men and women are allowed to play and responsibilities that they are allowed to assume in the church. In particular, “through baptism all Christians have the capacity to communicate Christ to others and to

---

<sup>13</sup> Speaking of “liberal” and “conservative” is not particularly helpful when it comes to the principle of headship, because the distinctions are not so neat and clean. “Egalitarian” and “complementarian” are better terms and will be used throughout this thesis. Here, however, imagine a spectrum with secular feminists more toward the left, evangelical feminists more in the center, and WELS Lutherans more toward the right.

<sup>14</sup> Besides the broad guiding principles discussed here, secular feminist writers also have a variety of opinions and interpretations on specific passages of Scripture and specific roles that women played in Acts and the Pauline Epistles. The latter will be discussed more fully later in this chapter.

<sup>15</sup> *Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the seas and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

<sup>16</sup> *You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

share his life in multiple forms of ministry. As there is no restriction on the basis of race, so there can be no restriction by way of gender.”<sup>17</sup> The absolute equality of males and females provides the reason for this lack of restriction; the practical benefits reinforce its correctness. “Feminism advocates a community of equals that provides full opportunity for all the members, women and men alike, to use their God-given gifts to the benefit of all.”<sup>18</sup>

It is interesting that secular feminist writers hold passages like Genesis 1 and Galatians 3 in such high regard, because their overall view of Scripture is much less positive. For the purposes of this thesis, we will consider two facets of this overall view: the perspective of secular feminists regarding historical accounts such as the Gospels and Acts, and their attitude toward the theological teachings found in the Epistles, primarily in Paul’s writings. There is, of course, no acceptance whatsoever that any of the Scriptures is inspired or inerrant.

When it comes to historical accounts recorded in the Gospels and Acts, these accounts are viewed as suspect at best and flat-out mischaracterizations of the actual events they claim to record at worst. Women certainly played more of a role than was recorded, so these writers say, with a key assumption being the *implied* presence of women. “Unless it is clear that [women] were absent, such as in the Sanhedrin, the male-only Jewish council, we should assume that women are present in many scenes alongside men.”<sup>19</sup> This assumption is necessary because of the culture at the time these events were

---

<sup>17</sup> Lee, *Ministry of Women*, 183.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara E. Reid, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: The Order of St. Benedict, Inc., 1996), 7.

<sup>19</sup> Lee, *Ministry of Women*, 33.

written down. Due to a male-dominated, patristic culture, women's roles in the historical account were greatly minimized or simply eliminated altogether. This, of course, is a problem that can only be fixed by rewriting history "to remove the bias of male historiography and to make visible the dim or hidden figures of women in the church's story, including the astonishing roles they played in leadership."<sup>20</sup>

Turning to secular feminists' view of the Pauline Epistles, we first have to start with the authenticity (or lack thereof) of Paul's writings. It is generally agreed that Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon are authentically Pauline.<sup>21</sup> There is considerable disagreement among secular feminist writers as to the authenticity of the rest of the writings attributed to Paul.<sup>22</sup> The rest of the supposed Pauline Epistles were written later, partially in response to a church where "the leadership of women [was] regarded, more and more, as one of the sure signs of heresy and a disordered community."<sup>23</sup> Even in Paul's authentic letters, we still see a male-dominated and inherent patristic culture, and therefore we must "not simply...reinterpret biblical texts within their patriarchal framework, but [also] dismantle the patriarchal structure itself and replace it with an alternate version."<sup>24</sup> In other words, Paul's letters were a product of their time and place, and we need to view them accordingly.

---

<sup>20</sup> Lee, *Ministry of Women*, 170.

<sup>21</sup> There is, however, disagreement as to whether the *full* contents of these letters are authentically Pauline. In particular, there is conjecture that 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 was added later and was not part of Paul's original letter.

<sup>22</sup> In particular, there is extreme skepticism as to whether the Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy and Titus) are authentically Pauline or were written under Paul's name by his disciples.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Malone, *Women & Christianity: The First Thousand Years*, vol. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 82. One assumes the author has in mind the Montanist movement of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cent CE.

<sup>24</sup> Reid, *Better Part*, 8.

Moving toward the center of the spectrum, we find another type of feminist writers: evangelical feminists. Led by figures such as Rebecca Merrill Groothuis and Aida Besancon Spencer and organizations such as Christians for Biblical Equality, this group also espouses a message of biblical equality that “denies that there is any created or otherwise God-ordained hierarchy *based solely on gender*.”<sup>25</sup> The hermeneutical principles for arriving at this conclusion, however, differ significantly from secular feminist writers.

First and foremost, it is important to note that evangelical feminists “acknowledge God as the primary author of Scripture.”<sup>26</sup> As such, there are no questions about the authenticity of the historical accounts recorded in the Gospels and Acts or the writings of Paul in his Epistles. Nor is there the view that these texts were primarily written to silence women or that women’s contributions and leadership roles were intentionally hidden or obfuscated. A quick skim of hermeneutical principles in Roger Nicole’s article also produces much that we as WELS Lutherans would agree with: considering the genre and literary form of a text, primarily by determining literal vs. figurative language; differentiating between prescriptive and descriptive passages;<sup>27</sup> and reading Scripture in its context rather than “lifting a passage from its context and thus incurring the danger of misunderstanding and misapplying it.”<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 13.

<sup>26</sup> Roger Nicole, “Biblical Hermeneutics: Basic Principles and Questions of Gender,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 355.

<sup>27</sup> There is, of course, considerable debate over *which* passages are prescriptive and which are “merely” descriptive. This will be discussed further later in the thesis.

<sup>28</sup> Nicole, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” 360.



However, there are also other hermeneutical principles at play which produce a much different view both on the principle of headship and on its applications in the church today. One of these returns us to Galatians 3:27-28, a passage mentioned above as favored by secular feminists. Many evangelical feminists view this passage as an “interpretive center,” using it as the starting point—the clear text—for understanding all of Paul’s other writings on the headship principle. Other passages from Paul, such as 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 14:33b-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 are viewed as “obscure” passages and should be given less weight than the clear passages.<sup>29</sup> In addition, an understanding of the culture of Paul’s day is also important in interpreting these “obscure” passages. This culture differed greatly from ours, particularly in relation to the roles of men and women, and therefore, what was normative for believers at Paul’s time is not to be interpreted as normative for believers today. In other words, “the problem is not with the principle but with how extensive its implementation should be.”<sup>30</sup> Questions must be asked about whether the historical context limits the application of a text, questions that evangelical feminists answer differently than confessional Lutherans.

Speaking of confessional Lutherans, we are now ready to examine the hermeneutical principles we employ in our use of the historical-grammatical method.<sup>31</sup> As mentioned above, we share some of these principles with evangelical feminists,<sup>32</sup> such

---

<sup>29</sup> Paul W Felix Sr., “The Hermeneutics of Evangelical Feminism,” *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 38. Although the hermeneutic of using clear passages is indeed valid, we as Lutherans differ from evangelical feminists in our handling of clear and obscure passages, as will be discussed later in this section.

<sup>30</sup> Felix Sr., “Hermeneutics of Feminism,” 40.

<sup>31</sup> Virtually all of the material in this section comes from class notes provided by Prof. Paul O. Wendland for THE 5003: Biblical Hermeneutics, a course offered in the MLC M.A. in Theological Studies curriculum (MATS).

as holding to 2 Timothy 3:16,<sup>33</sup> viewing Scripture as literature and thus considering its genre and literary form, and reading Scripture in its context rather than pulling out isolated “proof passages.” We also read Scripture as sacred, striving to let Scripture interpret Scripture,<sup>34</sup> differentiating between principle and application, and determining whether a passage is prescriptive or descriptive.

One key place where we diverge from evangelical feminists can be seen in our consideration of the historical context of Paul’s Epistles. Like evangelical feminists, we strive to understand the culture of Paul’s day and the situations in which the recipients of his letters found themselves. However, we do not believe this discounts Paul’s writings from being normative today. Paul’s writings reflect the culture of his day and yet also have timeless relevance for the church of all time. Although the application may look different in our day, we still seek to honor the timeless principle found in the biblical text.

We also diverge from evangelical feminists when it comes to the analogy of faith.<sup>35</sup> Rather than searching for one clear passage that can serve as an “interpretive center,” we consider the sum total of all that Scripture has to say on a subject. It is true that some of what Scripture says will be clearer than other parts, and we do agree with letting the clear passages help interpret the less clear passages. But we do not view these

---

<sup>32</sup> As was mentioned in footnote 29 and as will be considered in the next section, the fact that we share some of these hermeneutical principles does not always lead us to the same conclusions as evangelical feminists, particularly when it comes to the roles women can play and the positions they can hold in the church.

<sup>33</sup> *All Scripture is God-breathed...*

<sup>34</sup> Although the wording is shared with evangelical feminists, the application of “letting Scripture interpret Scripture” plays out slightly differently; see the next paragraph.

<sup>35</sup> This phrase refers to the same concept as “Let Scripture interpret Scripture.” And here I owe a debt of gratitude to Pastor Eric Schroeder for explaining to me that the phrase “analogy of faith” comes from the transliteration of τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως (*tēn analogian tēs pistews*) in Romans 12:6 rather than from the English word “analogy.”

less clear passages as “second-tier” Scripture or treat them as any less authoritative than the clear passages. We simply recognize that they are harder to interpret and handle them as such.

A final hermeneutical principle is somewhat tangential to the doctrine of headship, but this principle is still important enough to mention. As confessional Lutherans, we view all of Scripture through a Christocentric lens. That is, “when Lutherans approach the Holy Scriptures, then, we expect to see—both in the Old and in the New Testament—the record of God’s love for poor sinners... The entire Bible is the account of God’s love come down to save us.”<sup>36</sup> In all of Scripture, we see God’s love for us as exemplified through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, a love that shapes our identity and who we are in Christ. First and foremost, we are redeemed, blood-bought children of God. Every other aspect of our being flows from and is informed by this status, including our maleness or femaleness. Therefore, although the doctrine of headship is indeed important and worthy of study, the roles of men and women should never become our primary focus either when reading the Scriptures or when considering how each believer is a part of the body of Christ.

With this understanding of hermeneutics, that everything written in Scripture is God-breathed, a reliable account of actual historical events, and timeless doctrines along with culturally-based applications, we now turn specifically to the doctrine of headship. Scripture is a unified whole, and therefore both the Old Testament and the New Testament are relevant to our understanding of this doctrine. We begin in the Old

---

<sup>36</sup> Paul O. Wendland, “An Overview of Lutheran Hermeneutics in the 21st Century,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 110, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 194.

Testament with a consideration of the role for which Eve—and all women<sup>37</sup>—were created: the role of *ezer*, of helper.

### ***Ezer and Headship***

In October 2019, the WELS released “Male and Female in God’s World,” a new summary statement of what Scripture teaches about headship. Noteworthy in this statement was a change in language from “head” and “helper” to “selfless leading” and “selfless yielding.”<sup>38</sup> The accompanying Bible study explains the reason for the change: “Words such as ‘submit’ and ‘submission’ and ‘authority’ and ‘headship’ are all good words that have unjustly suffered greatly from...distortions and misunderstandings.”<sup>39</sup> The word “helper” is not mentioned in this quote, but its change to “selfless yielding” in the summary statement indicates that “helper” could also be a word that has unjustly suffered greatly from distortions and misunderstandings. How should we view the Hebrew word *ezer* (translated as “helper”), a word which is used in Genesis to describe Eve?

Before jumping into an examination of the use of *ezer* in the Old Testament, a quick look at the connotations of the English word “helper” is warranted. The *Oxford*

---

<sup>37</sup> This is a claim that is subject to considerable debate and one that will be supported later in this chapter.

<sup>38</sup> “Male and Female in God’s World” is currently undergoing revision, and I believe the intent is to share the revised version at district conventions in the summer of 2022. I am unsure what the language will be in this newest revision: “head/helper,” “selfless leading/selfless yielding,” or something else entirely.

<sup>39</sup> “Bible Study—Male and Female He Created Them—Participant Study” (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, October 2019), 9, <https://synodadmin.welsrc.net/download-synodadmin/en-cristo/?wpdmdl=3422&refresh=619169ae60e231636919726&ind=1574689654338&filename=SAMaleandFemaleinGodsWorld-official-11252019.pdf>.

*English Dictionary* defines “helper” as “one who (or that which) helps or assists, an auxiliary.”<sup>40</sup> There aren’t exactly negative connotations here, but looking at the entry for “auxiliary” is interesting: “an organization which is subsidiary to a parent body, frequently performing ancillary or associated functions.”<sup>41</sup> And going one layer deeper, “ancillary” is defined as “subservient, subordinate, ministering (to).”<sup>42</sup> How accurate are these English connotations of *ezer*, the word most often translated as “helper”? Is the role of “helper” truly a lesser or lower role? Was Eve created as a subordinate to Adam?

In Genesis 2, we can clearly see that God created Eve as an *ezer*. Adam named all the animals as they passed by, but for him, no suitable helper was found. So as recorded in Genesis 2:18,<sup>43</sup> God engaged in more creative act to rectify the situation: he created Eve as an *ezer* for Adam. The relationship between Adam and Eve, the *ezer* created for him, needs to be understood in light of the use of *ezer* in the rest of the Old Testament.

Of the 21 uses of *ezer* in the Old Testament, by far the most common use is in reference to God—either in reference to God acting as an *ezer* or (more commonly) to God providing *ezer* to his people. Deuteronomy 33:26-29<sup>44</sup> shows us that this is no

---

<sup>40</sup> “Helper,” in *Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d., <https://www-oed-com.wlc.ezproxy.switchinc.org/view/Entry/85744?rskey=XnP18N&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>.

<sup>41</sup> “Auxiliary,” in *Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d., <https://www-oed-com.wlc.ezproxy.switchinc.org/view/Entry/13568?redirectedFrom=auxiliary#eid>.

<sup>42</sup> “Ancillary,” in *Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d., <https://www-oed-com.wlc.ezproxy.switchinc.org/view/Entry/7258?redirectedFrom=ancillary#eid>.

<sup>43</sup> *The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”*

<sup>44</sup> *“There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides on the heavens to help you and on the clouds in his majesty. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemy before you, saying, ‘Destroy him!’ So Israel will live in safety alone, Jacob’s spring is secure in a land of grain and new wine, where the heavens drop dew. Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will trample down their high places.”*

flawed earthly help; it is the perfect help of the almighty God, help that was an incredible blessing to the children of Israel, help that that set the Israelites apart and made them more powerful than their enemies.

This theme continues in the Psalms, where the psalmists (particularly King David) recognize and acknowledge that Israel's past success was entirely due to the Lord's help and their future success depends entirely on his continued help. There is no worry that the Lord might not be able to act as an *ezer*; there is only confidence that the Lord will indeed answer his people when they are in distress.<sup>45</sup> No matter what forces and weapons their enemies muster against them, Israel can put their trust in the Lord, their *ezer* and their shield.<sup>46</sup> Yes, David is a mighty warrior, but he still needs the *ezer* that the Lord provides. This *ezer* is solely due to the Lord's love and mercy, and it is bestowed on those who are totally and completely undeserving of it.<sup>47</sup>

To clarify the relationships between Adam and Eve denoted by the word *ezer*, we first need to recognize that in and of itself, the role of *ezer* does not imply inferiority or subordination. As explored in the preceding paragraphs, *ezer* is most often applied to God either as an *ezer* or in providing *ezer*, and this *ezer* is always given by God to human beings. Clearly, God is in no way inferior to his fallen race, and therefore Heger is correct when he says, "The word 'helper' does not indicate that the helper is inferior to the

---

<sup>45</sup> Psalm 70:1,5: *Hasten, O God, to save me; O LORD, come quickly to help me... Yet I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay.*

<sup>46</sup> Psalm 33:20: *We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield.*

<sup>47</sup> Psalm 146:5a, 7-9: *Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob... [the LORD} upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.*

person helped.”<sup>48</sup> Lawrenz and Jeske reach the same conclusion in regard to subordination: “Some have maintained that being a helper does not in itself imply a subordinate position. This is correct, for in the Holy Scriptures God himself urges us to turn above all to him as our helper.”<sup>49</sup>

But what about Eve specifically being created as an *ezer* for Adam? Is she inferior or subordinate to Adam in this particular relational situation? The question of inferiority is easier to answer. Looking back at Genesis 1:27, we see that God created both Adam and Eve in his image. In Galatians 3:26-28, Paul emphasizes this lack of inferiority of believers before God as related to justification. In the eyes of God, both Adam and Eve were his perfect creation, and both male and female believers are his dearly-loved, blood-bought children. In God’s eyes, all are equal in their sinfulness and in their need for a Savior, and therefore Eve is not inferior to Adam in terms of her status or stature before God.

As to the question of whether Eve was subordinate to Adam, it is helpful to first understand exactly what we mean by subordinate.<sup>50</sup> Clark explains it this way: “The English word ‘subordination’ literally means ‘ordered under,’ and its Greek counterpart means almost the same ... The term ‘subordination’ is one of the best translations of a Greek word (*hypostasso*) [ὑποτάσσω, the verb translated as “submit” in 1 Corinthians

---

<sup>48</sup> Paul Heger, *Women in the Bible, Qumran, and Early Rabbinic Literature* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2014), 14.

<sup>49</sup> Carl J. Lawrenz and John C. Jeske, *A Commentary on Genesis 1-11* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 116.

<sup>50</sup> I would be hard-pressed to decide whether “helper” or “subordinate” carries more of a negative connotation. That’s a large part of what makes this discussion so hard: the English terms we use are charged with emotion. Despite these emotions and negative connotations, I still believe that the pros of using “helper” outweigh the cons. I am less convinced of this for the terms “subordinate” and “subordination.”

14:34].”<sup>51</sup> God created Adam and Eve for different roles: Adam for the role of head and Eve for the role of helper. “God the Creator made the woman to be a fitting helper and companion for man who was created first.”<sup>52</sup> Relationships that allowed God’s newly-created world to be orderly rather than chaotic existed in all aspects of this world, including the relationship between Adam and Eve.

A further look at the Hebrew text adds another facet to the relationship between Adam and Eve. Not only is Eve designated as a helper for Adam, she is a helper suitable for him (נֶגֶד, *neḡed* or, more often, *kenegdô*). The Hebrew term literally means “what is conspicuous” or “what is in front of” and indicates a correspondence between Adam and Eve. Adam saw all of the animals pass in front of him, but none of them were suitable because none of them corresponded to him. In contrast, God created Eve as a suitable helper for Adam, and her suitability flowed out of the equality that Adam and Eve shared in their creation in the image of God. As Mathews explains, “The focus is on the equality of the two [Adam and Eve] in terms of their essential constitution. Man and woman share in the ‘human’ sameness that cannot be found elsewhere in creation among the beasts.”<sup>53</sup>

A helpful concept of sameness and subordination can be seen in a baseball game. As members of the same team, the pitcher and catcher correspond to each other and work together to script the game. This is especially seen in the type of pitches that are thrown. While the catcher suggests each type of pitch, the pitcher has the choice of whether to

---

<sup>51</sup> Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1980), 23.

<sup>52</sup> Lawrenz and Jeske, *Genesis*, 156.

<sup>53</sup> Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, vol. 1A, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 213.



accept the catcher's sign or wave it off and request another. Viewed in this way, the catcher is subordinate to—is “ordered under”—the pitcher. Both the pitcher and the catcher are of vital importance to the team's victory or defeat, but the pitcher has the ultimate choice in what pitches are thrown.

Now that the concept of subordinate is more clearly understood, let's return to our original question: was Eve subordinate to Adam? A seemingly logical syllogism, based on the use of the word *ezer*, would say no: God is a helper to his fallen creation; God is not inferior to his fallen creation; Eve is a helper to Adam; therefore, Eve is not inferior to Adam. Some theologians agree with this syllogism, focusing on Eve being a counterpart and complement to Adam rather than being subordinate to Adam. Klassen favors avoiding this idea of subordination altogether: “Thus the word ‘help, helper’ should only be used if it can provide a similar nuance of meaning and avoid the idea of subordination, of being an add-on.”<sup>54</sup> Rosenzweig cites the translation of Genesis 2:20b in ancient Jewish tradition as support, noting that the phrases “is equal to,” “outweighs,” “surpasses,” or “above all” are most commonly used when rendering “a helper suitable to him” in English.<sup>55</sup> And Flesher takes this lack of subordination as a foregone conclusion, further deducing, “If Eve is designated by God in Genesis 2 as an *ezer* and the word *ezer* does not connote subordination, but rather salvation, then Eve is not being designed a servant in Genesis 2, but a savior of some kind.”<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Randy Klassen, “Ezer and Exodus,” *Direction* 35, no. 1 (2006): 20.

<sup>55</sup> Michael L. Rosenzweig, “A Helper Equal to Him,” *Judaism* 35, no. 3 (Summer 1986): 279.

<sup>56</sup> LeAnn Snow Flesher, “What the @#%! Is a Helpmate?,” *Review & Expositor* 115, no. 4 (2018): 456. However, since sin did not enter the world until Genesis 3, one might ask why Eve would be designated as a savior in Genesis 2. From what would Eve been a savior?

On the surface, this argument seems to work—and yet it contains a fatal flaw: that of comparing Eve to God in every way. Yes, we can agree with Flesher that the concept of *ezer* as applied by God to himself throughout the pages of Scripture does not convey subordination. We can further agree with Flesher that Eve was functioning in a God-like role in providing assistance for Adam and helping him perform tasks that he could not perform on his own. We can even agree with Rosenzweig in considering Eve a helper “equal to” Adam in status and importance before God.

However, the concept of *ezer* as particularly applied to Eve as an *ezer* for Adam can also convey subordination without conceding any of the above points. Lawrenz and Jeske favor the term “unity-subordination” when describing the specifics of Adam and Eve’s relationship.<sup>57</sup> Clark also expands upon the nature of this unity-subordination:

In some ways, the term ‘complementarity’ best sums up the relationship between the man and the woman in Genesis. ‘Complementarity’ implies an equality, a correspondence between man and woman. It also implies a difference. Woman complements man in a way that makes her a helper to him. Her role is not identical to his. Their complementarity allows them to be a partnership in which each needs the other, because each provides something different from what the other provides.<sup>58</sup>

We need to take care not to extend the analogy too far, but we can again compare Adam and Eve to a pitcher and catcher in a baseball game. They worked together to “call the pitches” during their life here on earth. As the head, though, Adam was the one ultimately responsible for deciding which pitch to throw.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Lawrenz and Jeske, *Genesis*, 116.

<sup>58</sup> Clark, *Man and Woman*, 23.

<sup>59</sup> Note also that after Adam and Eve sinned, God first called to Adam and asked where he was rather than calling to Eve.

This consideration of the nature of Adam and Eve’s relationship is useful and enlightening. Thinking of *ezer* in terms of a role that God fulfills makes the categorization of “helper” much more palatable. This section is entirely academic, however, if the role of *ezer* applies only to Eve. How do we know that the role of “helper” applies to all women of all time? Answering this question and diving into the nuances of how exactly this “helper” role plays out in the church takes us to the New Testament and the writings of the apostle Paul.

### **The Order of Creation and 1 Timothy 2**

Paul addresses the principle of headship in a number of places in his letters. This paper will consider 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 11 & 14. In order to understand that this principle of headship—these roles of “head” and “helper”—do indeed apply to men and woman of all time, we must first follow Paul’s lead in 1 Timothy 2:13<sup>60</sup> and consider the teaching known as the “order of creation.”<sup>61</sup> Some understand the term to refer to the chronological sequence in which Adam and Eve were created—Adam first, then Eve—“rather than prominence of Adam over Eve.”<sup>62</sup> Others argue that the term does relate to headship and submission, but Adam is the head solely by virtue of being created first and Eve is the helper solely by virtue of being created second.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> “*For Adam was formed first, then Eve.*”

<sup>61</sup> The origin of the phrase “order of creation” is not entirely clear, and some commentators find the term more harmful than helpful. In particular, some favor the phrase “Creator’s order.”

<sup>62</sup> Andrew B. Spurgeon, “1 Timothy 2:13-15: Paul’s Retelling of Genesis 2:4-4:1,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no. 3 (September 2013): 544.

<sup>63</sup> Benjamin L. Merkle, “Paul’s Arguments from Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 and 1 Timothy 2:13-14: An Apparent Inconsistency Answered.,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 3 (September 2006): 542.

A better interpretation, however, understands that Adam and Eve were created to fulfill distinct roles in God's perfect creation. Adam was created first, but more important than sequence is the purpose for which he was created.<sup>64</sup> God created Adam for a headship role.<sup>65</sup> God put Adam in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it<sup>66</sup> and gave Adam the task of naming all the animals.<sup>67</sup> "By all of these actions, God marked him for human headship, for the leadership role."<sup>68</sup> In contrast, God created Eve specifically to be a helper for Adam, and he made this purpose clear at the very beginning of time.<sup>69</sup>

Because Paul references the order of creation in 1 Timothy 2 and bases his prohibition on women teaching or exercising authority on this relationship between Adam and Eve, answering the question of whether head/helper roles still apply today becomes much easier. Remembering that head/helper roles were established in perfection before the fall into sin and that "no new law was given after creation regarding the position of women"<sup>70</sup> makes it still easier to reject the concept that head/helper applied

---

<sup>64</sup> Although the order of creation is not really about chronology, neither is chronology irrelevant to the concept of the order of creation.

<sup>65</sup> Note, however, that this headship role was still subordinate to God.

<sup>66</sup> Genesis 2:15: *The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.*

<sup>67</sup> Genesis 2:19-20: *Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the ground.*

<sup>68</sup> Lawrenz and Jeske, *Genesis*, 115.

<sup>69</sup> Genesis 2:20b-22: *But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God causes the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.*

<sup>70</sup> Mueller, "Role of Women," 5.

only to Adam and Eve. And remembering that Eve was created to be a helper for Adam, not that a wife was created to be a helper for her husband, also addresses an objection voiced by (among others) Kelm and Becker when they posit, “Do the first three chapters of Genesis clearly establish a moral law called the ‘order of creation’ governing male/female relationships apart from marriage? The evidence seems weak.”<sup>71</sup>

With this background and understanding of the “order of creation” in mind, we now turn to Paul’s teaching on the subject of headship and submission as it relates to teaching and authority in the church in 1 Timothy 2:11-12. Secular feminists would prefer that “this text...not be read, as it sometimes is, as an indictment against all Christian women for all time, still less as a basis for excluding them from leadership.”<sup>72</sup> While evangelical feminists would be more likely to view this text as having more long-reaching implications, they also argue that this text does not restrict all woman from church leadership, positing that Paul is only restricting a certain kind of teaching: either false teaching or “teaching in a dictatorial fashion...teaching that tries to get the upper hand.”<sup>73</sup>

As a modern-day female, it is tempting to espouse these arguments and view Paul’s restriction in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 as merely cultural or only restricting a certain type of teaching. Fully following Paul’s line of thought in these verses, however, does not permit such an interpretation. Again, Paul’s reference to the order of creation is crucial

---

<sup>71</sup> Bruce Becker and Paul Kelm, “Women and the WELS: Connecting Church Practice With Scriptural Teaching,” May 2018, 3.

<sup>72</sup> Lee, *Ministry of Women*, 127.

<sup>73</sup> Linda L. Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 223.

here. As discussed previously, the order of creation and the head/helper relationship still apply today. Therefore, any acts that violate this head/helper relationship must be rejected. So Paul is not being chauvinistic or making a cultural statement in 1 Timothy 2. “The acts ruled out by Paul [of teaching and having authority] would have been contrary to God’s order of creation.”<sup>74</sup> Nor was teaching by a woman contrary to the order of creation because the woman was uneducated, untrained, or disorderly. In Paul’s day, teaching was primarily viewed “as a governing function performed by elders, masters, and others with positions of government,”<sup>75</sup> that is, a role imbued with authority. Therefore, teaching by a woman was contrary to the order of creation because a woman assumed authority in teaching. For Paul, teaching in a non-authoritative manner was inconceivable. In short, Paul bases his prohibition on women exercising authority on the order of creation. This order continues to exist today, albeit imperfectly, and therefore we also still hold to this prohibition.

A question remains, however. What roles can a woman fulfill in the church today without violating Paul’s prohibition on exercising authority? This takes us into the realm of applications, which are not timeless and will almost certainly vary from Paul’s day to ours. In short, “the difficulty in applying the passage does not arise from an unclarity in the meaning of the passage, but from the difference between the approach to teaching taken by the modern church and the approach of the early Christians.”<sup>76</sup> Before

---

<sup>74</sup> Lawrenz, “Holy Scripture,” 8.

<sup>75</sup> Clark, *Man and Woman*, 196.

<sup>76</sup> Clark, *Man and Woman*, 200.

attempting to answer this question, it will be helpful for us to examine two other sections of Paul's writings which also deal with both the principle and applications of headship.

### Headship and 1 Corinthians

Paul discusses the headship principle and its applications in two sections of 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 11:3-16<sup>77</sup> is a passage of Scripture that is fraught with interpretive difficulties, partially because of the way Paul structures this section. His argument here is somewhat meandering, traveling from principle to application and back again, and so we agree with secular feminists that "the passage is generally recognized as complex in its logic."<sup>78</sup> However, we disagree with the assertion Paul is "appealing to the understanding of his addressees [that] they must judge *for themselves* on the basis of what nature itself teaches *them*"<sup>79</sup> or that "Paul's intent...is to maintain a cultural tradition that has the effect of serving as a gender distinctive."<sup>80</sup> Although some parts of this section

---

<sup>77</sup> *Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.*

<sup>78</sup> Lee, *Ministry of Women*, 115.

<sup>79</sup> Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "1 Corinthians 11:16 and the Character of Pauline Exhortation," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 684. Emphasis is the author's.

<sup>80</sup> Gordon D. Fee, "Praying and Prophesying in the Assemblies," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 160.

are indeed cultural, a closer look at these verses demonstrates that there are also parts which still hold true in the church today.

An understanding of 1 Corinthians as a whole (in terms of structure, content, and historical and cultural setting) helps us to see why Paul's words are still relevant for the church today even though our circumstances are different from those of the Corinthians. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to a congregation in the midst of some difficult circumstances. There were divisions in the church,<sup>81</sup> but—even worse—there were a number of moral issues plaguing the congregation. In 1 Corinthians, we have Paul's response to these problems, not necessarily a full explanation of the problems themselves. From the structure of 1 Corinthians, though, we can see that Paul is addressing the main categories of divisions in the church (Chapters 1-4), sexual immorality and marriage (5-7), food sacrificed to idols (8-10), disorderly worship (11-14), and the resurrection (15).

In each of these sections, Paul attempts to first show the Corinthians the true nature of the problem. Why can't the members of the congregation continue along the same path they have been walking? Why is the practice that Paul is addressing truly a problem? After Paul demonstrates that each of these categories is indeed a problem, he then responds to the problem through the lens of the gospel. In general, throughout the entire book "Paul was concerned with the Corinthians' problems, revealing a true pastor's (shepherd's) heart, approaching the difficulties with the gospel of God's grace."<sup>82</sup> We need to clearly understand the difference between the particular difficulties

---

<sup>81</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:11: *My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.*

<sup>82</sup> Robert G. Hoerber, ed., *Concordia Self-Study Bible: New International Version* (St. Louis, MO: Concorida Publishing House, 1986), 1746.



that Paul is describing and the general solution offered by the gospel of God's grace.

Although the difficulties that the church faces today are different than those faced by the Corinthians, the solutions are rooted in the unchanging gospel. Therefore, if we limit our understanding of 1 Corinthians to only these problems, we lose much of the richness and relevance of the gospel solutions Paul offers.

Like all of Paul's letters, 1 Corinthians also needs to be read in its historical and cultural context.<sup>83</sup> In Greece generally, and in Corinth specifically, it was a custom for men to have short hair. Payne notes that there is "abundant evidence in the Greek, Roman, and Jewish literature of Paul's day that it was disgraceful for men to wear long effeminate hair" and cites a number of ancient texts condemning long hair in men as "disgraceful," "not fit for men," and "a dreadful spectacle."<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, the custom for women was to have long hair and to wear a head covering; this was in contrast to the way prostitutes in the temple of Aphrodite adorned themselves when engaging in ritualistic worship practices. Kuske explains, "When we remember that Corinth was a trading center which was infamous for excesses and sexual license...it is not hard to understand why the respectable woman who kept her head covered with long hair would be highly honored for this."<sup>85</sup>

In Corinth, men having long hair and women having short hair could also be seen as a deliberate choice to eschew traditional gender roles. As mentioned above, long hair

---

<sup>83</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 is one section where it is particularly important to understand that historical and cultural context.

<sup>84</sup> Philip B. Payne, "Wild Hair and Gender Equality in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," *Priscilla Papers* 20, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 9.

<sup>85</sup> David P. Kuske, "Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11:3-16," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (April 1981): 100.

was “not fit for men” and was also associated with homosexuality, a clear break from traditional gender roles. The evidence is not as clear regarding the additional implications of a woman having short hair and/or an uncovered head. For a female, this visual renouncing of traditional gender roles could also indicate an implicit assertion that she did not need a man but was instead capable of moving through life on her own, thus rejecting the authority of male leadership.<sup>86</sup>

Regardless of the specific societal nuances of long-haired males and short-haired females, the evidence shows that these hairstyles demonstrated some sort of renouncing of traditional gender roles and stepping outside the customs of the day in Corinth. Paul now addresses this issue as it showed itself in the Corinthian congregation. In the church, what does it mean for a male to have long hair? For a female to have short hair? These are application questions that deal with the ways in which the doctrine of headship played out in the Corinthians congregation. A closer examination of Paul’s train of thought in 1 Corinthians 11:3-16, however, shows that these verses are not solely limited to applications of the biblical principle of headship.

Paul begins these verses by expressing three timeless truths: “the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”<sup>87</sup> These truths set the stage for the section and explain Paul’s justification for the directions he is about to give. He is reminding the Corinthians that “man is to conduct himself properly toward Christ his head in the problem at hand and woman is to conduct herself properly

---

<sup>86</sup> Merkle, “Arguments from Creation,” 533.

<sup>87</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:3.

in relationship to man her head in the problem at hand.”<sup>88</sup> None of the Corinthians are independent of each other, just as Christ is not independent of God. Therefore, the Corinthians need to consider how their actions will affect one another, particularly in the area of hair length and head coverings in worship.

In verses 4-6, based on the earlier cultural discussion, we see one way that this relationship to one’s head played out in the Corinthian congregation. A man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors Christ, and a woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors man. In these verses, “Paul is not so much concerned with what one wears or does not wear, but the meaning or message that is conveyed by one’s appearance.”<sup>89</sup> For the Corinthians, this meaning or message showed itself in hair length and head coverings. For us, this meaning or message will show itself in different cultural ways. Ultimately, “the importance of this passage lies not so much in what Paul says about head coverings as such, but rather in the significance that he attaches to head coverings as a symbol of the role distinctions that man and woman must preserve in the church.”<sup>90</sup> Paul’s argument in verses 4-6 can therefore be viewed as an application of the timeless principle of headship and submission, and we are not bound to apply his specific directions regarding hair length and head coverings in our worship today.

In verses 7-10, Paul again circles back to the thought that he first introduced in verse 3. *Why* are both men and women to act in such a way that honors their head? In these verses, Paul more fully develops the concept of the order of creation in

---

<sup>88</sup> Kuske, “Exegesis of 1 Corinthians,” 2.

<sup>89</sup> Merkle, “Arguments from Creation,” 535.

<sup>90</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Study on the Role of Women in the Church* (Berrian Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1987), 126.

demonstrating that God created man for a headship role and woman for a helper role. For these reasons—because man and woman were created for these distinct and complementary roles—man and woman will act in such a way as to honor these roles, particularly in worship. The roles are timeless; the way the roles are honored in worship is not. It is important to note that Paul is not appealing to the order of creation to say that women of all time must wear head coverings. Instead, “Paul appeals to creation to demonstrate the differences between men and women that God established from the beginning—and violating these distinctions brings shame instead of glory.”<sup>91</sup>

In verses 11-12, Paul continues his line of thought from the previous verses. That is, he is still talking about timeless principles rather than particular applications. Yet by beginning these verses with “however,” he is drawing a contrast to the way he discussed the principles in verses 7-10. In verses 11-12, Paul emphasizes the interdependence of man and woman. This interdependence should show itself as man being a good head for woman rather than lording his headship over her. And this interdependence should show itself as woman being a good helper for man rather than challenging or questioning his direction.

Finally, now that Paul has fully developed the biblical principle of head and helper, he returns to the Corinthians’ particular situation one more time in verses 13-16. Again, note the culture that shows itself in these verses. There are certain distinctions that differentiate between the sexes in Corinth—namely, length of hair and head coverings. In the interest of good propriety, Paul rhetorically asks the Corinthians whether they should follow these distinctions; he clearly expects an affirmative answer. Verse 16 has been

---

<sup>91</sup> Merkle, “Arguments from Creation,” 535.

interpreted in a number of different ways, and an analysis of these interpretations is again outside of the scope of this paper. Note, though, that in verse 16, Paul calls the topic of head coverings a “practice” or “custom,” meaning that he is clearly identifying this topic as an application, not as a timeless principle.

Thankfully, the other section of 1 Corinthians where Paul discusses male and female roles<sup>92</sup> is not as fraught with hermeneutical difficulties. That is not to say, however, that this section lacks controversy. Part of this controversy comes from what Paul meant by his directives for women to “remain silent in the churches” and “speak in the church.” Feminist writers view this section as in conflict with 1 Corinthians 11:3-16, pointing out that “since 1 Corinthians 11 portrayed the Corinthian women as prophesying and praying, it would appear that Paul is here contradicting himself.”<sup>93</sup> Those espousing this view provide several different ways of dealing with this interpretive difficulty. Some reject this section of 1 Corinthians 14 outright, concluding that these words are not authentically Pauline and were instead a later addition. For example, Malone views this section as “the first official and explicit modification of the Christian vision with regard to women.”<sup>94</sup> Others restrict Paul’s words in some way, arguing that this section only applies to wives<sup>95</sup> or that his words are only a cultural reflection of the social context of his day—a social context in which women were expected to not speak up—therefore

---

<sup>92</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35: *As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*

<sup>93</sup> Keith A. Burton, “1 Corinthians 11 and 14: How Does a Woman Prophecy and Keep Silence at the Same Time?” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 10, no. 1–2 (1999): 280.

<sup>94</sup> Malone, *First Thousand Years*, 1:77.

<sup>95</sup> Burton, “Prophecy and Keep Silent,” 281.

concluding that this section does not “prohibit women in very different cultural settings from speaking God’s word.”<sup>96</sup> Neither of these explanations are particularly satisfying, however. Lockwood addresses the first, noting the authenticity of verses 33b-35 is overwhelmingly supported by the manuscript data.<sup>97</sup> And Paul’s appeal to “the Law”<sup>98</sup> in verse 34 once again points us back to the order of creation, reminding us that Paul’s words transcend culture.

How then should we understand Paul’s words? It’s better to begin in the negative: we do *not* understand them as restricting all speech or commanding absolute silence for women in worship. Such an interpretation is overly narrow and clearly at odds with the rest of Scripture. Nor is Paul forbidding women from learning in church. On the contrary, in the verses immediately preceding this section he expresses a desire that everyone participating in worship might be “instructed and encouraged.”<sup>99</sup> Moving to the positive, two plausible explanations have been suggested. The first, finding wider acceptance among complementarian commentators, views Paul’s words as “prohibiting women from preaching and authoritative (pastoral) teaching of the church in worship.”<sup>100</sup> Thompson tweaks this prohibition slightly in a second explanation, conjecturing that the Christian

---

<sup>96</sup> Craig S. Keener, “Learning in the Assemblies,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 171.

<sup>97</sup> Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 529.

<sup>98</sup> Paul does not reference the roles of men and women established at creation here as clearly as he does in 1 Timothy 2:11-14. But if we remember Jewish terminology of “the Law and the Prophets” as shorthand for the sum total of the Old Testament, and if we let Scripture interpret Scripture by also taking 1 Timothy 2:11-14 and 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 into consideration, we can more easily see the reference to the order of creation.

<sup>99</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:31b.

<sup>100</sup> Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 531.

church met regularly *both* together as one for Sunday morning worship services *and* in smaller household gatherings that took place during the week. He favors paraphrasing verses 33b and 34 this way: “In all the congregations everywhere women should remain silent in the Sunday church services,”<sup>101</sup> In other words, “in the larger gatherings (‘in church’) women should remain silent, but it is appropriate for them to ask questions and ‘learn’ more actively in the smaller house gatherings (‘in home’).”<sup>102</sup>

All three of these sections from Paul’s writings help us to clarify our understanding of the biblical doctrine of headship and the roles of men and women. These roles were established before sin came into the world and are therefore perfect. Just because these roles do not play out perfectly in our fallen world today does not give us the right to set them aside. In contrast, Paul’s appeals to the Old Testament establish the continuation of these roles today: the role of “head” for man and the role of “helper” for woman. Nor are these roles limited to the believers in Paul’s day. The timeless biblical principle transcends culture and therefore is still in place today. The *applications* of this principle, however—the specific ways this principle plays out in our lives—look different, both from biblical times to now and from one modern situation to another. Specific instances of these applications will be considered in more depth in Chapter 2 (applications in the lives of women in Acts and the Pauline Epistles) and Chapter 3 (applications in my own life as a 21<sup>st</sup> century confessional Lutheran female). Before

---

<sup>101</sup> Glen L. Thompson, “The Role of Women in the Public Ministry: New Testament Exegesis in the Twenty-First Century” (unpublished, April 6, 2019), 25. Thompson acknowledges that to the best of his knowledge (at the time of his writing), this interpretation is not discussed in the commentaries. However, whether one accepts or rejects the conjecture that the church gathered in Sunday worship services, in private homes, *and* in “smaller neighborhood gatherings that took place between the larger Sunday public meetings” (4), the fundamental interpretation he espouses does not change. In particular, Thompson still believes that “women should not take the leadership in preaching and teaching in the church” (4).

<sup>102</sup> Thompson, “Role of Women,” 25.

jumping into these specific instances, we need to return to the question of what roles a woman can fulfill in the church today without violating Paul's prohibition on exercising authority.

### **“Head and Helper” Revisited**

For the purposes of this section, we will omit the opinions of those who view Paul's writings on this subject as inauthentic or merely suggestions rather than guiding principles for the church. Instead, we will focus instead on those who *do* believe in the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. Broadly speaking, those in this latter category can be divided into two sub-categories: egalitarians and complementarians.<sup>103</sup> In short, both egalitarians and complementarians view man and woman as equal before God. Complementarians and many egalitarians also recognize that God created gender differences between men and women that allow men and women to work together and complement each other as they each bring their own unique set of gifts to the church. The divergence comes in how these complementary gifts play out. Egalitarians “reject the notion that any office, ministry, or opportunity should be denied anyone on the grounds of gender alone.”<sup>104</sup> One's gifts and abilities, rather than one's gender, should determine the ways in which one can serve, particularly in the church. In contrast, complementarians believe that “men and women are equal in value but have different

---

<sup>103</sup> The descriptions that follow of egalitarians and complementarians are painted using a very broad brush. Just as there is a spectrum of opinions referenced earlier in this chapter, so there are also spectra within egalitarians and complementarians. For our purposes here, however, a general understanding of each's position will suffice.

<sup>104</sup> Pierce and Groothuis, *Discovering Equality*, 13.



roles.”<sup>105</sup> These roles were not only for Adam or Eve nor for husbands and wives, nor are these roles to be set aside because sin entered the world. Rather, these roles apply to women of all time, although they will not play out perfectly this side of heaven.

With that general understanding, we can return to our original question: what roles can women fulfill in the church without violating Paul’s prohibition on authority? The question is easy to answer from the egalitarian camp. As mentioned above, egalitarians do not believe that gender should restrict the roles that one can play in the church. Therefore, a woman should be able to assume any role in the church, including the role of pastor.<sup>106</sup>

A natural follow-up question, then, is how egalitarians can believe *both* that 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is inspired *and* that women can assume authoritative roles in the church today? Egalitarians answer this question in a variety of ways. One response was discussed previously in the section on 1 Timothy: Paul is only prohibiting the exercise of certain types of teaching, such as incorrect teaching or teaching that tries to get the upper hand. Similarly, women are not permitted to assume authority that dominates men, but when women and men work together in the church, both may serve in authoritative roles. A different answer brings into play the culture of Paul’s day. In Paul’s day, there were certain cultural values and virtues ascribed to women; authority and teaching were not part of these. Therefore, Paul’s prohibition should be understood as “a directive to

---

<sup>105</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 1000 Disputed Questions* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 60.

<sup>106</sup> Again, it is important to note that egalitarians fall along a spectrum. There are some egalitarians who would disagree with this particular application. Most, however, have no problem with female pastors.

women to maintain the normal standards of their society and culture”<sup>107</sup> and exemplify the virtues of their day. Since these virtues and values are no longer associated with women in today’s society, Paul’s words in 1 Timothy 2 no longer prohibit women from exercising authority or teaching in the church today.<sup>108</sup>

In contrast, complementarians believe that Paul’s prohibition on women exercising authority and teaching is not a command merely rooted in the culture of the day but instead still applies in the church today. In other words, the cultural situation in Paul’s day provided the context rather than the reason for his command. Paul’s command also encompasses two separate concepts: that of exercising authority and that of teaching. These two concepts are closely related, but they are not equivalent and should be treated as two different activities. “We think 1 Timothy 2:8-15 imposes two restrictions on the ministry of women: they are not to teach Christian doctrine to men and they are not to exercise authority directly over men in the church.”<sup>109</sup> Nor do these commands apply only to wives. Although the Greek words Paul uses for “woman”<sup>110</sup> and “man”<sup>111</sup> in 1 Timothy 2:12 can be translated as “woman” or “wife” and “man” or “husband,” respectively, Paul’s appeal to the order of creation once again tells us that the context is broader than husbands and wives.

---

<sup>107</sup> Lee, *Ministry of Women*, 124.

<sup>108</sup> This position naturally extends to say that women should display the virtues and values of *their* day. However, other than the concept of not usurping authority, egalitarians are virtually silent on what these virtues and values are in 21<sup>st</sup> century America.

<sup>109</sup> Douglas J. Moo, “What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?: 1 Timothy 2:11-15,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 180.

<sup>110</sup> γυνή (*gunē*).

<sup>111</sup> ἀνὴρ (*anēr*).

When it comes to applying Paul's command in the church today, two main complementarian positions will be considered. Evangelicals<sup>112</sup> view teaching as "the careful transmission of the tradition concerning Jesus Christ and the authoritative proclamation of God's will to believers in light of that tradition."<sup>113</sup> They therefore restrict women from preaching, from teaching biblical doctrine in colleges and seminaries, and possibly from teaching Bible studies to a mixed group in church, although there is significant disagreement on this point.<sup>114</sup> There is also disagreement over whether women can lead small-group, home-based Bible studies.<sup>115</sup> Having authority is viewed as holding a limited number of church offices, most notably pastor and elder. Other offices and functions are not considered authoritative by evangelicals and are therefore open to women, such as committee chairperson, Sunday School superintendent, reading Scripture aloud on Sunday morning, and voting in business meetings of the church.<sup>116</sup>

Turning to the WELS position, there are some similarities to evangelicals in roles or activities constitute having authority or teaching. When determining in what situations a woman can teach, Kuske provides two important considerations:

When a teaching position by its very definition (e.g., pastor, congregational leaders) requires others to submit to the person in that position, obviously a

---

<sup>112</sup> A group not to be confused with evangelical feminists—and again a group that does not have unanimity on all the roles a woman can and cannot hold in the church.

<sup>113</sup> Moo, "Have Authority," 185.

<sup>114</sup> Some evangelical complementarians draw the line between high school and college: it is permissible for a woman to teach a high school Bible study or Sunday School class but not a class consisting of college students.

<sup>115</sup> For example, Grudem disagrees with women leading home fellowship groups but also acknowledges that this is his personal judgment rather than a timeless application of 1 Timothy 2:12.

<sup>116</sup> Grudem, *Feminism & Truth*, 94.

woman cannot serve in that position. When a teaching position by its practice (e.g., some Bible class leaders, some church committees) calls on a person or group of people to act in an authoritative way and the others involved agree to submit to the authority of the given person or group of people, a woman cannot serve.<sup>117</sup>

In terms of exercising authority, the 2019 WELS Statement “Male and Woman in God’s World” describes the concept in broad strokes: “the responsibility for determining direction to be followed for the benefit of those they lead.”<sup>118</sup> Very few specific examples are given—either in this statement or in more recent papers on the subject<sup>119</sup>—preferring instead to consider individually those roles that may change from congregation to congregation. Roles such as pastor and church elder are considered authoritative, but roles such as board members, committee chairmen, etc. may differ in implementation from congregation to congregation, with some implementations having authority and others not. And in recognition that many—although not all—WELS congregations are governed by a voters’ assembly, this part of the 2019 statement is relevant:

While we do not believe that all voting is always an exercise of authority, where a vote is clearly exercising the authority to give direction to others they are to follow for their good or for the good of others, there God’s people honor the calling God has given to the adult males of the congregation to exercise that authority on behalf of the family of faith.<sup>120</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> David Kuske, “An Exegetical Brief on 1 Timothy 2:12,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 88, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 67.

<sup>118</sup> “Male and Female in God’s World” (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, October 2019), 6, <https://synodadmin.welsrc.net/download-synodadmin/en-cristo/?wpdmdl=3422&refresh=619169ae60e231636919726&ind=1574689654338&filename=SAMaleandFemaleinGodsWorld-official-11252019.pdf>.

<sup>119</sup> Older WELS papers on this subject, such as Pastor Wayne Mueller’s “Ministry Positions for Women” from 1991, seemingly have no problem listing out roles that women can and cannot hold. As one looks across the WELS today, some of these roles are still only able to be filled by males, but many are held by males and females alike. The one that strikes near and dear to my heart is that of college professor.

<sup>120</sup> “God’s World,” 10.

Before looking at how these roles played out in Acts and the Pauline Epistles (Chapter 2) and how it plays out in my life today (Chapter 3), one final concept needs to be discussed. As mentioned in the introduction, the word “leadership” causes me to struggle, especially when “leadership” and “authority” are used synonymously. Once again, the 2019 WELS statement addresses some of this difficulty, noting that “confusion can also arise here because of the different ways Scripture and our culture speak of leadership.”<sup>121</sup> This confusion is amplified in writings that do not provide a clear definition for the term “leadership.”

I don’t think that anyone would disagree that the church contains female leaders—either the earliest days of the Christian church or in the WELS today. Similarly, the WELS encourages both men and women to be leaders. For example, this encouragement can be clearly seen in the 2020 WELS National Conference on Lutheran Leadership, a conference that both men and women were invited to attend.<sup>122</sup> The 2019 WELS statement concurs, saying “There are also many times women will also find themselves serving in callings as selfless leaders.”<sup>123</sup> And yet this very same 2019 statement views true biblical leadership as leadership with authority, stating “when Scripture uses any of its leadership words, the concept of authority is always in play...Scripture does not know of leadership without authority.”<sup>124</sup> I have difficulty seeing how all of these concepts can stand alongside each other without being contradictory, and I am certain I am not alone in this regard.

---

<sup>121</sup> “God’s World,” 7.

<sup>122</sup> [www.lutheranleadership.com](http://www.lutheranleadership.com)

<sup>123</sup> “God’s World,” 7.

<sup>124</sup> “God’s World,” 7.

Perhaps the best solution is to take care with the terms we use. “Head” and “helper” are terms with clear biblical definitions; “leader” is not.<sup>125</sup> This lack of precision is further exemplified by the wide use of “leader” in secular society. Perhaps it is better, then, not to speak of “leadership” positions in the church—and especially not to equate these so-called “leadership” positions with positions that are always imbued with authority. Instead, positions in the church that are authoritative should be named as such, as should positions that are not authoritative. And as for the term “leader”? Use it as society does: as one influencing others, as one to be looked up to, as one who guides and shows the way, as one who has demonstrated responsibility, but not necessarily one in authority. Allow for differences among congregations in the way “leadership” roles are structured, and allow for the possibility that two congregations may use the same terminology for a “leadership” position but may also differ on whether or not that position is imbued with authority.

The terms “head” and “helper” have the tendency to offend our modern sensibilities. But the roles of head and helper were created before sin came into the world and therefore still apply today. They did not apply only to Adam and Eve, nor do they apply only to husbands and wives. Paul’s directives for the roles of men and women in the church are also not to be dismissed as inauthentic, cultural, or no longer relevant today. The biblical principle of headship is timeless and applies to the Christian church throughout the centuries. We now turn from that timeless principle to changing

---

<sup>125</sup> This is technically correct; there is no single word in Scripture that translates as “leader.” However, there are a variety of words in Scripture that convey the concept of leadership. When these words are used, they incorporate the concepts both of leadership and of authority. In a scriptural sense, then, leadership does come with authority. But definitions are important, and this is *not* the way we tend to use the word “leadership” in our churches. Therefore, there are indeed positions in the church today that are “leadership” positions but not positions with authority.

applications by examining the specific service of women in Acts and the Pauline Epistles, women who were leaders but still lived within their role of helper.

## CHAPTER II: WOMEN IN ACTS AND THE PAULINE EPISTLES

When I was growing up, my family would take two-week-long road trips, driving across the United States. This was before the time of MP3 and portable DVD players, so if my sister and I wanted to listen to something other than the radio, it had to be played in the car's tape deck. I remember listening to "Games for the Road" and hours of silly children's songs on tape, and I also remember listening to kid-themed dramatizations of Bible stories. The stories that stand out most were four on women of the Old Testament: Miriam, Rebekah, Ruth, and Esther. These biblical women were our companions during long hours of driving, and I loved hearing about them over and over.

Women like these are sprinkled throughout the pages of Scripture: women of faith, women with compelling stories, women who both came before and followed after the promised Messiah. These women provided refuge for spies<sup>126</sup> and killed a pagan general.<sup>127</sup> They led Israel<sup>128</sup> and were ancestors of the Savior.<sup>129</sup> They walked and talked with this Savior<sup>130</sup> and were the first to proclaim the news of his resurrection.<sup>131</sup> And they were some of the very first New Testament believers, offering support and hospitality to the apostles in the earliest days of the Christian church.

---

<sup>126</sup> Rahab: Joshua 2.

<sup>127</sup> Jael: Judges 4.

<sup>128</sup> Deborah: Judges 4 and 5.

<sup>129</sup> Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba: Matthew 1:1-17.

<sup>130</sup> Numerous examples exist, perhaps most notably Mary and Martha: Luke 10:38-42 and John 11:1-44.

<sup>131</sup> Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and others: Luke 24:9-11.



Yet there are those who feel these women have been marginalized or even silenced by the human authors of the New Testament. Because the Bible was written by men who were products of the patriarchal culture of their day, the roles of women in the New Testament have been underreported, they say, and these underreported roles should most definitely not serve as a model for women in the church today. The biblical roles of women are no longer applicable today, partially because of a change in societal norms and customs, but also partially because these roles were never a true representation of the service of women to the Church.

Which is it? Were women leaders and pillars in the early Church, serving equally with men and assuming the roles of apostles and elders? Or did women hold what we might think of as more “traditional” roles, supporting the ministry of the apostles but not leading the church in the same way that Peter and Paul and others did? A look at women in Acts and the Pauline Epistles<sup>132</sup>—both the actual women in these letters and a related look at how these women fit into the culture of their time<sup>133</sup>—will show that women were indeed instrumental in the growth and spread of the New Testament church, but not necessarily in the formal leadership roles that secular feminists and egalitarians argue for.

---

<sup>132</sup> There are, of course, many more women from both the Old and the New Testament who could be included in this chapter. Although I narrowed my study to women in Acts and the Pauline Epistles, this narrowing should in no way indicate that the women highlighted in this chapter are any more important than the rest of the women in Scripture.

<sup>133</sup> There are also many ways in which women “fit into” the culture of their time, and again the discussions in this chapter only scratch the surface. Because of the women studied in the chapter—Lydia, Priscilla, and Phoebe—we will consider the cultural roles of “household head” and “patron.”

### Lydia: Head of a House Church?

We meet Lydia in Acts 16, after the vision of a man from Macedonia led the apostle Paul to leave Troas and travel to Philippi. Although Lydia is only briefly mentioned in Acts 16:11-15<sup>134</sup> and even more briefly in Acts 16:40,<sup>135</sup> we still learn quite a bit about her from these verses. She was a foreigner from Thyatira, a city in the Roman province of Asia and the Hellenistic district of Lydia.<sup>136</sup> Although we are not told of Lydia's religious heritage, she was almost certainly a Gentile. She shares her status as a "worshiper of God" (literally "God-fearer") with Cornelius,<sup>137</sup> a status that likely marked her as one who knew of the Jewish faith but had not yet fully espoused its beliefs. This status was relatively common in the Roman world at this time; such "semi-proselytes were attached to almost every Jewish synagogue in the first century."<sup>138</sup> Note, however, that Paul deviated from his usual *modus operandi* when coming to a new town: he went outside the city gate to the river rather than first going to the synagogue. This indicates

---

<sup>134</sup> *From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day to Neapolis. From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. On the Sabbath, we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.*

<sup>135</sup> *After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.*

<sup>136</sup> The *Concordia Self-Study Bible* points out that Lydia's name may not actually be her name, since she is also from the region of Lydia—in other words, we may not know her name at all. I find it very interesting that in all the feminist writings I read bemoaning the silencing of women in Luke and Acts, not one mentioned the fact that Luke may not have given us Lydia's actual name.

<sup>137</sup> Acts 10:2: *[Cornelius] and all his family were devout and God-fearing...*

<sup>138</sup> Teresa J Calpino, "'The Lord Opened Her Heart': Boundary Crossing in Acts 16:13-15," *ANNALI DI STORIA DELL'ESEGESI* 28, no. 2 (2011): 87.

that Philippi probably did not have the required number of Jewish men (ten) to form a synagogue,<sup>139</sup> sending Paul instead to where the Jewish women were gathered for prayer.

Lydia's occupation as a dealer in purple cloth marks her as a businesswoman and a woman of means, a status which is further confirmed by her likely role as the head of a household. This financial wealth and rule over a household was not as uncommon for women in Paul's day as modern readers might expect today. Remember that Philippi was a Roman colony and the leading city of its district of Macedonia. In other words, it was a cosmopolitan area. Secular history tells us that "the more Romanized a city was, the more the dignity and rights of women, particularly higher class women, were asserted."<sup>140</sup> In these verses (and in all the rest of the accounts of women that we will consider throughout this chapter), it is important to read the biblical text through a first-century New Testament lens. Luke's readers would have known what it meant for Lydia to be a businesswoman and the head of a household. Although our modern sensibilities would like Luke to provide more details and give us more facts about Lydia (and other women), the fact that he does not should not be read as an intentional silencing or marginalization of women. Nor should we view this account as Osiek does: "It is probably best to not look for direct correlation between the story of Lydia and the real circumstances of Paul's day...Lydia herself may never have existed."<sup>141</sup> On the contrary, these verses are a faithful recounting of actual historical events—a recounting that, when "judged against

---

<sup>139</sup> Richard D. Balge, *Acts*, The People's Bible (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1988), 179.

<sup>140</sup> Susan Smith, "Women's Human, Ecclesial and Missionary Identity: What Insights Does the Pauline Correspondence Offer the Contemporary Woman?," *Mission Studies* 27, no. 2 (2010): 152.

<sup>141</sup> Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 236.

the standards of his historical contemporaries... give[s] women more attention and greater status than most,”<sup>142</sup> just as the rest of Luke’s writings do.

From verse 40, we learn that Paul and Silas met with the brothers<sup>143</sup> at Lydia’s house before they left Philippi. This likely indicates that a house church had begun meeting in Lydia’s home. As the head of a household in which a house church was meeting, this puts Lydia in an interesting position, potentially one of leadership. In secular society, the household of this time was a woman’s domain, and women functioned mostly independently in the day-to-day running of the household. “The woman manager of the household had full authority over the material and human resources of the household...and was expected to administer those resources wisely.”<sup>144</sup> In Lydia’s case, since she refers to “my house,” since she was a businesswoman and therefore a woman of means, and since there is no male name given alongside of her (as we see in the case of Priscilla and Aquila), Lydia was probably the sole authority figure and “breadwinner” for her household. This should not be viewed as an anachronistic or feminist reading of Luke. On the contrary, “there are a number of surviving papyri in which a woman registers on the tax list her own house and family as her property.”<sup>145</sup>

Returning to the concept of a house church, how then would Lydia’s “secular” authority have translated to her authority over the church that met in her house? Before

---

<sup>142</sup> Lee, *Ministry of Women*, 72.

<sup>143</sup> This is one of those places (referenced in the introduction) where the gender-specific language of NIV84 is not especially helpful. Here, ἀδελφοὺς (*adelphous*) would better be translated “brothers and sisters,” indicating that Paul and Silas met with a gathering of believers—both men and women—before they left Philippi for Thessalonica.

<sup>144</sup> Osiek and MacDonald, *Woman’s Place*, 152.

<sup>145</sup> Osiek and MacDonald, *Woman’s Place*, 157.

attempting to answer this question, a hermeneutical note is in order, as is remembering the crucially important concept of “let Scripture interpret Scripture.” Because we view Scripture as inspired writings from the Holy Spirit, all the different pieces and parts of Scripture must fit together into a cohesive story, a unified whole. Therefore, the stories of Lydia and the other women considered in this chapter must be read in conjunction with Paul’s other writings on the headship principle and the roles of men and women. All of the women highlighted in this chapter are held up as model believers and pillars of the New Testament church. If they acted in a way that violated the headship principle, we would certainly expect that to be part of the biblical text—or, at the very least, we would not expect such commendation for them and their actions.<sup>146</sup> On the other hand, we cannot fill in the omitted details of their stories in a way that allows us to conclude “women should have full access to the church’s ministry, whether in lay or ordained ministries, and that this access [should] depend not on gender but rather on a sense of vocation and on the church’s discernment of calling.”<sup>147</sup>

With this hermeneutical lens in place, we can return to the question of Lydia’s role in a house church. Giles points out that the one owning the home was not necessarily the spiritual leader of the house church, instead positing that the homeowner’s “main responsibility was to preside when the group met and to encourage wide participation.”<sup>148</sup> Smith concurs, giving the homeowner responsibility for extending hospitality, facilitating

---

<sup>146</sup> One might object to this statement because some of the women highlighted in this chapter lived before Paul wrote on the doctrine of headship. However, when we remember the hermeneutical principle of viewing Scripture as a unified whole, we properly understand that the date when the human authors wrote does not affect the commendation of these women.

<sup>147</sup> Lee, *Ministry of Women*, 11.

<sup>148</sup> Kevin Giles, “House Churches,” *Priscilla Papers* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 6.

faith formation, and generally taking a leading role<sup>149</sup> in the meals—including the Eucharistic meal. This raises an interesting question: would it have been permissible for women such as Lydia to take a leading role in the Eucharist and still honor their role of helper?<sup>150</sup> It is interesting to note that Paul does not directly address this concept anywhere in his writings. One can argue that Paul’s prohibition on women speaking in the churches<sup>151</sup> extends to them *not* taking a leading role in the Eucharist. On the other hand, Paul explicitly restricts women from the activity of teaching.<sup>152</sup> If he similarly intended to restrict women from taking a leading role in the Eucharist—especially since a woman would have taken a leading role in a secular meal hosted in her home—one can argue that Paul would have also made this restriction explicit. Since he does not, nor does he assign the role of taking a leading role in the Eucharist to a specific group (either the elders or the deacons), women like Lydia could have taken a leading role in the Eucharist without violating the headship principle.

It’s an interesting question, albeit one that is unanswerable based on the evidence that we have. What we do know, however, is that Lydia was an important figure in the

---

<sup>149</sup> There is yet another natural question to be asked here: what would it mean to “take a leading role” in the Eucharist? We don’t know what the meetings of these house churches entailed beyond the reference in Acts 2:42, 46, 47: *They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people*, and therefore it is difficult to say specifically what “a leading role” in the Eucharist might have looked like at Lydia’s time. It is extremely likely that the meetings of these house churches and their celebration of the Eucharist was much less formal than our modern-day worship and communion. However, we simply don’t know, and therefore very little can be said with certainty.

<sup>150</sup> As noted in the previous footnote, taking a leading role in the Eucharist in Lydia’s day was likely much less formal than a minister presiding over the Eucharist in a worship service today. Therefore, this question of whether it would have been permissible for Lydia to take a leading role in the Eucharist is entirely separate from whether women can preside over communion today.

<sup>151</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:34.

<sup>152</sup> 1 Timothy 2:11-12.

early Christian church. Since “women were expected to independently manage their households, with or without a husband...to step into a Christian house church was to step into women’s world,”<sup>153</sup> we can confidently say that women were not restricted from many activities in early Christian house church based on their gender. On the contrary, Lydia’s hospitality to Paul and Silas and the newly-formed church in Philippi makes her a crucial part of the New Testament church. We can similarly see these leadership qualities in another female who hosted house churches—a female about whom we have significantly more information.

### **Priscilla: A Teacher of Men?**

Like Lydia, we meet Priscilla<sup>154</sup> and Aquila in Acts in the context of Paul’s travels. Priscilla and Aquila appear three times in Acts 18: in verses 1-3,<sup>155</sup> 18-19,<sup>156</sup> and 24-26,<sup>157</sup> and we learn quite a bit about them from these verses. They were Jews who,

---

<sup>153</sup> Osiek and MacDonald, *Woman’s Place*, 163.

<sup>154</sup> Priscilla is referred to in two different ways throughout the New Testament: as “Priscilla” by Luke in Acts and as “Prisca” by Paul in his Epistles. “Prisca” is a variation that indicates an added familiarity and friendship, like friends using each other’s nicknames rather than their formal given names. For ease of notation, I will use “Priscilla” throughout unless quoting.

<sup>155</sup> *After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.*

<sup>156</sup> *Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila...They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila.*

<sup>157</sup> *Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.*

upon their expulsion from Rome,<sup>158</sup> traveled to Corinth and made their home there. Because there is no mention of Paul instructing them when he meets them, nor are they among the list Paul gives of those he baptized in Corinth,<sup>159</sup> it is likely that they were already Christians when they first met Paul in Corinth. Along with this “faith connection,” they also shared an occupation with Paul, and so he stayed and worked with them in Corinth. Paul stayed in Corinth for about 18 months, and then he departed for Ephesus, taking Priscilla and Aquila along with him. Luke does not tell us specifically why Priscilla and Aquila went along with Paul, but we can surmise it was to assist in Paul’s mission work: “committed to God and the gospel, they left everything and accompanied [Paul] 250 miles across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus.”<sup>160</sup>

Paul then left them at Ephesus when he continued to Caesarea. From the greetings conveyed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:19,<sup>161</sup> we know that Priscilla and Aquila remained in Ephesus<sup>162</sup> and hosted a house church in their home. And from Paul’s greetings in Romans 16:3-5,<sup>163</sup> we can surmise that Priscilla and Aquila left Ephesus, returned to Rome, and once again established a house church (possibly a house church made up of

---

<sup>158</sup> In addition to the reference in Acts 18:2, the expulsion of Jews from Rome under Claudius is also mentioned by the Roman historians Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus and Lucius Cassius Dio.

<sup>159</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:14,16: *I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius... (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanus; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.)*

<sup>160</sup> Marie Noel Keller, *Priscilla and Aquila: Paul’s Coworkers in Christ Jesus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 13.

<sup>161</sup> *The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.*

<sup>162</sup> Remember that 1 Corinthians was written while Paul was in Ephesus.

<sup>163</sup> *Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house.*



the same group of believers that they left when they first went to Ephesus). They are mentioned one final time in 2 Timothy 4:19,<sup>164</sup> indicating that either they returned to Ephesus or that Paul wished for Timothy to greet them in Rome.<sup>165</sup> In short, many commentators view Priscilla and Aquila as “movers and shakers in Pauline circles...missionaries, teachers, collaborators of Paul and others, and patrons of house churches in three different cities.”<sup>166</sup> But is this an accurate characterization? Was Priscilla truly a missionary, teacher, and collaborator of Paul in her own right? Or would the assumption of those roles violate the principle of headship?

Before exploring these questions, it is interesting to consider an issue about which commentators know the least, although this lack of knowledge that does not correspond to a lack of speculation. Of the five times that Paul pairs their names, Priscilla appears first four times, with Aquila appearing first only once. Listing the female name first would have been unusual for the culture of Paul’s day. Wives were identified in relation to their husbands, and so the husband’s name would have appeared first in the naming of a married couple. Some commentators view this ordering as an indication that “Priscilla possessed the dominant ministry and leadership skills of the duo.”<sup>167</sup> Others say that these claims are mere speculation, concluding instead that “it is difficult to say anything with

---

<sup>164</sup> *Greet Priscilla and Aquila...*

<sup>165</sup> From 2 Timothy 4:21 (*Do your best to get here before winter*), we know that Paul wanted Timothy to come to him in Rome and give aid during Paul’s imprisonment.

<sup>166</sup> Osiek and MacDonald, *Woman’s Place*, 32.

<sup>167</sup> Linda L. Belleville, “Women Leaders in the Bible,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 122.

certainty about the significance of the order of names.”<sup>168</sup> The truth is probably somewhere in the middle. It is unlikely that both Paul and Luke would have eschewed the customs of their day and listed Priscilla first without having at least *some* reason for doing so. Perhaps Priscilla was the leader in the relationship, or perhaps Paul viewed her as a particularly close friend (as further indicated by his use of “Prisca”). But Priscilla being listed first does not in any way indicate that she would have stepped out of her helper role either when it came to her marriage or her service to the church.

What exactly did that service to the church entail? We have some specific details from the account concerning Apollos. After Priscilla and Aquila encountered Apollos’ correct but incomplete teaching, they invited him to their home and more fully instructed him in the truths of the Christian faith. From the way Luke records this episode, it is clear that Priscilla was indeed involved in some way with teaching and instructing Apollos. Belleville views her as “a teacher at Ephesus, who expounded the ‘way of God’ to a man in exactly the same way Paul expounded the gospel to men and women in Rome.”<sup>169</sup> Schreiner disagrees, saying that “it is precarious to base too much on this text, since it is an argument from silence to say that Priscilla was the primary teacher.”<sup>170</sup> Again, the truth is likely somewhere in the middle. Priscilla would not have been listed alongside Aquila if she had no role in instructing Apollos. And Apollos’ prior instruction in the

---

<sup>168</sup> Grudem, *Feminism & Truth*, 180.

<sup>169</sup> Belleville, “Women Leaders,” 124.

<sup>170</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 218.

Lord and accurate teaching about Jesus “demonstrates that both of these people [Priscilla and Aquila] were knowledgeable enough to teach this teacher.”<sup>171</sup>

Note where Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos, though: in their home, not in the synagogue. This teaching, then, was not the same as publicly standing up in front of a gathering of believers and authoritatively instructing them; it was not teaching that violated 1 Timothy 2. It was two believers sharing their faith and theological knowledge with another believer in a private setting—a task that all Christians are called to fulfill.

An examination of the role of Priscilla would be incomplete without consideration of one more piece of information we are given in Romans 16:3. Paul’s characterization of Priscilla and Aquila as “fellow workers” has again produced much speculation. Does this mean that Priscilla especially shared in the same role as Paul: an apostle, a missionary, and one who held an official leadership position in the church? In short, no. Paul does use the term “fellow worker” or “co-worker” to refer to other males, such as Timothy and Titus, who shared in his missionary duties and served as elders in the churches. But he also uses the term throughout his epistles for other brothers and sisters in the faith, some of whom are only mentioned in passing and about whom we have no other extra-biblical information. If *all* of these “fellow workers” performed the same work as Paul—or even as Timothy or Titus—we would expect to hear much more about them, but we do not. It is also not reasonable to expect that Paul means exactly the same thing by “fellow worker” every time he uses the term. He uses it “very generally of any co-worker who is active in promoting the Gospel ministry of the church, whether normal lay people or

---

<sup>171</sup> Keller, *Paul’s Coworkers*, 25.

appointed leaders.”<sup>172</sup> Therefore, there is once again no evidence that Priscilla’s role in the early Christian church is an indication that women can serve in the role of pastor today.

That said, Priscilla’s contributions to the church should not be understated. Together with Aquila, she hosted house churches, taught and instructed Apollos, and supported the mission of the church. “As a wife, artisan, missionary and foreign immigrant, Prisc(ill)a lived on the crossroads of the public (and traditionally viewed as male) sphere and the private (and traditionally viewed as female) sphere, exerting her influence through a broad spectrum of activities.”<sup>173</sup> But she did not step out of her helper role in doing so—a characteristic shared by another woman whom Paul references in Romans 16.

### **Junia: A Female Apostle?**

When discussing my thesis with friends and colleagues, the most common response when I mentioned the next woman under consideration was “Who?”<sup>174</sup> Junia<sup>175</sup> is mentioned only once in the Scriptures: in verse 7 of Paul’s long list of greetings in

---

<sup>172</sup> Thompson, “Role of Women,” 46.

<sup>173</sup> Osiek and MacDonald, *Woman’s Place*, 34.

<sup>174</sup> Many of these friends and colleagues are ministry-certified professors at WLC and have therefore taken a number of theology classes.

<sup>175</sup> As this section discusses, there is speculation about whether the second individual named by Paul in Romans 16:7 is a male (Junias) or a female (Junia). Since I will argue it is more likely this individual is a female, I will use “Junia” and feminine pronouns rather than “Junias” and masculine pronouns throughout unless quoting.

Romans 16.<sup>176</sup> Yet there is much fodder for speculation in this short verse. Is the second name male or female? Which translation is correct: “outstanding among” or “esteemed by” the apostles? And, for that matter, exactly which group of people is Paul referring to by his use of the term “apostle”?

Despite all this speculation, and despite the paucity of information we have on Junia, she is championed by both secular feminist writers and egalitarians. Belleville views her as “an example of a woman not only functioning as an ‘apostle’ in the New Testament church but [one] highly esteemed as such by Paul and his apostolic colleagues.”<sup>177</sup> Conservative commentators disagree, arguing instead that “it is a pretty far-fetched assumption that some make when they say that this name is feminine, that this person was an ‘apostle,’ and that, therefore, this passage shows that women were leaders in the early church.”<sup>178</sup> A closer look at the textual and historical evidence is needed before deciding what implications Junia’s role in the early church might have for the role of women in the church today.

The first question to be considered is whether the person Paul greets is male or female. This debate comes from accenting: Ἰουνίαν (*Ioun-I-an*) results in a masculine name, while Ἰουνιά ( *Ioun-i-AN*) is feminine.<sup>179</sup> A quick look at various translations shows a split: the King James Version, New Living Translation, NIV2011, and Christian

---

<sup>176</sup> *Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among [or are esteemed by] the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was* (NIV2011).

<sup>177</sup> Belleville, “Women Leaders,” 120.

<sup>178</sup> David P. Kuske, *A Commentary on Romans 9-16* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2014), 354.

<sup>179</sup> The earliest copies of Paul’s letters do not contain the accenting needed to definitively classify the name as male or female.

Standard Bible render the name as female; NIV84 and the Revised Standard Version have “Junias” without any sort of footnote; and the Evangelical Heritage Version and the English Standard Version have “Junia” in the text but offer “Junias” as an alternate in the footnote. The historical verdict from Christian writers throughout the ages is similarly split, as can be seen by Moo’s summary:

Interpreters from the thirteenth to the middle of the twentieth century generally favored the masculine identification. But it appears that commentators before the thirteenth century were unanimous in favor of the feminine identification,<sup>180</sup> and scholars have recently again inclined decisively to this same view.<sup>181</sup>

However, Christian texts do not exist in a vacuum, and therefore it is wise to look at secular use of the name as well. Various written records of this time period, including literary works, inscriptions, and epitaphs, are overwhelmingly female.<sup>182</sup> Therefore, it seems wise to follow historical use—both religious and secular—and conclude that Paul is speaking of Junia, a female.<sup>183</sup>

Now that the question of gender has likely been settled, we can turn to Junia’s role in the early Christian church. There is again a translation question here: how to translate the phrase ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις (*episēmoi en tois apostolois*). The

---

<sup>180</sup> This is not entirely true. See Michael H. Burer and Daniel B. Wallace, “Was Junia Really an Apostle? A Re-Examination of Rom 16:7,” *New Testament Studies* 47, no. 1 (January 2001). There the authors note that Epiphanius, the bishop of Salamis in Cyprus in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, uses the masculine name. However, they also note that “Epiphanius’s testimony here ought not to be weighed too heavily, for he calls Prisca in the previous sentence a man, too!” (77). Origen also refers to Junia once in the masculine and once in the feminine, but Burer and Wallace conclude that the masculine is “most likely a later corruption of his text” (76).

<sup>181</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 922.

<sup>182</sup> Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 25.

<sup>183</sup> Some also argue that Junia was female because Andronicus and Junia were a husband and wife missionary team.

various translation options can be broken down into two viewpoints, characterized by Burer and Wallace as “inclusive” and “exclusive.” The inclusive view favors a translation similar to “outstanding among the apostles,” indicating that Junia herself was to be counted among the apostles; the exclusive view prefers “well-known to the apostles” (or a translation along those lines), holding Junia in high esteem but not elevating her to the role of apostle along with the other plural “apostles” referenced in this verse.

Unfortunately, there is little evidence from history here, as Burer and Wallace point out: “The patristic authors are preoccupied with whether Ἰουνιᾶν is male or female, giving little substantive attention to what Paul has to say about this individual’s relation to the apostolic band.”<sup>184</sup> An analysis of the Greek grammatical evidence for the inclusive vs. the exclusive view is beyond my expertise. Burer and Wallace offer the most thorough grammatical analysis, concluding both from Paul’s text and from other Greek writings of the same time period that the exclusive view is correct.<sup>185</sup> Based on their expertise, I would also lean toward the exclusive view, but I am not willing to make this assertion with absolute certainty.

Regardless of whether the exclusive view or the inclusive view is correct, there is still another question under consideration: what did Paul mean here by his use of “apostle”? It is true that Paul most often uses this term<sup>186</sup> in the same way that it is used in the Gospels: to refer to Jesus’ twelve apostles. It is also true that Paul uses the term

---

<sup>184</sup> Burer and Wallace, *Junia*, 78.

<sup>185</sup> The other commentators I consulted offered who favored the inclusive view offered very little in the way of grammatical analysis to support their conclusions, and simply refer to the rendering of the phrase in various English translations.

<sup>186</sup> ἀπόστολος (*apostolos*).

“apostle” to refer to himself and that he vigorously defends his apostleship throughout his epistles. However, Paul also uses the term to refer to other first-century believers who were not among the twelve apostles: brothers who were “representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ;”<sup>187</sup> Epaphroditus;<sup>188</sup> and himself, Silas, and Timothy.<sup>189</sup> Therefore, I agree with Moo that “many scholars...are guilty of accepting too readily a key supposition in this line of reasoning: that ‘apostle’ here refers to an authoritative leadership position such as that held by the ‘Twelve’ and by Paul.”<sup>190</sup> In particular, Epp’s conclusion that because Paul most often applies the term to himself, he also “implies that to be an apostle involves encountering the risen Christ and receiving a commission to proclaim the gospel”<sup>191</sup> interprets Paul’s use of the word “apostle” too narrowly. In addition, the early church writers did not devote much ink to Junia. She is mentioned here and there,<sup>192</sup> but not to the extent one would expect if she did indeed fill the much-neglected role of female apostle. Junia’s lack of mention by the early church fathers is

---

<sup>187</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:23: *As for our brothers, they are representatives [ἀπόστολοι] of the churches and an honor to Christ.*

<sup>188</sup> Philippians 2:25: *But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger [ἀπόστολον], whom you sent to take care of my needs.*

<sup>189</sup> 1 Thessalonians 2:6: *We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ [ἀπόστολος], we could have been a burden to you...*

<sup>190</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 923.

<sup>191</sup> Epp, *Junia*, 70.

<sup>192</sup> Her most notable mention comes from John Chrysostom when he writes, “To be an apostle is something great. But to be outstanding among the apostles—just think what a wonderful song of praise that is! They were outstanding on the basis of their works and virtuous actions. Indeed, how great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle” (*Epistolanum Ad Romanos*, 31:2, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, 669–70). It is true that Chrysostom espouses the inclusive view. But two additional notes are relevant: first, Chrysostom does not restrict “apostle” to the Twelve. Second, he does not use Junia’s example to advocate for or promote a greater leadership role for women in the church.



admittedly an argument from silence and is therefore somewhat dubious. It does, however, support Thompson's assertion: "This is not what we would expect if she were both a famous apostle and the only one who was a woman!"<sup>193</sup>

What then *was* Junia's role? Again, although the exclusive view is preferred, the inclusive view cannot be ruled out. But returning to our hermeneutical principle of "let Scripture interpret Scripture," it is certain that whatever Junia's role was, it would not have been a role that violated the headship principle. She was undoubtedly a faithful Christian, a relative of Paul (possibly only in a spiritual sense, but her blood relationship or lack thereof is not extremely important to this discussion), one who was imprisoned for her faith, and someone who came to faith even before Paul. She was greeted by Paul, singled out for commendation by him, and was therefore Paul's dear friend. But her mention in Romans 16:7 "does not give a clear example of a woman being called to or assuming a position of public leadership in the church, and certainly does not justify the modern church in doing so."<sup>194</sup>

### **Phoebe: Deaconess and Patron?**

The last woman mentioned prominently in Romans 16 is yet another candidate for a woman serving in an official leadership position in the church: Phoebe, mentioned only in Romans 16:1-2.<sup>195</sup> As with Junia, we have limited information on Phoebe, and the

---

<sup>193</sup> Thompson, "Role of Women," 105.

<sup>194</sup> Thompson, "Role of Women," 50.

<sup>195</sup> *I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.*

information we do have is subject to translation issues and questions. Almost everything that follows, then falls into the realm of possibilities rather than that of certainties. Some of these possibilities are more likely than others, and we will examine the likelihood (or not) of each conjecture posed. But the discussion that follows should be viewed as precisely that: conjecture.

The first question under consideration is why Paul would commend Phoebe to the church in Rome. On this point, there is widespread agreement: Paul likely mentions Phoebe here because she was the one entrusted with carrying this Epistle to the churches in Rome. Paul did not establish the church in Rome, nor had he visited there before,<sup>196</sup> and so he would have needed to establish not only his own credibility but also the credibility of the one with whom he was sending this letter. “For letter-carriers to be accepted in the communities to which they were sent it was often necessary for the senders to provide the courier’s credentials; thus, a letter or note of commendation would be provided.”<sup>197</sup> Paul paints a most favorable picture of Phoebe as a sister in the faith and one committed to the church in Cenchrea<sup>198</sup> and asks the Christians in Rome to receive her in the Lord and give her any help she needs.

It is natural, then, to ask what precisely this task of letter-carrier would have entailed. Here commentators differ, with some ascribing a larger role to Phoebe than

---

<sup>196</sup> Romans 1:10: *I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you; Romans 15:22-24: This is why I have often hindered from coming to you. But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I visit Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.*

<sup>197</sup> Terry L. Wilder, “Phoebe, the Letter-Carrier of Romans, and the Impact of Her Role on Biblical Theology,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 56, no. 1 (Fall 2013): 46.

<sup>198</sup> Spelling of this port city varies; some sources use Cenchreae, and others prefer Cenchrea. I will use Cenchrea unless quoting.

others. Virtually all agree that Phoebe would have had to find her own way from Corinth to Rome, a journey of significance whether made by land or sea. It is possible that in addition to delivering the letter, Phoebe may have also had business reasons for traveling to Rome. Regardless of whether this trip had both secular and spiritual purposes, the fact that Phoebe likely financed it herself marks her as a woman of means—a conjecture supported by Paul’s characterization of her in verse 2.<sup>199</sup> Once Phoebe arrived in Rome, there is greater disagreement on the nature of the duties needed to complete her task as letter-carrier. Following the secular traditions of the time, Phoebe’s role would also have included reading the letter aloud to the churches in Rome—a verbal reading whose best parallel today is that of a performance in a forensics competition. “Oral performance was often the task of the letter deliverer, who may have been chosen precisely for this reason.”<sup>200</sup>

Some commentators ascribe more to Phoebe than simply reading the letter aloud, instead also giving her responsibility for explaining parts of the letter and answering questions that might have arisen out of its contents. Here we potentially run into problems with the headship principle. Although Paul would have “coached” Phoebe on some of the answers and potential questions, thus making Phoebe more of a messenger than a teacher, he could not have predicted all the questions that might have arisen or explanations that might have been needed. So yes, it is possible that Phoebe’s role would also have included some explanation. But “one makes a huge jump from Phoebe’s role as

---

<sup>199</sup> Although it is generally agreed that this characterization marks Phoebe as a woman of means, the translation and exact nature is again a source of disagreement; see the following paragraphs for further discussion.

<sup>200</sup> J. David Miller, “What Can We Say about Phoebe?,” *Priscilla Papers* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 18.

a courier and its associated responsibilities of clarifying and explaining some of Romans' content (if need be) to the conclusion that women are thus now permitted to teach men in the churches."<sup>201</sup>

We now turn back to Romans 16:1-2 and consider what else we know about Phoebe. Here, two interpretative difficulties emerge: the first dealing with Paul's characterization of Phoebe's role in the Cenchrean church (verse 1) and the second with the "help" she has been to many people (verse 2). Since there is greater agreement and clarity on the second point, we will begin there. Commentators generally concur that the word Paul uses here<sup>202</sup> should be understood in the context of the Roman patron-client system. This system was "a basic building block of Roman imperial culture and a key factor in the maintenance of power and control across the far-flung Empire"<sup>203</sup>—a building block that likely made its way into the first-century Christian church as well. The nuances of the patron-client system are well beyond the scope of this paper, but a cursory examination of the basic principles is helpful. The relationship between patrons and clients was typically a relationship between two secularly unequal parties, with the patron providing economic or political resources in exchange for "promises of reciprocity, solidarity, and loyalty."<sup>204</sup> Patronage could occur between two individuals or

---

<sup>201</sup> Wilder, "Phoebe, Letter-Carrier," 50.

<sup>202</sup> προστάτις (*prostatis*).

<sup>203</sup> Amanda C. Miller, "Cut from the Same Cloth: A Study of Female Patrons in Luke-Acts and the Roman Empire," *Review and Expositor* 114, no. 2 (2017): 204.

<sup>204</sup> Osiek and MacDonald, *Woman's Place*, 195.

between an individual and a group, and “both private and public patronage were activities in which women were deeply involved.”<sup>205</sup>

By his wording choice in verse 2, Paul would almost certainly have been recognizing Phoebe as a patron “to many people,” that is, a patron for a group. This conjecture gains additional strength when we remember that Phoebe would have had to finance her own trip to Rome, thus marking her as a businesswoman and/or a woman of means. Translating *προστάτις* (*prostatis*) as “help” is not entirely incorrect, but it loses the concept of the patron-client system. In particular, “the first-century audiences hearing Luke, then, would not be thinking of these women [Phoebe, Lydia, and others] as voiceless society matrons.”<sup>206</sup> Paul’s word choice would have conveyed the very specific type of help offered by a patron, and he would have been asking for the same type of material support from the church in Rome upon Phoebe’s arrival.

On the other hand, Phoebe’s role at the church in Cenchrea has received considerably more debate. The word Paul uses here<sup>207</sup> is translated a variety of ways in the New Testament, but its word etymology brings to mind the word “deacon”—and indeed, this is the same word that Paul uses in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 when he lists qualifications for deacons. Does this mean Phoebe served the Cenchrean church in an official capacity: that of deacon (or “deaconess,” if one prefers)? Commentators are split. Zell asserts the following:

It is not necessary to qualify Phoebe’s *διάκονος* role as that of a “deacon” appointed by the church. Instead by recognizing Phoebe as a “servant” of the church we may consider any of these tasks [encouragement, support, teaching

---

<sup>205</sup> Osiek and MacDonald, *Woman's Place*, 199.

<sup>206</sup> Miller, “Female Patrons,” 206.

<sup>207</sup> *διάκονον* (*diakonon*).

women and children] as well as many others fitting for a woman who had been given a new life in her Savior Jesus.<sup>208</sup>

Other commentators disagree, instead understanding Phoebe's role as "a recognized leader of the church in Cenchreae with a role that included authority and responsibility."<sup>209</sup>

Which is correct? From the writings of the early church, we know that an office of deaconess did exist, although the earliest mentions of deaconesses do not occur in the church of Paul's time.<sup>210</sup> Therefore, it is not impossible to say that Phoebe served as a deaconess at the church in Cenchrea. It is too strong, however, to say that she *did* serve in an officially recognized church role as a deaconess rather than generally offering help, service, and support. We simply don't know enough about the church at Cenchrea to authoritatively state what Phoebe's role might have been. Regardless of whether her role was official or not, we *can* say with certainty that she was not violating the headship principle in whatever sort of official position she might have held or whatever sort of unofficial help she might have given the Cenchrean church. Thompson's characterization of Phoebe serves us well: "a highly respected and active member of the Corinthian congregation, but...[not] a person who taught, preached, or led public worship."<sup>211</sup>

Before leaving this historical survey behind, an assumption made in the previous paragraph needs to be addressed. If it is possible that Phoebe held the role of

---

<sup>208</sup> Paul E. Zell, "Romans 16:1, 7: Phoebe, a Deacon? Junia, an Apostle?", *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 111, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 105.

<sup>209</sup> Dzubinski and Stasson, *Women in Mission*, 50.

<sup>210</sup> Depending on how one interprets 1 Timothy 3:11, this statement is debatable. Interpretation of this verse will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>211</sup> Thompson, "Role of Women," 45.

deaconesses, then women can hold this role in the church without violating the headship principle. Is such an understanding in harmony with the rest of Scripture, especially with Paul's writings on the qualifications for various church offices? And if so, what responsibilities did the office of deaconess likely entail? To answer these questions, we first extend our study beyond the church of Paul's day and then return to the New Testament for one final analysis of Paul's relevant writings.

### **Deaconesses: Women Teachers and Preachers?**

Our understanding of the role of deaconess in the church of Paul's day is relatively murky. This murkiness is not limited to Phoebe's role at the church in Cenchrea, nor is it limited to the office of deaconess. We don't know very much about church polity in general in the earliest days of the New Testament church. In particular, we don't know how the office of deaconess developed or the responsibilities of deaconesses in Paul's day.

Thankfully, this murkiness does not extend farther forward in history, and we have more clarity on the role of deaconess in the next few centuries of the Christian church. Since the focus of this chapter is on the role of women in Acts and the Pauline Epistles, and since we "must also not confuse church history with Bible exegesis regardless of the practice followed in the church of the third and fourth centuries...the issue lies not in what the early church did so much as it does in what Paul means,"<sup>212</sup> we will limit our discussion regarding what we know about the office of deaconess beyond Scripture to a few key details. Historical evidence from the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and

---

<sup>212</sup> Robert M Lewis, "The 'Women' of 1 Timothy 3:11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136, no. 542 (June 1979): 171.

the *Apostolic Constitutions* provides compelling proof that an office of deaconess did indeed exist in the post-apostolic church. The *Didascalia Apostolorum* was written in the third century, the *Apostolic Constitutions* in the fourth. Both discuss the office of deaconess, and the *Apostolic Constitutions* particularly “spelled out the duties of deaconesses and included instructions for their ordination.”<sup>213</sup> Deaconesses were often charged with assisting women in preparations for their baptisms and instructing women after baptism. They were not, however, permitted to baptize nor to perform the same functions as bishops, presbyters, or priests. In short, we “should not ignore that there were indeed women deacons in the early church,”<sup>214</sup> although this was far from a universal practice.

As mentioned above, however, an establishment of the office of deaconess is a moot point for women today if this office is not in harmony with the rest of the Scriptures. Therefore, we now turn back to the writings of the apostle Paul to determine whether he too would have supported such an office. The natural place to look is 1 Timothy 3:8-13,<sup>215</sup> where Paul outlines the requirements for deacons, with the crux of the matter found in the translation of *γυναικας* (*gunaikas*).

As is the case in 1 Timothy 2:12, this Greek word can be translated either “woman” or “wife,” and so we rely on context to assist with the translation. A number of

---

<sup>213</sup> Dzubinski and Stasson, *Women in Mission*, 51.

<sup>214</sup> Miller, “Phoebe,” 17.

<sup>215</sup> *In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus (NIV2011).*



factors point toward a translation of “woman” rather than wife. First, “if Paul indeed has the deacons’ wives in mind, one wonders why he did not say anything about the qualifications of overseers’ wives.”<sup>216</sup> Second, the structure of this section argues against translating γυναικας as wives, as it would be odd to refer to deacons’ wives in verse 11 before actually saying in verse 12 that a deacon must be faithful to his wife. Finally, mentioning deacons’ wives interrupts Paul’s line of thought. He is clearly laying out requirements for deacons in verses 8-10 and 12-13. Why would he pause briefly to talk about their wives instead of waiting until he was done with the requirements for deacons and *then* talking about the requirements for their wives? It seems most likely, then, that Paul means “women” and not “wives” in verse 11.

But who are these women? Are they women who fulfill the special office of deaconess? Or are they simply women who assist and provide service to the church in various ways but do not serve in an officially-established church position? Once again, we are unable to answer these questions with absolute certainty. Looking at the duties of the office of deacon, however, can tell us whether the duties of that office would have included duties that violated the headship principle and thus would have been prohibited to women. Although the noun διακονοι (*diakonoi*) is not used in Acts 6:1-6,<sup>217</sup> most

---

<sup>216</sup> Armin W. Schuetze, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The People’s Bible (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991), 57. Although most commentators agree with this line of thinking, Lewis offers an interesting alternate theory: that Paul did not address the wives of overseers because overseers’ wives would not be able to assist with their ministry. Deacons’ wives, on the other hand, could indeed be of assistance to their deacon-husbands and therefore merited mention by Paul.

<sup>217</sup> *In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas,*

agree that this section describes the establishment of the office of deacon, the diaconate, although there is still some uncertainty on this point.<sup>218</sup> The duties of deacons are clearly outlined: they are to work under the Twelve in performing specific service-related duties to the church. This distinction between elders (or overseers) and deacons can be further seen in 1 Timothy 3, where separate requirements are laid out for each group. Deacons, therefore, are “to take over and accept responsibility for certain specific duties in the church which have been allocated to them”<sup>219</sup>—specific duties that do not appear to include spiritual oversight of a congregation.<sup>220</sup>

Since the role of deacon likely did not include an exercise of authority or teaching, it is possible that Paul could have been recognizing an official church office—the office of deaconess, like that of overseer and deacon—in 1 Timothy 3:11. The fact that the church officially recognized and approved of the office of deaconess by the third and fourth centuries would appear to further support this hypothesis. We cannot be sure

---

*and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.*

<sup>218</sup> The Greek verb translated “wait on tables” is *διακονεῖν* (*diakonein*), which comes from the same root as the Greek noun for “deacon.” As mentioned above, however, note that there *is* still uncertainty on the point of whether Acts 6:1-6 does indeed establish the office of deacon. This uncertainty makes the “One Final Historical Caution” portion of this chapter extremely relevant to Acts 6:1-6 and the office of deacon.

<sup>219</sup> B.W. Powers, “Patterns of New Testament Ministry II - Deacons,” *Churchmen* 87, no. 3 (1973): 246.

<sup>220</sup> The only other place in Paul’s writings where “deacons” are referenced as some type of official church leadership group is in Philippians 1:1: *To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons...* We have absolutely no information as to whether this group of deacons did or did not include females. However, if one assumes that the office of deaconesses did indeed exist in Paul’s day, then it is not unreasonable to conclude that “deacons” here included both males and females, especially when we remember the origins of the Philippian church. Paul’s ministry in Philippi began with Lydia and the other women at the river instead of at the synagogue as would have been his normal practice, and, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, many commentators have hypothesized that Paul deviated from his normal routine because there was no synagogue in Philippi due to a lack of the requisite number of Jewish men needed to form one.

of this, however, nor can we be sure of the exact responsibilities of such an office. We don't know whether the offices of deacon and deaconess would have been on equal footing in the earliest days of the Christian church or whether these office would have had the same—or at least mainly similar—responsibilities. We don't know how widespread the office of deaconess was, how many women may have served in this role, or whether the office of deaconess was restricted to single women (virgins and widows).<sup>221</sup> Nor do we know whether there were both deacons and deaconesses serving every congregation, or whether deaconesses were less common than deacons. As with many of the other historical questions addressed in this chapter, we can say very little with absolute certainty. But if there were indeed deaconesses in Paul's time, we can agree with Schuetze in concluding that "as deaconesses, [women] could render valuable service to their fellow Christians in keeping with the order of creation as Paul had spoken of it in [1 Timothy] chapter two."<sup>222</sup>

### **One Final Historical Caution**

Before moving on to Chapter 3 (the role of women in the church today) one final historical caution is in order. As mentioned frequently in this chapter, there is very little we can say with certainty about how the Christian church during the time of Acts and the Pauline Epistles was organized. We can make quite a number of educated guesses, and many of these guesses carry the weight of significant historical evidence. But unless we

---

<sup>221</sup> To impose a modern term, the demographics of various congregations would have also influenced the office of deaconess. Smaller churches would not have needed deaconesses, while larger churches would have been more likely to utilize the office simply on the basis of numbers.

<sup>222</sup> Schuetze, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 58.

have writings or other historical evidence specifically dedicated to a question we want to answer, that question cannot be answered with absolute certainty. Therefore, we need to take care not to state our conclusions with an absolute certainty that is impossible to achieve. I am not calling for equivocation; I am simply asking for restraint in using unequivocal language to describe historical situations where this language is impossible to defend beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Similarly, we should be very careful in completely—or even primarily—basing arguments about how women can serve today on how women may have served in Acts and the Pauline Epistles. Part of the reason for this is the lack of absolute certainty referenced in the preceding paragraph. Part is also because so many of these arguments are essentially arguments from silence. We don't know that Lydia took a leading role in the Eucharist, that Priscilla taught Apollos in a more public setting than her home, that Junia served as an apostle even in the broadest sense of the word, or that Phoebe was a deaconess of the church in Cenchrea. Everything mentioned in the preceding sentence may be true. But it also may not be true, and therefore basing an argument on any of these potentially hypothetical situations is not a sufficient reason to allow a woman to fulfill a role in the church today.

At the same time, we also need to be careful of falling into the other ditch.<sup>223</sup> The flip side of everything said in the previous paragraph is also true: we don't know that Lydia did not take a leading role in the Eucharist, that Priscilla taught only in her home and only in partnership with Aquila, that Junia was well-known to the apostles rather than being counted among their number, or that Phoebe only served the church in Cenchrea in

---

<sup>223</sup> The phrase “the narrow Lutheran middle” is appropriate here.

an unofficial capacity. Everything mentioned in that preceding sentence may also be true. But it also may not be true, and therefore basing an argument on any of these potentially hypothetical reasons is also not a sufficient reason to restrict a woman from fulfilling a role in the church today. In other words, we can—and should!—look to the New Testament church for guidance and direction as we consider in what ways women can serve. We should not base our arguments—either in permitting or restricting women’s service in the church—solely on historical first-century practices about which we cannot speak with certainty, unless these practices are clearly supported or rejected by other clear doctrinal passages from Scripture. Care also needs to be taken in differentiating between descriptive historical situations and practices and prescriptive Scripture passages.

Regardless of how much of the speculation of this chapter is correct, there is one thing we know for sure about all the women highlighted: they eagerly desired to use their gifts, abilities, and resources to serve their Lord while still respecting the doctrine of headship and their calling of helper as they would have understood it. The same can be said of the vast majority of WELS women today, and it can particularly be said of me. But reconciling that desire with actual church practices and applications can be difficult, especially when some of these practices and applications seem to restrict women from serving in roles and situations where the headship principle does not apply. Let’s now move from the ancient to the modern and consider how the doctrine of headship plays out in the church today, especially as that doctrine is seen through my various callings and vocations.

## CHAPTER III: THE BLESSINGS OF HEADSHIP

The summer between first and second grade, my family transferred our membership from Mt. Lebanon Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, WI, to St. John's Lutheran Church in Wauwatosa, WI, and so I changed grade schools at that time. Like any kid, grade school had its ups and downs for me, and some stories and experiences stand out more than others. I particularly remember one episode from 7<sup>th</sup> grade that happened during the Lenten season. Like many other churches, St. John's has afternoon midweek Advent and Lent worship services—and like many other churches, the upper-grade students serve as “ushers in training” at those services. It's a good system, one that gets the grade school kids involved in church and hopefully encourages them to serving in this way when they transition into high school.

St. John's was like many other churches in an additional way: only the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys were allowed to usher. I can't remember if my 7<sup>th</sup> grade self thought this was fair or not, nor can I remember whether I would have known enough about the headship principle and roles of men and women to be perturbed that I couldn't usher. But I do remember what happened: the teacher was asking for boys to volunteer to usher, and not enough boys volunteered to cover all the needed usher slots. So I volunteered, despite the fact that there was one boy in my class who was particularly upset about the prospect of a female ushering.<sup>224</sup> In the end, though, my teacher said it was fine,<sup>225</sup> and so I ushered for

---

<sup>224</sup> Full disclosure: this boy and I did not get along throughout much of grade school. So to be fair, I am not entirely sure whether his objection was to a female ushering or whether it was to *me* ushering.

<sup>225</sup> I suspect that my teacher would have asked the pastor, but my 7<sup>th</sup> grade self was not privy to all of those details.

the afternoon service. And moving forward, grade-school girls started ushering for the afternoon midweek Advent and Lent services with more regularity, at least for a time.<sup>226</sup>

This story can be taken in one of two ways: either I was dissatisfied with the application of the roles of men and women at my local congregation at a young age, or I saw a need that wasn't being filled and stepped up to fill it at a young age. In reality, it's probably a little bit of both. As mentioned above, I'm not sure whether I knew enough about the headship principle in 7<sup>th</sup> grade to see the ushering situation as an overly strict application of the roles of men and women. But I likely did see a situation where I was being told I couldn't do something without being given a good reason, and I know that would have prompted me to want to do the very thing I was being told I couldn't do. At the same time, I do also hope my motives were not *entirely* self-serving. Ushers were needed and this was something I could do, so why wouldn't I volunteer to do it?

This 7<sup>th</sup> grade story is a snapshot of how I've interacted with various WELS entities in the 30 years since. Like this 7<sup>th</sup> grade story, both sides of the coin are still in play. There are times when I chafe under the headship principle and am dissatisfied with the way the roles of men and women are applied, both at my local congregation and across the synod as a whole—times when I see our practices as being “unnecessarily restrictive” to women. But my actions aren't always motivated by dissatisfaction either. By God's grace, I have been blessed with a number of gifts, and I truly have a desire to use those gifts in service to my congregation, my employer, and my synod. This chapter highlights some of the ways I have used those gifts in my various callings and vocations, particularly while staying within my role of helper.

---

<sup>226</sup> St. John's is now back to only male students ushering for afternoon midweek Advent and Lent services. I am not sure when or why this change occurred.

### Guiding Principles

Just as Chapter 1 began with a discussion of hermeneutical principles to shape and frame our understanding of how to read and interpret the biblical text, so this chapter needs to begin with a consideration of several guiding principles in the discussion on applications of the headship principle.<sup>227</sup> All of these guiding principles are related to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 10:23-24<sup>228</sup>: words that talk about building up the body of believers by our actions, words that deal with the concept of *adiaphora*. *Adiaphora*—those things neither commanded nor forbidden—can be a challenging concept in the Lutheran church, and we need to be careful how we apply the term. In matters of *adiaphora*, Christians can be in perfect agreement on biblical principles and still differ on applications. But *adiaphora* is not a license to do whatever we want simply because a certain action or task or application is neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture. Interpreting *adiaphora* in this way totally misses the point of 1 Corinthians 10:23-24. Instead, *adiaphora* is the beginning of the conversation rather than the end—a conversation where several additional considerations are important.

The first consideration is one I like to term “can vs. should.” My thinking on this consideration has changed significantly, as can be seen from a series of conversations I had several years ago on the roles of men and women with one of my pastors. These conversations were productive and fruitful, helped me refine my thinking on the subject

---

<sup>227</sup> These guiding principles are more relevant to the material in Chapter 4 than in Chapter 3, but Chapter 3 should also be read through the lens created by these guiding principles.

<sup>228</sup> *Everything is permissible*—but not everything is beneficial. “*Everything is permissible*”—but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.



and bring it more into line with what God says in his Word, and formed much of the basis for this thesis. What stands out the most, though, isn't the particular topics we discussed nor the places where we agreed or disagreed. No, I mainly remember our differing approaches to the question of "What can a woman do in the church?" I wanted to talk about whether a woman could usher, serve on a board, read a Scripture lesson. In short, I wanted to answer the question!

On the other hand, it seemed like all my pastor wanted to talk about was how the practices of our local congregation might be received, both by our members and by other nearby WELS congregations. I was *so frustrated* with him at the time because it felt like he was completely ignoring the question. But now I understand his motivation and reason for approaching the question the way that he did; now I understand why it's important to frame the question in terms of "can vs. should." My questions on women and the church originally began with the question "What can a woman do in the church?" Or, to make it more personal, I always tried to ask "Can I do this with respect to the headship principle?" when determining if I could serve in a particular way at St. John's. I never asked with malicious motives, nor was I trying to push the boundaries beyond what God says in his Word. But I was trying to determine if the places St. John's didn't permit me to serve (for example, ushering or serving on a board) were really places I couldn't serve or were instead unnecessary restrictions.

It's taken awhile, but I've finally come to the point where my question has changed. Instead of asking "*Can* I do this?", I'm now much more likely to ask "*Should* I do this?" There are times when the answer to those two questions is the same, but there are also times when the answer is different. Previously, I thought this mismatch was bad

and unnecessarily restrictive to me as a female. I thought that if I *could* do something, I *should* be able to do it, especially if that meant completing a job that was currently incomplete or fulfilling a need that was currently unfilled. Over the course of many conversations, much prayer, and quite a bit of study and growth, I've come to a place where I understand that "Can I do this?" isn't always the right question to ask. There are other things to think about than whether not I as a female should be able to do something at church, other factors to weigh besides just a job left incomplete or a need left unfilled.

That brings us to another consideration when talking about application of the headship principle: building up the body of Christ. The word "synod" means "walking together," and we are blessed to walk together with our fellow sisters and brothers in the Wisconsin Synod. This blessing of walking together also brings a sense of responsibility, both to fellow members of one's congregation and to the synod as a whole. In my role at St. John's, I might be serving in the most helpful way, taking care of something that isn't on anyone else's radar, or making the church a better place by my contribution. But if I'm creating pangs of conscience for a fellow believer, causing other congregations to question my actions, or inadvertently making the conversation more about me than about the ministry being carried out, then the good I am doing may be coming at a cost. This also plays into "can vs. should": perhaps it is better for me to give up some of my freedoms because acting in a certain way will harm the faith of a fellow believer. This is incredibly difficult to do, but it is also an outstanding display of Christian love and mature faith.

There is a flip side to this consideration, however. Acting out of Christian love for our fellow sisters and brothers in the faith is key. But if a fellow sister or brother issues a

prohibition where God has not—if they incorrectly claim a woman is not permitted to do something even though there is no such command in Scripture—then I am compelled to respectfully disagree. Even more than that, I am free to engage in the very activity that is being prohibited—not out of spite or malice, but again out of love, love that strives to demonstrate Christian freedom rather than abusing or restricting this freedom.

One final consideration circles back to the role for which women were created: the role of *ezer*, of helper.<sup>229</sup> What follows is a stereotype, but like any stereotype, it is somewhat rooted in truth. When a need is identified, women are more likely than men to step up and fill that need. This will often be done without much fanfare, with very little need for recognition. We as women see something that needs to get done and we can take care of it, so we do. It's as simple as that. But in the church, this can turn into taking opportunities away from males to serve or giving them opportunities to abdicate their leadership. I am *not* saying that any of this is being done intentionally or with sinister motives. However, we are all sinful creatures, and original sin gives us all the propensity, at varying levels, to step out of our God-given roles.

As a female who likes to take care of things, stepping back sometimes feels like I'm selling out. Something isn't being done, and I'm capable of doing it without violating the headship principle? Why wouldn't I do it? Again, I've come to learn (especially at St. John's) that there are other ways to help accomplish the task, ways that allow me to serve as a helper, ways that let me build up the body of Christ and encourage men in their unique calling. Sometimes these ways are harder in the short run but much more beneficial for the body of Christ in the long run. It has truly been a blessing figuring out

---

<sup>229</sup> See discussion of the Hebrew term *ezer* in chapter 1 (20 ff.)

how I can serve at St. John's, a blessing that has taken me on quite a journey over the past several years.

### **At My Congregation**

I'll be the first to admit that my situation at St. John's is unique. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, my family transferred there when I was in second grade. Except for a five-year period while I was away at graduate school, I've been a member of St. John's ever since that second-grade transfer. I'd always been involved as a volunteer in various ways, from directing the handbell choir to serving on the Bible study organizing committee. In 2013, I was asked to serve on a short-term communications task force, service that turned into being a volunteer member of a standing communications committee. And in July 2019, that service changed again: from volunteer lay member to part-time church staff member. In my role of Communications Coordinator, I have primary responsibilities in two areas: overall church communication and worship coordination. It has truly been a wonderful experience working in both of these areas—an experience that allows me both to serve in a helper role and also use the gifts of leadership that I have been given, all without violating the headship principle.

Before diving into my specific responsibilities in each of these areas and how these responsibilities are a faithful application of the roles of men and woman, a broader note is order. There have been two unexpected benefits in transitioning from a volunteer to an official staff member. The first (which I too often take for granted) is working closely with all of my pastors in various ways and on various tasks. I have always had a good relationship with my pastors, and I never felt uncomfortable coming to them with

anything from academic theological questions to spiritual concerns.<sup>230</sup> But now that I am officially on staff, this relationship has also morphed into a working relationship between colleagues. I have learned so much from my pastors about how to serve in an official capacity at church, and I am hopeful they have learned a little bit from me about what it is like to be a female in ministry in the WELS.

The second unexpected benefit is an added sense of independence and autonomy, and this has taken some getting used to. I tend to see *everything* church-related through the lens of headship. That's not always a bad thing, but there are times when the headship principle simply doesn't need to be part of the conversation. That viewpoint, plus figuring out what I could do on my own and what I should run through someone else, caused me a significant amount of consternation when my position first became official. Now, I am grateful for that independence and autonomy, mainly because I can help to carry out the ministry of St. John's in specific ways that utilize my gifts of leadership.

Speaking of those gifts of leadership, they come out full force in the communications side of my job. However, I hardly ever deal with the headship principle in the area of communications. My tasks are varied and range from planning our quarterly newsletter to writing the script for our quarterly video update, from revamping the bulletin boards to changing the template of the website, from writing congregational-wide communications to creating graphics and slides for our weekend worship services.

---

<sup>230</sup> These academic theological questions often dealt with the principle and applications of headship, and I owe a debt of gratitude to all of my pastors for their continual willingness to answer and discuss whatever I threw at them. I am not one to mince words with people I am comfortable with, and sometimes these discussions became quite passionate and personal. I am so grateful that they created a safe space to discuss these issues, especially when it would have been easier to say, "Kristi, I just don't have time for this today." I never got that response—even though I am certain I deserved it at times—and their encouragement of my questions and discussions was a large reason I decided to enroll in the MATS program.

Technically speaking, all of these tasks fall under someone else at church, either a specific person or a board.<sup>231</sup> Practically speaking, I ask for help when I need it but more often end up making a recommendation that gets accepted with very little fanfare or discussion. There have been very few times when I've planned a quarterly newsletter or written the script for a quarterly video update and have been told to change what I did. I can't remember the last time that a congregational-wide communication that I've written (most of which are sent out under pastors' or board members' names) has undergone any significant revisions. As for the bulletin boards, website, graphics, and slides, I ask when I have a question and know that what I create will be fine otherwise.

That last sentence could make it sound like I am being flippant about headship, and I certainly don't mean to be. Instead, it's an example of how the headship principle should ideally play out. Yes, there are males at church who hold a headship role and to whom I report. Yes, those males could abuse their headship and make my life difficult by asking to see and approve everything I write or plan or create. Yes, I could abuse my helper role by intentionally introducing changes without saying anything even though I know those type of changes should really be part of a larger discussion. But none of that currently happens because everyone is working together to serve and build up the body of Christ. I certainly don't mean to say that we always get it exactly right. But when it comes to headship and communications at St. John's, I'd say we are indeed applying the headship principle faithfully and also allowing everyone to use their gifts and talents in the best way they possibly can.

---

<sup>231</sup> Because my tasks are so varied, and because my position is so new, there isn't exactly a clear path for whom I report to. The Communications Committee, which I chair, officially resides under the Board of Outreach. My other tasks, though, touch a variety of areas within the church, and so my official position description says that I report to the ministry team: the pastors and the school principal.

As part of my official role at St. John's, I also serve in the area of worship coordination. Much goes on behind the scenes here, and there is great potential for me to step out of my helper role. One of my pastors plans the worship services,<sup>232</sup> and then it's my job to help execute those plans. This includes a number of tasks, and I again have a significant amount of autonomy in these tasks. I look for hymn conflicts<sup>233</sup> and suggest changes to the worship plan to fix these conflicts. I start with synod-produced materials and adapt these to create worship summary paragraphs for our weekly e-newsletter and short explanatory sentences for each of the worship service readings. I map out church festivals and create special liturgies and prayers for these festival worship services. And I communicate all of this to our musicians and choir directors to make sure everyone is on the same page for each worship service.

Once again, the previous paragraph's listing of what I do can easily make it seem as though I am being flippant about headship. Is it proper for a female to change worship plans, to edit synod-produced materials, and to write liturgies and prayers? In my situation, yes, for two reasons. First, everything that I change or edit or write flows through my worship pastor. I am good at what I do—partially because of my gifts and abilities and partially because of the experience I've gained through helping to coordinate worship for a number of years—and so my pastor doesn't often see the need to adjust what I've changed or edited or written. There are times when he does, however, and in those cases I submit to his decision even if I might not entirely agree with it. That's an

---

<sup>232</sup> This worship planning mainly involves picking the hymns and the sermon text. At St. John's, we have a well-established monthly rotation of liturgies, so we don't write a liturgy every week like some churches do. We also use the synod lectionary, so there isn't a need to pick the readings for the day.

<sup>233</sup> Hymn conflicts mainly include hymns that are sung too often or hymns that need to be changed because of an overlapping musical selection being sung by our choir.

excellent example of how the headship principle should play out: males and females working together, with the male being entrusted with the ultimate decision-making authority. Second, my role in worship coordination is very much a helper role. *Could* my worship pastor perform all the tasks that I do? Absolutely; he's more than capable. *Should* he have to perform these tasks? Absolutely not. God has blessed me with the gifts to do these tasks, I enjoy doing them, and because my worship pastor doesn't have to do them, he is free to concentrate on other aspects of ministry. In the area of worship, I try to take what I can off my pastor's plate so that he can fill his plate with those pastoral responsibilities that only he can carry out.<sup>234</sup>

To someone on the outside, my autonomy at St. John's might look like a disrespect for the headship principle. I am entrusted with responsibilities in a number of areas in which I practically speaking often have the final say. But instead, this autonomy is an appropriate and beneficial application of how the headship principle can (and should!) play out in a way that doesn't restrict females. Through a system built on mutual respect, trust, and a common desire to work together for the good of the church, I can make contributions to ministry without stepping out of my helper role.

### **At Wisconsin Lutheran College**

As much as I love my service at St. John's, it isn't my primary calling. Since July 2006, I have been divinely called to serve as a mathematics professor at Wisconsin Lutheran College in Milwaukee, WI. Despite the fact that I've served at WLC for over 15 years, there have been very few times when the doctrine of headship has come up in

---

<sup>234</sup> Serving in this way also allows my pastor to fulfill his calling to "prepare God's people for works of service" (Ephesians 4:12).



relation to my call at WLC.<sup>235</sup> The conversation about the headship principle is certainly not entirely absent at WLC, and there are a few interesting situations that will be discussed in this section. But throughout my time at WLC, I have very rarely experienced any restrictions because I am a female.<sup>236</sup> One potential reason for this is because of the demographics of WLC. Yes, all WLC professors are required to be WELS members in good standing. However, WLC is an academic institution, not a church. It is an academic institution in fellowship with the WELS, one that “builds its identity from the theological roots of Confessional Lutheranism” and has “a commitment to these theological roots and an emphasis on teaching biblical truths through the hermeneutical lens of Lutheran theology.”<sup>237</sup> But its primary mission is to educate students, and therefore WLC is not a church in the same way as St. John’s or any other local congregation. While this “not a church” status does not give WLC license to entirely ignore the headship principle, it does mean it is possible to apply the headship principle differently at WLC without violating biblical principles.<sup>238</sup>

Still, there are a few commonly asked questions about how my call at WLC relates to the headship principle. The first and most basic is whether I should even have a

---

<sup>235</sup> The most contentious issue—that of female called workers receiving the same “minister of the gospel” tax status as male called workers—will be addressed later in the “Across the WELS” section of this chapter.

<sup>236</sup> It should be noted that this is true at WLC but is not necessarily true across the synod. For example, upon finding out that I serve as Department Head, one well-intentioned pastor questioned how I could possibly serve in this role without violating headship. So the lack of interaction with and conversations about headship in relation to my call at WLC are internal, not necessarily external. And that’s one of the reasons I wanted to write this section of my thesis: to demonstrate that WLC is indeed applying headship in a biblically faithful way.

<sup>237</sup> “Wisconsin Lutheran College: Academics,” n.d., <https://www.wlc.edu/academics/>.

<sup>238</sup> There are many ways that WLC honors headship, and some of these are seen in the area where WLC is closest to church: that of theology. For example, only male professors and staff members give chapel, and only male professors teach theology classes.

call to WLC at all. I am teaching male students who are generally ages 18 and up (male students whom our country views as of legal age in many respects). Should I be in a position of authority over them? Before answering that question, there is an inherent assumption here that needs to be addressed: whether the college-age males that I teach are truly of “legal age.” Or, put another way, whether they are the “men” that Paul is speaking of in 1 Timothy 2:12 when he forbids a woman from having authority over a man. This is likely to be an unpopular opinion among my students, but I don’t believe they are the same type of “men” Paul is speaking of—or, at least, they aren’t these type of “men” in the way I interact with them. The very fact that they are in college and (in most cases) are continuing their education directly from high school indicates that they are still continuing to grow and mature. To be sure, this growth and maturation process will (hopefully!) continue for the rest of their lives. But it is particularly pronounced during these four years of college, and therefore I would not say that my students are the same type of “men” that women should not have authority over—especially when it comes to non-theological matters.<sup>239</sup>

This type of argument is not entirely satisfying on its own, however, because I do occasionally have a non-traditional student (who is my age or older) in class. The question of whether it is proper for me to serve as a professor at a Lutheran college, then, needs to be answered on the basis of my position itself rather than solely on the basis of the students I am teaching. And on the basis of my position, I *do* believe it is proper for me to serve as a professor at a Lutheran college. It is true that “in our Christian schools

---

<sup>239</sup> Please note that the purpose of this section is *not* to create a loophole or technicality that validates my call to WLC. Whether or not my students are “men” is not the main reason I believe my call is valid. However, the question of whether or not my students are “men” is a commonly asked question, and therefore it deserves consideration.

all those who teach, whether it be History, English, Science, Mathematics, or other branches of learning, are also ministers of the Gospel. In these classes, too, as well as in the religion classes, the Gospel is served and taught.”<sup>240</sup> But remember that I am called to teach mathematics at WLC; I am not called to teach theology. I do live out my faith in the way I conduct myself in my classroom every day. I am blessed with opportunities to have spiritual conversations with my students from time to time. And I am particularly honored to be able to serve as a role model and mentor for my female students, both in the way I approach my subject area and the way I approach my service to WLC, to St. John’s, and to the church as a whole. But my classroom teaching is exactly the same at WLC as it would be at a secular institution.<sup>241</sup> I do not have authority over my students in the way that Paul would have prohibited in 1 Timothy 2:12, and therefore it is entirely proper for me—and other similarly-qualified females—to serve as college professors at a Lutheran institution of higher learning.<sup>242</sup>

Throughout my time at WLC, I have also held two other roles that have potential implications for headship: those of Department Head and Faculty Senate Chair. The role

---

<sup>240</sup> Wilbert R. Gawrisch, “The Place of Women in the Life and Work of the Church,” 1968, 15, <http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/1769/GawrischPlace.pdf>.

<sup>241</sup> In my culminating paper for ministry certification (written in 2008 but still applicable today), it was suggested that I answer the question “How does your classroom at WLC look different than your classroom would at a public university?” I put off writing that paper for almost a year because I was hesitant to commit to this answer: “It doesn’t.” Ignoring the mathematical and educational growth gained through teaching experience, my classroom as a graduate student at a public university would look exactly the same as my classroom as a professor at WLC. In other words, my faith does not show itself in the academic content that I teach. I do not demonstrate to my students that I am a Christian when working through a mathematical proof or explaining the applications of a mathematical equation. If someone observed one of my lessons, they would gain no insight into my religious beliefs and convictions by how I teach the mathematical content. In writing that paper, I became much more comfortable with committing to that answer. As mentioned above, I live out my faith in various ways. I feel no compulsion to change my classroom teaching to artificially incorporate my faith into my academic content.

<sup>242</sup> I have avoided addressing one issue in the preceding paragraphs: is it proper for a female to serve as a **theology** professor at a Lutheran institution of higher learning? That question will be examined in Chapter 4.

of Department Head is easier to address, mainly because of the way the position is described in the “Roles and Responsibilities of the Department Head” document: “Within the academic governance structure of the college, the position of Department Head is a service-oriented role.” As Department Head, I am responsible for either carrying out or delegating the following tasks: receiving and properly directing communication to and from the department, ensuring that the department’s published curriculum is accurate and up to date, submitting the department’s annual budget, organizing and overseeing monthly department meetings, overseeing and completing department business, and serving as an advocate for the needs of the faculty members in my department. None of these responsibilities involves having authority over the other members in my department. Therefore, Department Head is not a role that is imbued with authority, and it is again entirely proper for me to serve in this role at WLC.<sup>243</sup>

Although Faculty Senate Chair is not explicitly identified as a “service-oriented role,” the same argument can be made for a woman holding this position based on the responsibilities assigned to the Faculty Senate Chair.<sup>244</sup> Responsibilities of this position include some clerical tasks such as scheduling monthly meetings, preparing meeting agendas and publishing meeting minutes, and supervising annual elections of faculty

---

<sup>243</sup> I would argue that even if the role of Department Head did carry authority, it would still be proper for me to serve in this role. As mentioned previously, WLC is not a church in the same sense as a local congregation, and therefore I do not believe Paul’s restriction in 1 Timothy 2:12 should be applied as narrowly at WLC as it is at local congregations. Again, when it comes to spiritual matters such as giving chapel, I firmly hold to applying Paul’s words at WLC. But I also believe that in more secular matters such as Department Head, we should exercise caution with just how far we extend Paul’s prohibition. If we are not going to restrict women from holding positions of authority over men in secular jobs, then neither should we restrict women from holding positions of authority over men when it comes to the more secular aspects of WLC.

<sup>244</sup> Note that I am listing the duties of Faculty Chair simply to provide context for the position, not to provide a checklist of “permissible” and “not permissible” activities for a female. And, similar to the preceding footnote, even if Faculty Senate Chair *were* a position that carried authority, I argue that women could still serve in this role.

committee members. Other tasks include presiding over these monthly meetings, serving as a liaison between the faculty and the Provost, and encouraging faculty committees in their progress and work. In my two years serving as Faculty Senate Chair, it was a great privilege to give ear to my colleagues and hear their perspectives—both positive and negative. The position of Faculty Senate Chair also allowed me to use my gifts of leadership and organization, and I am thankful to have been able to serve in this way. Once again, this is not a position imbued with authority that goes against 1 Timothy 2:12, and therefore this is also not a position that is restricted to men.

### **Across the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS)**

In addition to my work at St. John's and WLC, I am also part of the WELS as a whole. There are many conversations about and applications of the headship principle across the synod, and a few of the more controversial will be discussed in Chapter 4. I am especially grateful to the Conference of Presidents for recognizing that “our WELS doctrinal statements on the subject [of the God-given roles of men and women] could, in places, be misunderstood or misapplied” and “appoint[ing] a committee to review our doctrinal statements and other published materials dealing with the roles of men and women and provid[ing] recommendations for improvement.”<sup>245</sup> This committee began their work in late 2017 or early 2018 and produced a Bible study on the topic (“Male and Female He Created Them”) and a revised doctrinal statement (“Male and Female in God's World”). As mentioned in Chapter 1, this revised doctrinal statement is currently undergoing its own set of revisions, and it is tentatively scheduled to be presented for

---

<sup>245</sup> “Book of Reports and Memorials” (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, May 2019), 8, <https://synodadmin.welsrc.net/download-synodadmin/official-synod-reports/>.

discussion at district conventions in the summer of 2022.<sup>246</sup> Despite the delay, both the Bible study and the initial revision have provided much good material for discussion and have indicated that the WELS is indeed aware of the potential pitfalls and difficulties surrounding the way we talk about the headship principle and the roles of men and women. As a WELS female, I very much appreciate the willingness to not only study this issue but also to be sensitive to the language we are using.

In the rest of this section, I'd like to highlight two ways that I have interacted with the headship principle on a synod-wide level. These are two vastly different situations, but they are two situations that demonstrate our commitment as a synod to engaging in open and honest conversations on the principle of headship and revising our applications of this principle when appropriate. The first is an issue that has had an impact on female called workers across our synod since 1956: the issue of how called workers are classified for tax purposes. Ever since a private letter ruling in 1956, WELS pastors and male teachers have been classified as "ministers of the gospel" (or, more recently, simply "ministers") by the Internal Revenue Service; female teachers have not. For the purposes of this paper, it is sufficient to understand that this created a disparity in the net income after taxes for male and female called workers.<sup>247</sup>

When I first interviewed at WLC, one of my future colleagues in the math department made sure I was aware of the disparity in tax status. There wasn't anything

---

<sup>246</sup> The COVID-related cancellation of district conventions in 2020 almost certainly slowed this process, as the completed statement was scheduled to be made available to the district conventions in 2020, with feedback requested, and then the statement was to be presented in final form to the synod convention in 2021.

<sup>247</sup> It is important to be clear on this point: WELS was **not** paying its male and female called workers differently. Instead, male workers were allowed to exclude the value of housing, utilities, and furnishings on their taxes, resulting in a lower taxable income and therefore a higher net income after taxes.

that I could do about it, however, and I wasn't going to decline the call to WLC based on this issue, so I simply chalked this up to a quirk of the WELS. But it was always something that bothered me just a bit, especially after I finished my ministry certification and held essentially the same call as my male colleagues.<sup>248</sup> It was one of those issues that was a running joke among the females at WLC—one that was particularly of interest to me as a single female because I was the head of my household and did not file joint tax returns. And although WLC chose around 2015 to compensate female called workers for the difference in income—compensation that WLC was under absolutely no obligation to offer—it still rankled because of the seeming inequity that existed on a synod-wide level.

Happily, in the summer of 2020, the WELS changed its position and “after a thorough investigation...received a legal opinion that synod ministry certified female teachers and female staff members in our synod do qualify for the parsonage allowance.”<sup>249</sup> The documentation on this subject makes it clear what has and has not changed in classifying females as eligible to receive this tax benefit:

This tax benefit has not become available because WELS has changed in its understanding or definition of the role of female called workers. Our description of female teachers and female staff ministers as called workers who serve in the public ministry hasn't changed. What has changed is the way the courts have interpreted IRS rules regarding the required qualifications for this benefit. In other words, this is not a question of theology (our teaching has not changed) but of how tax law is interpreted and applied by the courts and the IRS.<sup>250</sup>

---

<sup>248</sup> At WLC, male called workers are given the opportunity to give chapel, but they are not required to do so. This is essentially the only difference in calls between male and female professors. Therefore, since some of my male colleagues do not give chapel, my service at WLC is essentially the same as theirs.

<sup>249</sup> “Together: WELS Female Called Workers Eligible for Parsonage Allowance,” WELS Together Archives, July 7, 2020, <https://wels.net/wels-female-called-workers-eligible-for-parsonage-allowance/>.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

In many ways, it would have been easier to maintain the status quo with respect to the IRS. In contrast, I am thankful that WELS saw this issue as one worth studying and pursuing a legal opinion on, and I appreciate the resolution of an inequity that was not created by the synod but that existed nonetheless.

The second interaction with the headship principle on a synod-wide level is decidedly more personal. In the introduction to this thesis, I mentioned that I serve on the WELS Women's Ministry (WM) Executive Team. I've served on this team since January 2020, and I have gained far more from this service than I've given. It has been an amazing privilege to work with and learn from fellow WELS women who, like me, are incredibly committed to and supportive of their synod but who also wish to use their unique female voices to build up women across the synod, especially women who may be struggling with questions related to the principle and applications of headship.

In Advent 2020, WM released a series of 25 devotions—one for each day in December—written by women for women. These devotions were incredibly well-received, and so we decided that we'd like to follow up with another devotional series. After brainstorming and discussion, we settled on a 13-week series of devotions to be released in summer 2020 focusing on the unique callings of men and women. Since I was partially on sabbatical from WLC to finish up my work in the MATS program, and since this topic was of particular interest to me,<sup>251</sup> I served as the project manager for this series, entitled "*Reflections on Our Unique Callings: Men, Women, and the Body of*

---

<sup>251</sup> I've written a number of papers on various aspects of headship for my work in the MATS program, and I knew even when first starting the program that I wanted to write my thesis on some aspect of headship and the roles of men and women. Spending spring 2020 planning the *Reflections* series and writing a number of the devotions, along with the various papers I wrote and the various conversations I had with my pastors, was exactly the preparation God knew I needed to write this thesis.



*Christ.*”<sup>252</sup> This was an extraordinary experience from start to finish. From the very first virtual meeting with synod leadership to pitch this devotional idea and ask for their backing and support, to outlining the series and examining the various aspects of headship (both principle and application), to writing a number of devotions and being equally edified by the writings of my fellow WM Exec Team members, to working with theological reviewers and ensuring these devotions were speaking the same language as the rest of synod, to making final edits and sending off the devotions for publication—all of these came together to produce something that we haven’t seen all that often at a synod-wide level: writings on the headship principle from the voice of confessional Lutheran females.

In conjunction with the written devotions, a few of us from the WM Exec Team, along with one of our pastoral advisors, produced an audio companion to each devotion: a continuing conversation (or a mini podcast, if you will). These audio conversations gave us the opportunity to further develop and discuss the material in the accompanying devotion, but they did more than that. They allowed us to be honest about our various struggles with the issue of the headship principle and to model how to have open, honest, and respectful conversations with a pastor on this topic.

The comments that came in from women across the synod were overwhelmingly positive, and a common theme emerged in many of them. Women who had previously felt alone because of their struggles with the headship principle were built up by the knowledge that other women also shared in these struggles. Women who had previously felt guilty because of their struggles with the headship principle were strengthened by the

---

<sup>252</sup> <https://wels.net/serving-you/devotions/unique-callings/>.

knowledge that even those of us who have thought about and studied this subject in a significant way still struggle with aspects of headship, both the principle and the application. The support that the *Reflections* series garnered from synod, together with the incredibly positive response from both women and men, once again indicate that WELS is open to honest conversations about the headship principle, even when these conversations are difficult. Even more than that, these conversations involve women's voices as well as men's.

I've seen the blessings of the headship principle in my various callings and vocations. In my work at St. John's, at WLC, and across the synod, this topic has been approached with care and concern for all involved. There's been a desire to first start with a thorough understanding of the biblical principle and then turn to the discussion of applications, to allow women to serve in the fullest way possible by using their God-given gifts and abilities while still respecting the headship principle, and to understand the unique struggles that women face when it comes to the doctrine of headship. All of these blessings of headship are significant, and none of them should be taken for granted. At the same time, these blessings haven't totally erased my struggles with the headship principle. Despite agreement on the biblical principle, there have been situations where I question the way the headship principle has been applied—"sticky situations," if you will. This thesis would be an idealized and incomplete look at the headship principle without an examination and analysis of some of these sticky situations.

## CHAPTER IV: WHERE'S THE FENCE? (IS THERE EVEN ONE?)

I recently read a blog post<sup>253</sup> that painted the following picture: a city is building a new playground. It's going to be a beautiful playground full of slides and swings and monkey bars, but unfortunately the only park space available is near a busy intersection. Before the playground opens, the city installs a large fence around it—a fence intended to let the children play safely. Once the playground opens, it becomes clear that the fence is indeed doing its job. Children are having fun on the playground within the fence's confines, and there's no worry from parents that their children will run out into the busy intersection.

But one day a new family comes to the playground, a family that wants to make sure their daughter knows why the fence is there. They tell her that the fence is the only reason she's able to play on the playground at all, remind her to always keep her eyes on the fence, and admonish her to never try to climb it. What's going to happen? That child is going to play, yes, but her playing is always going to be shaped and influenced by the fence. She might even stay farther away from the fence than she normally would just to make sure her parents know she isn't trying to climb it. She's not really thinking about the playground in the same way the other children are. She's thinking about the fence.

I'm sure you see the point of this analogy. When it comes to women and the church, it sometimes feels like all we talk about is the fence: what women can't do in the

---

<sup>253</sup> <https://ftc.co/resource-library/blog-entries/less-about-the-fence-more-about-the-playground-female-ambition-and-complementarian-culture/>. Please note that I do not agree with everything said in this blog post. However, I think the playground and fence picture is an interesting and enlightening way to look at headship.

church so as to not violate the headship principle. And for some women in some situations, it can also feel like the fence is too close to the playground. Does the fence *always* need to be exactly where we've placed it? Or are there situations where the headship principle is being applied too narrowly and women could serve more fully than they are currently being allowed? This chapter strives to answer that question for a handful of specific situations: situations in which I am personally invested and are near and dear to my heart.

### **Guiding Principles, Part 2**

The guiding principles in Chapter 3<sup>254</sup> were all based on Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 10:23-24 and dealt with how we as a church, as a college, and as a synod should handle matters of adiaphora. Similarly, this chapter also needs to begin with a set of guiding principles,<sup>255</sup> but the guiding principles below are decidedly more personal. The topic of headship is often emotionally charged for me. While it is good to bring that emotion into the conversation, it also amplifies the potential for misunderstanding. And while "backtrack" is too strong a word, certain themes have emerged throughout my various conversations on the headship principle—themes that often need additional explanation and clarification. In other words, I've had enough conversations on the headship principle to realize that the guiding principles below need to be explicitly spelled out in order to clearly explain my intent for discussing the material in the rest of this chapter. Once again, these guiding principles are my own and should not be projected

---

<sup>254</sup> "Can vs. should," building up the body of Christ, and not taking away opportunities for males to serve.

<sup>255</sup> What follows might better be labeled as "disclaimers" rather than "guiding principles."

onto anyone else—male or female—with whom the headship principle is being discussed.

The first guiding principle comes from an understandable but not always correct assumption: if I am evaluating and potentially critiquing a process or procedure, I must therefore think there is something wrong with the way the process or procedure is currently being carried out. Or, to speak specifically of an example related to the headship principle, if I am evaluating and potentially critiquing the use of a voters' assembly at St. John's,<sup>256</sup> I must think that there is something wrong with having a voters' assembly or that it is inherently undesirable to have a voters' assembly. This is true up to a point and will play out with several of the situations discussed in this chapter. Sticking with this specific example, do I think that a voters' assembly is the best way to carry out church polity? Maybe not, and that is most definitely a question I want to explore and a conversation that I want to have. At the same time, though—and here's the guiding principle—I absolutely do not think there is anything biblically incorrect about having a voters' assembly. A church's use of a voters' assembly is a fully faithful application of the principle of headship, as are the rest of the situations discussed in this chapter. But a voters' assembly is not the *only* system of church polity that is a fully faithful application of the principle of headship. This is where I want to take the conversation on a variety of topics, including that of a voters' assembly. Is there anything sinful or unbiblical about how we are currently applying the headship principle? No. Could we apply the headship principle in other ways that are also neither sinful nor unbiblical? Yes.

---

<sup>256</sup> I will indeed offer such a critique later in this chapter.

Secondly, I'll be using a phrase throughout this chapter that merits further explanation: "unnecessarily restrictive."<sup>257</sup> Two aspects of this phrase need to be explained. First, when determining whether a practice at St. John's or WLC or synod-wide is "unnecessarily restrictive" to women, the comparison point will be the doctrine of headship itself. Two questions need to be asked: 1) Does the doctrine of headship permit women to serve in a certain way? and 2) Are women currently permitted to serve in this way at St. John's or WLC or synod-wide? If the answers to those questions are "yes" and "no," respectively, then the practice under consideration will be termed unnecessarily restrictive to women.<sup>258</sup> As will be explored in this chapter, there are good reasons for some of these practices that allow only men to serve in certain positions even though women *could* serve in those same positions without violating the headship principle. *Intent* is a large part of the conversation here, as is doing what is best for the entire body of Christ. Labeling a practice as unnecessarily restrictive to women is not necessarily an indictment of that practice. It is simply a recognition that women *could* serve in a way they are currently not permitted to serve without violating the headship principle.

An additional aspect of unnecessarily restrictive practices also deals with intent, and here I need to be very clear. I am *not* saying that any of these unnecessarily restrictive practices are *intended* to restrict the ways that women can serve in the church.

---

<sup>257</sup> This phrase is entirely one of my own creation. As long as it is properly explained, I like the sentiment it conveys, but I am not married to this phrase if it has the potential to cause offense.

<sup>258</sup> This is very similar to the concept of "can vs. should." In essence, I want to separate the reasons for not allowing women to serve in a certain way or hold a certain position in the church into "cannot" and "should not." If a woman would violate the principle of headship by serving in a certain way, then she *cannot* serve in that way. If it is not a good idea for her to serve in a certain way because of the "can vs. should" reasons discussed in Chapter 3 or because of some additional reasons brought up in this chapter, then she *should not* serve in that way, but she *can* (or *could*) serve in that way without violating headship. I believe this distinction is important, and I will defend that belief later in this chapter.

Making that assertion without having some very deep conversations with church leaders comes perilously close to violating the 8<sup>th</sup> commandment<sup>259</sup> by not "defending [these church leaders], not speaking well of them, and especially not taking their words and actions in the kindest possible way."<sup>260</sup> Returning again to the example of a voters' assembly, I am quite positive that no WELS church chooses to use a voters' assembly for the sole purpose of restricting women from voting. Putting the best possible construction on all these practices dictates that we assume churches are organized and biblical principles are applied in order to carry out ministry to both believers and unbelievers as best as possible. This chapter will weigh various aspects of that ministry in specific situations while still holding to the guiding principle that everyone involved desires to work together for the good of the ministry.

Finally, I will make the case in this chapter that I could serve more fully than I am currently permitted in several specific instances. My last guiding principle is this: I do not necessarily *want* to serve in the ways for which I am advocating. Bringing up a situation for discussion does not always correlate to wanting to serve in that particular situation. So in some ways, this chapter is entirely academic because I am not advocating for change in every situation I examine. Instead, I am striving to consider the biblical principle, examine whether women can serve in ways they are not currently permitted to serve, and then weigh the best possible application of the biblical principle for all involved. In some situations, this will translate into a personal desire to serve more fully than I am currently

---

<sup>259</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Catechism* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2017), 97. Reformed catechisms generally list this as the 9<sup>th</sup> Commandment.

<sup>260</sup> *ibid.* The quote is adapted from Luther's explanation of the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment as found in the *Small Catechism*.

permitted. In others, I will conclude that women could—and likely *should*—be able to serve more fully than they are currently permitted, but I do not have a desire to serve in this way. And in still others, I will assert that although women *could* serve more fully than they are currently permitted, such practices would not apply the biblical principle in a way that is most beneficial for the church as a whole.

With a clear understanding of these guiding principles, I now turn to “case studies” in the rest of this chapter. I have chosen several specific situations at St. John’s, at WLC, and across the synod where I feel there are questions about the way each entity applies the headship principle.<sup>261</sup> My goal is to look at each of these situations through my own personal lens, objectively weigh each situation against the biblical principle of headship, and contemplate how the biblical principle can be applied to best serve all the members of the body of Christ.

### **Voters’ Assemblies**

A brief personal digression is needed before jumping into the first topic under consideration. I mentioned in the introduction that I struggle with the headship principle and its various applications in the church. What I *didn’t* mention was one of the factors that partially informs and shapes this struggle for me: my status as a single female. Being single comes with its own pros and cons, with its own set of blessings and challenges—and these blessings and challenges are often amplified in the context of the church.

---

<sup>261</sup> As with the biblical women studied in Chapter 2, there are, of course, many more situations involving applications of headship that could be included in this chapter. I chose the situations that I did because I have a personal connection to and a personal investment in these situations. This narrowing should in no way indicate that other situations dealing with the application of headship are any less important than the situations discussed in this chapter.



Without meaning to sound overly sanctimonious or self-complimentary, I relate to and draw great comfort from Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7:34-35.<sup>262</sup> Being single allows me to allocate my time and serve the church in ways that would not be possible if I were married. Being single allows me to pursue a master's degree in theology without neglecting family responsibilities or feeling guilty about time spent studying. And being single allows me to be "devoted to the Lord" without wondering if that devotion is coming at the expense of devotion to a husband or children.

Yet along with these blessings also come challenges in the church. Some of these challenges are likely entirely a manifestation of my own insecurities, such as wondering who I am going to sit with at a midweek Advent or Lent fellowship meal. Some are unintentional and come from well-meaning people who are more likely to ask me to complete a task or take on a job because I don't have family responsibilities to take up my time. But some are rooted in the way the way we typically organize our churches: according to a voters' assembly. Since voting is viewed as an exercise of authority, and since I as a female am not to exercise authority in the church, I am not permitted to vote in church matters. Nor do I have a husband with whom I can discuss matters that come before the voters' assembly. In short, because St. John's is organized according to a voters' assembly and because I am a single female, I do not have an official voice in any matters that come before the congregation.

In addition, as a single female, I often feel uncomfortable attending voters' meetings. This is almost certainly a perception that is entirely of my own making, and

---

<sup>262</sup> *An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.*

therefore I do not mean to criticize a voters' assembly solely because I (and likely other single females) feel uncomfortable attending. But this uncomfortability is an unintended consequence of organizing a church according to a voters' assembly. I cannot vote, and voting is the culminating action of the meeting, so should I really be attending the meeting?<sup>263</sup> I am also more hesitant to speak up at voters' meetings and open forums than I would be in a one-on-one or small group meeting with church leadership. Once again, this is a byproduct of my personal situation and my personality, and this hesitancy should not be read as an indictment of voters' meetings. Neither are these issues the sole reason—nor even a primary reason—for my critique of organizing our churches according to a voters' assembly. But they are real issues for real single females in the church, issues that I acknowledge are difficult for church leaders to relate to and understand simply because these issues are not within their frame of reference.

Before evaluating the voters' assembly, one additional anecdote is appropriate. Several years ago, I was discussing the specific issue of church polity with one of my pastors. I expressed a similar consternation to the thoughts above: as a single female unable to vote in the church, I had no official voice in decisions made by the voters' assembly at St. John's. My pastor said something that has stuck with me: that not being able to vote at St. John's should not be conflated with not having influence at St. John's. Since then, I've come to see that "in spite of" being female, I do indeed have a significant amount of influence at St. John's, some of which was discussed in Chapter 3. I say this

---

<sup>263</sup> The issue of "Who am I going to sit with?" also comes into play here. Again, I acknowledge that this is entirely an issue of perception, not the fault of the voters' assembly nor of congregational leadership at St. John's. But I have had enough pre-meeting text conversations along the lines of "Are you going to the voters' meeting? I don't want to sit by myself!" with church friends who are also single females to know that I am not alone in this regard.

not to be boastful nor in an attempt to circumvent my role of helper. Rather, I say it to acknowledge that voting in the church should not be used as the *only* yardstick by which we measure whether the church is both allowing and equipping men and women to give input on official church decisions.

All that said, I do question whether organizing our churches according to a voters' assembly is truly the best system of church polity that we could use. Put another way, do we use a voters' assembly because we have evaluated many other systems of church polity and believe the pros of a voters' assembly outweigh the cons, or do we use a voters' assembly because of American cultural norms? Many of our WELS churches were established in the late 1800s and early 1900s, in a time when the government was viewed with much more trust than it is today, a time when women could not vote in society. Do these cultural norms cause us to view the voters' assembly in our churches through rose-colored glasses and gloss over the cons—especially the cons the system creates for single women? Would we organize our churches differently if we were starting fresh today?

Anecdotal evidence says yes, and this anecdotal evidence can be seen in the story of one WELS mission church.<sup>264</sup> Although this church is organized according to a voters' assembly, the voters' assembly differs from the St. John's voters' assembly in two key ways. First, voting members are not simply male communicant members in good standing who are at least 18 years of age. Instead, there are additional benchmarks that a male communicant member must reach in order to be a voting member. These

---

<sup>264</sup> This a real WELS mission church, and the information that follows comes from a conversation with the pastor and a reading of the church's constitution and bylaws. However, I am keeping the church anonymous because church polity is potentially an emotionally-charged subject, and both the pastor and I prefer not to publish the name or location of the church.

benchmarks, created to ensure that voting members have demonstrated active church membership, include attending church at least six times in the past six months, giving an offering at least once in the past six months, and volunteering at church at least once in the past 12 months. In other words, voting is not simply about being a male communicant member of the church. Voting is about being a leader in the church as demonstrated by meeting these three benchmarks.

Second, there is also a philosophical shift in how voting is viewed and the role of the voters' assembly by this church. When a vote is taken, this vote is an act by the voters taking responsibility for a decision that the congregation has already made. In other words, the decision being voted upon has already been discussed at one or more open forums and has been made by consensus. If the open forum is divisive, then the church isn't ready to vote, and the issue needs further discussion. That is, the congregation is not ready to vote until they are all on the same page. The voters' assembly also cannot change the motion being voted upon. They must either accept the motion or reject it and send it back to the congregation for further discussion and consideration.

Several caveats are in order with the use of this example. First, the pastor of this congregation very much emphasized that this model has not been tested. Although their constitution was accepted in 2020, the congregation has yet to hold a vote.<sup>265</sup> In the next several years, the congregation is considering embarking on a capital campaign and a building project, two matters that might require a vote. But again, this vote will be the voters taking responsibility for a decision already made by the congregation. Second, this congregation also has a Spiritual Oversight Team consisting of congregational leaders

---

<sup>265</sup> This surprised me, but as my conversation continued with the pastor, I better understood why. Budgets are approved by the district mission board, and there has not been a need to issue a call.

(president, secretary, etc.) and the pastor as an *ex-officio* member. These members can serve at most two consecutive three-year terms, and this is the group given the responsibility to carry out the operational decisions for running the church. When I interviewed the pastor, he said that their church polity system works in part because there is a high level of trust in the Spiritual Oversight Team. In a church with a different membership base or different internal dynamics, this model might not work as well.

I find the concept of benchmarks for voting members fascinating and would very much like to see it implemented at St. John's. In actuality, this likely wouldn't have any large-scale changes in the way our voters' meetings play out. Male communicant members who do not meet these benchmarks likely would also not attend voters' meetings. But in principle, the concept is extremely empowering to women, especially women who are more involved in their church than many male members but still cannot vote. The idea of the voters' assembly taking responsibility for decisions already made would be harder to implement at a larger church like St. John's. Simply by the nature of issues that come before the congregation, we need to vote on a more regular basis than the mission church described above. Nor is consensus always easy to achieve, especially in the matter of extending calls. Therefore, this shift in voting philosophy is interesting but not as practical at larger churches.

All of this discussion about voters' assemblies is good and beneficial, and I do support the idea of benchmarks that voting members must meet. However, I acknowledge that the concept of benchmarks could be off-putting to some churches, and therefore other suggestions are needed if I am to be critical of the voters' assembly. I am by no means an expert on church polity, and therefore what follows is at best a basic skeletal set

of suggestions. We could organize our churches using a Board of Directors and view the voters' assembly as an advisory body rather than a decision-making body.<sup>266</sup> We could give each family unit a vote rather than giving each male communicant member a vote. We could conduct the majority of church business by consensus decision and only call for a vote in situations where a consensus is not clearly reached.

Each of these systems of church polity comes with its own pros and cons, and it may be that the voters' assembly has the most pros and the fewest cons. But those pros and cons should be weighed from a variety of viewpoints within the church rather than sticking with a voters' assembly because our churches have always been organized in that way. These pros and cons should also be weighed from the perspective of Scripture. The church polity system chosen should be a fully faithful application of the headship principle rather than a disguised attempt to subvert the headship principle and the unique roles assigned to men and women. These unique roles should not be the only consideration, however. Yes, men and women were created for unique roles. But they were also created to complement each other, an aspect of headship that tends to get lost in the discussion. Therefore, a church polity system should incorporate *both* the head/helper roles *and* allow men and women—particularly women—to use their gifts and work together to serve the church.

Since I began this section on voters' assemblies with a personal note, I'd like to close in a similar way. I expressed a number of frustrations I have with the voters' assembly that are a byproduct of my "single female" status. But in light of the fact that the voters' assembly *is* the system of church polity currently used at St. John's, there

---

<sup>266</sup> I am aware of at least one WELS church in the Milwaukee area organized in this way. Because the voters' assembly is advisory, both men and women are permitted to vote at church meetings.

have been blessings related to the voters' assembly as well. One of these blessings is exemplified by a good male friend of mine (a good friend both at church and in life) who, when we are both in attendance at voters' meetings, makes sure to sit next to me and ask my opinion on the issues being considered at the meeting. At a call meeting, he will ask my opinion on the list of pastors or teachers or staff ministers under consideration; at a budget meeting, my opinion on the financial income and expenditures; and at an electoral meeting, my opinion on the slate of candidates. Yes, I know that I could share my opinion on these matters with the voters' assembly as a whole, and I also know that opinion would be well-respected and well-received. It is much less intimidating, however, to be *asked* for my opinion rather than to having to *volunteer* my opinion. So I am incredibly thankful for this friend, and I would encourage males reading this paper to do the same for the single females in their churches.

### **Other Leadership Roles**

There are two other leadership roles at St. John's that I'd like to examine through the lens of the headship principle. The first of these is congregational board and committee structures. The organizational structure at St. John's<sup>267</sup> is made up of four levels: the Policy Making level, the Policy Coordinating level, the Policy Executing level, and the Operating level. The Policy Making level consists of the voters' assembly. The Policy Coordinating level consists of the Coordinating Council: the Executive Board<sup>268</sup>

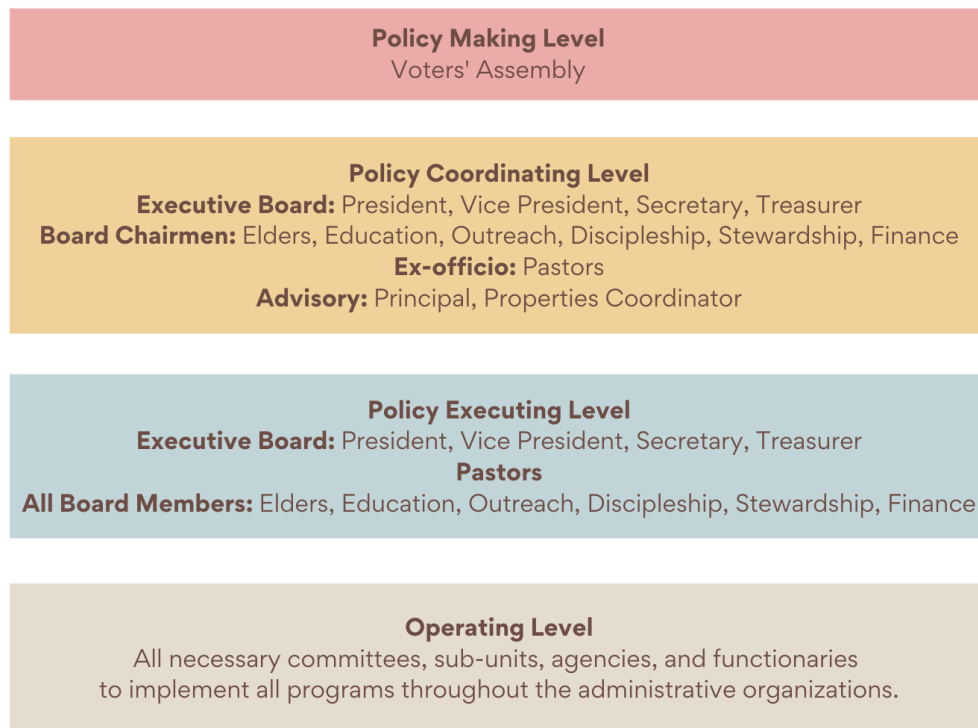
---

<sup>267</sup> All of the information cited in this section comes from the St. John's bylaws.

<sup>268</sup> The Executive Board consists of the officers of the congregation: president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. The pastors are *ex-officio* members of the Executive Board, and the school principal is an advisory member.

and one member each from the various other boards.<sup>269</sup> The Policy Executing level consists of the Executive Board, the pastors, and all the members of the various boards. And finally, the Operating level consists of “all necessary committees, sub-units, agencies, and functionaries to implement all programs throughout the administrative organizations.” Any male communicant member in good standing at St. John’s may serve on these boards and councils;<sup>270</sup> any communicant member may serve in most capacities at the Operating level. The chart below visually represents this structure:

### St. John's Organizational Structure




---

<sup>269</sup> The various boards at St. John’s are the Boards of Elders, Education, Outreach, Discipleship, Stewardship, and Finance. The pastors are *ex-officio* members of the Coordinating Council, and the school principal and properties coordinator are advisory members.

<sup>270</sup> There is one exception: members of the Board of Elders must have been communicant members of St. John’s for at least two years.



Practically speaking, each board (other than the Executive Board) is made up of five or six elected members and has one or more sub-committees under it. Some of these sub-committees actually consist of additional members beyond those serving on the board. Other sub-committees are in essence a “committee of one,” with the board member taking primary responsibility for the work assigned to the committee and bringing in additional communicant members to help carry out his duties and tasks as needed. For example, the Board of Discipleship has the following committees designated in the bylaws: Adult Discipleship, Home Discipleship, Youth Discipleship, Fellowship and Service, and Sunday School. As far as I am aware, only Adult Discipleship actually functions as a standing committee with communicant members (both male and female) who are not elected members of the Board of Discipleship. The work of the other committees is primarily done by the Board of Discipleship member elected to each respective role.

As it relates to the headship principle, I assert that the requirement for all of the members of these boards to be male communicant members of St. John’s is an unnecessary restriction to women.<sup>271</sup> It is certainly true that it would violate the headship principle for women to serve on some of these boards. The Executive Board has fairly broad-reaching responsibilities such as having “responsibility for the overall long-range planning of the affairs of the congregation,” serving as “the legal representatives of the congregation in matters pertaining to the property and business of the congregation,” and

---

<sup>271</sup> A reminder from the beginning of this chapter is needed here: not every unnecessary restriction to women is bad. As I will argue here specifically and in other places throughout this chapter, there are good reasons for some unnecessary restrictions. When a women *could* serve in a certain way without violating headship and is not permitted to serve in that way, however, that is what I am terming an “unnecessary restriction.”

being “authorized to sign legal documents on behalf of the congregation.” These responsibilities are authoritative, and therefore it would violate 1 Timothy 2:12 for a woman to serve on the Executive Board. Similarly, the Board of Elders has responsibilities of a spiritual nature, such as “be[ing] responsible for continued adherence to true Christian doctrine and the exercise of church discipline within the congregation in accord with the Scriptures,” “encourage[ing] and direct[ing] the spiritual welfare and Christian growth of the membership,” “admit[ting] and releas[ing] communicant members,” and “admonish[ing] and encouraging erring and delinquent members to amend their ways and utilize the Means of Grace.” Again, these are responsibilities dealing with authority in spiritual matters, and therefore it is appropriate to restrict membership on the Board of Elders to male communicant members.<sup>272</sup>

However, the responsibilities of some of the other boards are not authoritative nor spiritual in the same way, and therefore I believe women *can* serve on these boards without violating the headship principle. For example, the Board of Outreach is charged with organizing a variety of outreach-related events, including events that go out into the community; events that are designed to welcome community contacts, family, friends, and relatives of members; welcome events for new members; and events that provide opportunities for members to learn and practice evangelism skills. The chair of the Board of Outreach is indeed a position imbued with authority (as well as a position that sits on the Coordinating Council), and therefore it is again appropriate to require that the chair be a male communicant member. But the other positions on the Board of Outreach are

---

<sup>272</sup> Using the words “spiritual” and “authority” in the same context has the potential to cause confusion, and therefore it is important to clearly state that authority in the church is not limited to spiritual matters.

not authoritative, and therefore it would not violate the headship principle for a women to serve in a non-chair capacity on the Board of Outreach. Similar arguments can be made for some of the other boards as well.<sup>273</sup>

Does that mean I believe women *should* be able to serve on boards at St. John's? There are times when I am inclined to say yes (especially at the time of this writing). Our annual electoral voters' meeting is this Sunday, and as Communications Coordinator, I am responsible for formatting the slate of candidates and getting it ready to print. This means I am privy to some of the discussions that take place when it comes to identifying and recruiting candidates to fill each of the board positions. Despite the best efforts of everyone involved, not every board position is immediately filled upon the conclusion of the electoral voters' meeting. In talking with one of my pastors, he pointed out several reasons for these vacant spots, reasons that do not necessarily come from a lack of male leadership at St. John's nor even from a lack of candidates.<sup>274</sup> I understand his reasons—and, because St. John's is blessed with strong lay leadership from both males and females

---

<sup>273</sup> There are two reasons I am not individually evaluating whether women can serve on each board at St. John's without violating headship. First, as will be discussed in the next paragraph, I do not believe that women *should* be able to serve on these boards. Second, the official responsibilities of boards as outlined in the bylaws and the actual responsibilities of the boards as they play out in practice are often somewhat different. As Communications Coordinator, I sit on the Board of Outreach as an advisory member. Therefore, I am familiar with the actual duties and responsibilities of this board, and I am confident these duties and responsibilities could be carried out without violating headship. I would want to have further discussions with each board chair to find out how their board actually operates in practice before making a determination on headship responsibilities of each respective board.

<sup>274</sup> The reason for vacancies on boards immediately after the electoral voters' meeting mainly falls into one of two categories. First, sometimes board positions are intentionally left vacant. For example, the Board of Outreach had a position vacant which would have been up for election in December 2020, and it was decided to leave that position vacant because the activities of the Board of Outreach had been severely curtailed because of COVID. Their activities weren't quite ready to be ramped back up at the time, and so it didn't make sense to elect an additional board member simply for the sake of filling a position. Second, sometimes the timeline of identifying and recruiting candidates simply can't be completed before the electoral voters' meeting, especially if the first candidate asked declines to serve. Rather than imposing a strict schedule on candidates considering a board position, St. John's leadership has decided it's OK to fill some board positions by Coordinating Council appointment (which the bylaws allow).

alike, I acknowledge that these reasons accurately represent the level of lay involvement in St. John's board positions. But along with an intellectual understanding of those reasons, my perception from a female point of view is also equally real: there are vacancies on the slate of male-only board candidates, and there are females at St. John's who could fill these vacancies. In light of that perception, and especially in light of board positions that do not violate the headship principle, this is the time of year when I have difficulty saying that women should not be able to serve on boards at St. John's.

Despite this inclination to say yes, I do believe that the best answer in terms of building up the body of Christ is no—no, women should not be able to serve on boards at St. John's. Having an all-male Executive Board and Council (and Board of Elders) and then mixed-gender boards and committees underneath would allow females to serve in ways that do not violate the headship principle. However, creating this type of structure would also deny St. John's a great organic opportunity to train males to serve as spiritual leaders, both in the church and in their own families.<sup>275</sup> Serving on a board and attending monthly meetings, plus carrying out other board responsibilities at various times, creates a sense of ownership and investment in St. John's for board members that might not occur without this board service. Devotions at monthly board meetings and encouragements for board members to be involved in their own personal spiritual growth activities—both in their home and through corporate Bible study—provide assistance for board members who want to spend more time in God's word to strengthen and build up their faith but simply don't know where to start. And getting a glimpse into some of the

---

<sup>275</sup> Leadership development at St. John's is certainly carried out in other more intentional ways. However, organic leadership development is also valuable, and I believe it would be detrimental to disrupt this organic development.

internal workings of a board often translates into also becoming involved with other areas at St. John's (such as ushering at church or helping out with activities at school).

So yes, women *could* serve on some boards at St. John's without violating the headship principle. But allowing women to serve in this way may not be the most beneficial for the entire body of Christ, and therefore I am not inclined to amend our bylaws and allow women to serve on boards. As will be discussed at the very end of this chapter, it is important to understand the reason for this restriction. In this case, there is a good reason for not allowing women to serve on boards. I do not, however, believe that this reason is due to the fact that serving on some of the boards at St. John's would violate the headship principle.

Although the second leadership role is relatively new at St. John's, it is by no means uncommon in churches across the synod. In fall 2019, St. John's began a new type of Bible study: sermon-study growth groups. These small groups, hosted and led by St. John's members, are designed to provide a comfortable setting for more intimate fellowship and spiritual discussion than is possible in a large-group Bible study. These Bible studies are based on the previous Sunday's sermon and are intended to be very interactive and discussion based. The study materials, including a "student guide" and a "leader guide" containing answers to all the discussion questions, are created by a member of the Board of Discipleship in consultation with the St. John's discipleship pastor.

During the planning process for the first round of St. John's growth groups, the Board of Discipleship organizer asked if I wanted to host and/or facilitate one of the groups. Hosting didn't work well for me for a variety of reasons, but I did say that I

would be interested in facilitating as long as facilitating such a group would not be a violation of the headship principle. Because these groups were being held in more informal settings (private homes) than a corporate Bible study, because all of the materials were being provided, and because the role of group leader truly was intended to be a facilitating role rather than a teaching role, the organizer did not feel that there would be issues with the headship principle if a female facilitated a group. However, for the sake of good order, we both deferred to the St. John's pastoral staff for a final decision.

I sat down with the pastoral staff to discuss the matter, and our discussion was respectful, fruitful, and productive. We talked through the headship principle and its various implications, whether the group leader in this situation would be teaching in the way envisioned by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:12, and how a female facilitating might be received, both by members of St. John's and by other WELS churches in the area. In the end, I honestly don't remember if there was agreement on whether I *could* facilitate a group, because the decision was that I *should not* facilitate a group. Even though I wasn't seeking this opportunity because I had been asked to facilitate rather than volunteering to do so, having a female facilitate most definitely had the potential to shift the conversation from a discipleship and spiritual growth opportunity to the headship principle and the roles of men and women. And since growth groups were just getting started at St. John's, the pastors felt it would be better to keep the focus on the groups themselves rather than on whether a female could facilitate.<sup>276</sup>

---

<sup>276</sup> I do clearly remember this outcome of the meeting: that if St. John's ended up running a second round of growth groups, and if I still wanted to facilitate, we would revisit the conversation at that point. A second round did end up running, but there were enough repeat facilitators from the first round that it

Like service on a board, facilitating a growth group is a good example of a “can vs. should” situation. Based on the way our growth groups are organized, I do still believe that I could facilitate a group without violating the headship principle. But I also understand that having a female facilitator has the potential to create unintended ripples and waves. Perhaps some of our members would not feel comfortable attending a growth group facilitated by a female. Perhaps an opportunity to develop male leadership and model how to lead a growth group—a skill that has transferability to being the spiritual leader of one’s family—would be lost. Perhaps, partially because growth groups are organized differently at different churches, St. John’s would give the impression to area WELS churches of violating the headship principle. None of these “perhapses” deal directly with the biblical principle of headship, and therefore none of them are reasons that I *cannot* facilitate a growth group. They are, however, issues to be considered, and they are valid reasons that I *should not* facilitate a growth group at this time. Another WELS church in a similar situation might consider their own set of “perhapses” and come to the conclusion that a female *could* facilitate a growth group. Neither church is wrong as long as both are motivated by love, especially as that love shows itself in a desire to work together and build up the body of Christ.

### **Headship at WLC**

In Chapter 3, I mentioned that there have been very few times when the headship principle has come up in relation to my call at WLC. One interesting situation has arisen since I enrolled in the MATS program, though. This thought experiment first started

---

wasn’t necessary to find anyone else. And then COVID hit, putting growth groups on the back burner. We are just starting the process of trying to get these groups up and running again.

during a conversation with one of my pastors. I was telling him about MLC's new program and how I was interested in enrolling, and he asked whether working towards a master's degree in theology would "do anything" for me at WLC. I said I didn't think so—this wasn't a degree that WLC was asking me to earn; it was something personal, and so having a master's in theology really wouldn't change my duties or responsibilities at WLC at all.

But after doing a little more thinking, I came up with an intriguing answer. WLC is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). As part of this accreditation process, there are credentialing requirements for our faculty members. In order to teach a class in a subject area, a faculty member (full-time, part-time, or adjunct) is required to have a minimum of 18 graduate credits in that respective subject area; a master's degree is preferred.<sup>277</sup> Currently, I have 30 graduate credits in theology. When I complete the MATS program, I will have a master's degree in theology. In the eyes of HLC, I am credentialed to teach theology. *Can* I teach theology at WLC without violating the headship principle?

Before answering the question, a quick reminder of some of the relevant points from Chapter 3 regarding my call to serve as a mathematics professor at WLC is helpful. I do not believe the students in my classroom are the "men" that Paul was speaking of in 1 Timothy 2:12, nor do I believe that my teaching mathematics constitutes having the type of authority prohibited in this verse. It is entirely proper, then, for me to teach math at WLC. But what about theology? The first point above does not change: male students in a WLC theology classroom are similarly not "men" in the same way as my

---

<sup>277</sup> HLC also has alternate requirements (that are not relevant to this discussion) for credentialing a faculty member, such as "tested experience" in a subject area.



mathematics students are not. To answer the question, then, the second point needs to be considered. If I teach theology at WLC, am I teaching in the way Paul envisioned in 1 Timothy 2:12—am I teaching with authority?

On one hand, WLC's academic goals and how the teaching of theology fits into these academic goals can be used to justify a “no” answer: no, teaching theology at WLC is not the same as teaching with authority. WLC's goal for educating students is clearly stated in its academic catalog:

Wisconsin Lutheran College strives to develop in each student a Christian mind and a servant's heart that will allow him or her to excel in the world of ideas and in relationships with people. Each graduate will be committed to humble and responsible service through independent and creative thought and will use research and analytical skills to make critical judgments.<sup>278</sup>

This thought is more fully developed in WLC's first academic goal: “Articulate a world-view based on Holy Scripture, as interpreted by the Lutheran Confessions”<sup>279</sup>—an academic goal which is explained as follows:

Students at a Christian institution of higher learning have the unique opportunity of learning to view the wonder and order of the universe as part of God's creation. This coherent perspective of the world is based on an understanding of the biblical narrative, systems of doctrine, church history, and Christian vocation through the hermeneutical lens of the Lutheran Confessions. Students are thus enabled to comprehend synoptically the diversity of information to which they are exposed, as they effectively and faithfully carry out their roles in the church and society.<sup>280</sup>

Note well what this academic goal is and is not saying: students are to *articulate* a world-view based on Holy Scripture as interpreted by the Lutheran Confessions. They are

---

<sup>278</sup> “Academic Goals and General Education Outcomes,” Wisconsin Lutheran College Academic Catalog, July 1, 2021, <http://catalog.wlc.edu/content.php?catoid=14&navoid=459>.

<sup>279</sup> “Academic Goals.”

<sup>280</sup> “Academic Goals.”

not required to believe or confess or hold or accept a Lutheran world-view.<sup>281</sup> In other words, WLC's purpose in teaching theology is not to convert students to Lutheranism. Rather, its purpose is to teach students the tenets of the Lutheran faith and how these tenets guide and shape every aspect of life so that students have enough of an understanding of these tenets to *articulate* a world-view based on them. If a student belongs to a non-denominational church when they begin their freshman year at WLC, and if they still belong to that non-denominational church when they finish their senior year, WLC would not say that the theology department has failed that student. Since theology at WLC is an academic discipline, and since the purpose of classroom teaching is not to convert students, one can argue that this is not the type of teaching prohibited by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:12. As discussed in Chapter 3, there are some aspects of "church" present at WLC, such as chapel and other spiritual growth programming offered by the Campus Ministry Office. However, WLC is not *a* church in the same sense as a local congregation, particularly when it comes to the theology department.

On the other hand, is it really possible to separate the teaching of theology at a confessional Lutheran college like WLC as neatly as I have attempted to do in the preceding paragraphs? Even if the theology class being taught looks at the subject more from an academic viewpoint than a spiritual viewpoint, would I as a theology professor need to correct wrong understandings of theology that students in my class might have? If so, would that correcting constitute teaching with authority? In addition, even when theology is taught and studied in an academic way, can a spiritual viewpoint be

---

<sup>281</sup> I sat on the committee that produced WLC's current academic goals, including the first goal and explanation quoted above. I can therefore say with absolute certainty that "articulate" was chosen for the very reasons given in this paragraph.

completely removed from the classroom? If it cannot, would incorporating that spiritual viewpoint constitute teaching with authority?

One of the theology professors at WLC gave the following example: in a class he teaches on the history of the Reformations,<sup>282</sup> one topic studied is the difference between Luther and Calvin's views on the doctrine of election. Often, this also turns into a deeper explanation of the doctrine of election and in some situations, a follow-up on and a reassurance of the blessings of election with individual students who view this doctrine with fear rather than with comfort. Although this follow-up is not part of the class material, it is a natural extension of the content taught in class, and it happens with sufficient regularity to serve as an entirely plausible case study of whether I as a female could teach what appears to be academic material without violating the headship principle.

When considering whether I *can* teach theology at WLC, attention should also be given to the duties assigned specifically to the pastoral office. Although it is not a requirement, WLC has intentionally decided to only call theology professors who are also ordained pastors. The case can be made that teaching theology, whether in daily chapel services or in the classroom, is a task that specifically falls under the pastoral office. If this is the case, then I as a female would be violating the headship principle by teaching theology at WLC, even though I am credentialed in the eyes of HLC.<sup>283</sup>

---

<sup>282</sup> This is not a typo; "Reformations" is indeed plural in the course title. The class studies the Conservative, Radical, and Catholic Reformations and their impact on European society, with special concentration on Luther and other major figures.

<sup>283</sup> Note well what I am and am not saying here. I am saying that there are certain duties assigned specifically to the pastoral office, and it is possible that teaching theology in the way that it is taught at WLC is one of those duties. I am not saying that the only real authority is spiritual authority which is confined entirely to the pastoral office. The question of authority is a question associated with the order of

Which is it? Can I teach theology at WLC or not? To help shape and frame my line of reasoning for this section, I took an informal poll of fellow WLC faculty members and academic administrators. The responses were mixed—from “yes” to “I don’t know” to “no”—and the reasons given were largely along the lines of my “pro” and “con” arguments above. I lean toward yes, mainly because of the “articulate” wording of WLC’s first academic goal. But although I believe that I *can* teach theology at WLC, I do not believe that I *should* teach theology at WLC.

One reason for this is entirely practical: it is true that I am indeed credentialed to teach theology in the eyes of HLC. But I am by no means the best person available to teach in this academic discipline. There are many, many WELS pastors and professors better-trained than I am, and they are the ones who should be teaching theology at WLC. In addition, a female teaching theology has the potential to cause offense across the synod, especially if there is not a clear understanding of the purpose and outcomes of WLC’s theology classes. Finally, and on an entirely personal note, I have no desire to teach theology at WLC.<sup>284</sup> I greatly respect my colleagues in the theology department, and I hear incredibly positive comments from students in their classes. I am quite happy in my mathematics classes, and I am thankful that all of us—mathematicians, theologians, and professors in the rest of the disciplines alike—are called to WLC in ways that allow us to use both our gifts and abilities and our extensive subject-area knowledge and experience.

---

creation and the roles assigned to men and women, not a question associated with the doctrine of and various offices in the church.

<sup>284</sup> I do think it would be interesting to guest-lecture in a theology class here and there, perhaps on the academic material in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis or on a female perspective of headship as related to Chapters 3 and 4.

It's natural to extend this question and ask about teaching theology more broadly than WLC. Can I teach theology at an area Lutheran high school? At a synodical prep school? At MLC? Would teaching theology at any of these schools violate the headship principle, or could a similar argument be made as the ones above? I honestly don't know. My arguments above rest on the academic goals of WLC and the specific goals of our theology classes. I suspect the same would not be true for our area Lutheran high schools nor synodical prep schools nor MLC, but I am not certain. And without this certainty, it is not appropriate for me to speculate and attempt to answer the question of whether I can teach theology at those various locations. This is also an important point for the applications of the headship principle in general: great care must be taken in determining whether an argument is transferable or not. Just because I can possibly teach theology at WLC does not mean that I can possibly teach it anywhere else. Each situation—in a local congregation, in an educational setting, or more broadly across the synod—must be evaluated on its own specifics and evaluated on its own merits to determine how females can serve without violating the headship principle.

### **Sticky Situations in the WELS**

I have mainly interacted with the headship principle at my local congregational level, and I suspect the same is true for many other women across the WELS. There are a few synod-wide “sticky situations” that come to mind when thinking of the headship principle, though, two of which will be discussed in this section. The first is a situation with which I do not have personal experience: that of female principals in WELS schools. Although this situation is by far the exception rather than the norm, there are a handful of

female principals across the WELS, indicating that a woman can serve as a principal in a WELS school without violating the headship principle. In order to see how this situation might play out, I looked specifically at two WELS schools with female principals to see how they faithfully applied the headship principle.<sup>285</sup>

School A had a female faculty member who had been there for some time—someone who was well-acquainted with the school itself and with the faculty members and students. Her gifts and abilities lined up well with those needed for a principal, and therefore she was called to move into the principal role. Before issuing this call, conversations occurred between pastors and school faculty, and conversations also occurred at the district and praesidium levels. In order to make sure that the headship principle wasn't being violated, clear delineations were made between the principal's purview—the decisions she would make and would be responsible for—and who would be the person responsible for spiritual matters or other issues outside the principal's purview. In this situation, the school faculty consisted of both male and female teachers at the time the female principal was called. Everything is working out very well, and there have been no issues with the headship principle or other related circumstances.

School B had issued several calls for a principal and then reached the close of the WELS teacher call window. Because of the structure and needs of the school, it was not possible to leave the principal role vacant or redistribute the responsibilities for the upcoming school year. After some conversations and searching via existing WELS

---

<sup>285</sup> These are two real WELS schools, and the situations described are accurate to the best of my knowledge. However, as with the WELS mission church discussed earlier, I am again keeping the two schools anonymous.

connections, a female was identified as a good candidate to be called as principal.<sup>286</sup> She had extensive educational experience, had served as principal in several secular schools, and had also presented at WELS teachers conferences. School B issued her a call, which she accepted. At the time the call was issued, there were only female faculty members at School B. However, School B had also asked for an assignment of two teacher candidates from MLC's graduating class, and they ended up being assigned a male and a female from MLC. Although the situation of a female principal and a male faculty member was unintended, it has actually worked out quite well. The male faculty member has been encouraged to step into a spiritual leadership role and has taken on some associated responsibilities, such as partnering with the pastor to lead and conduct faculty devotions.

Both of these schools represent the best possible way that female principalship can play out. Conversations occurred with faculty members and with the district president and praesidium *before* calling a female principal. The principal's duties and responsibilities were clearly delineated and closely examined to make sure the headship principle was not being violated. The female called was qualified and possessed the necessary gifts and abilities to carry out this role in faithful accord with God's Word. And the female was called because she was the best person for the job, not to push the envelope and have a female principal just because the school could.

It is unlikely that female principals will ever become the norm in WELS, nor am I advocating for this. Part of the issue comes from the historical role of the principal and the continued use of this word. For the vast majority of WELS members, the word

---

<sup>286</sup> This female was not currently serving in a WELS school and was therefore eligible for a call even though the "teacher call window" had closed (i.e. the yearly time period established by WELS during which divine calls for teacher positions may regularly be issued).

“principal” conjures up a specific job description: a job description that is indeed authoritative. Neither School A nor School B are using this job description, and therefore it is entirely proper for a female to serve as principal in both of these schools. They are using the same word, however, as other schools across the synod for principal positions that *are* authoritative. Without explanation, there is great potential for confusion in this situation. As with the term “leadership,” it may be best to use a different term than “principal” in a situation when that role is not authoritative, regardless of the role is filled by a male or a female. With this non-authoritative definition in mind, there are times when a female principal makes sense, and I am appreciative that WELS recognizes that the office of principal can be designed in such a way as to allow females to serve without violating the headship principle.

The second “sticky situation” takes a somewhat deep dive into WELS procedures and likely is not a well-known issue across the synod. It is a situation that happens only a handful of times per year, and therefore one might wonder why I am bothering to allocate space to this issue. The answer is again decidedly personal: I am being restricted by the synod bylaws, and this is a restriction that I do truly view as unnecessary. The situation: the process for filling professorial vacancies at Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The setup: when a vacancy occurs, the governing board of the school “shall publish such vacancy on the official internet site of WELS and/or to congregations by mail and shall request the nomination of qualified candidates.”<sup>287</sup> The unnecessary restriction: “All pastors, male professors, male teachers, congregations, and voting

---

<sup>287</sup> “Constitution and Bylaws of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Constitution for the Districts,” August 2021, 32, <https://synodadmin.welsrc.net/download-synodadmin/official-synod-reports/?wpdmdl=3263&refresh=61a8db64cc06e1638456164&ind=1630612434593&filename=sa-WELSConstitutionandBylaws-082021.doc>.



members of congregations shall be entitled to nominate a candidate or candidates...”<sup>288</sup>

That is, I as a female am not allowed to submit a name for nomination to fill a professor vacancy at MLC or WLS.

I am thoroughly unconvinced that submitting a name for nomination violates the headship principle in any possible way, making this a situation where the answer to “can I?” is yes. I am also thoroughly unconvinced that this is a situation where the answer to “should I?” is no. As far as I can see, none of the reasons previously given to be considered when asking “should I?” apply here: developing male leadership, giving offense, or making the situation more about a female being able to nominate than about the actual nomination process.

I had no idea as to the reasoning behind this restriction until speaking with one of my pastors. He wasn’t sure of the rationale, but he speculated along the following lines (which may or may not be correct): according to his observations, our synod is set up in a similar way to a polity structure in place at the congregational level. And in some ways, synod decision-making processes are structured to mirror the voters’ assembly at a congregation. The analog to voting members of a congregation—male communicant members—would then be male members of the WELS: pastors, male professors, male teachers, and voting members of congregations. Adding a name to a list of nominations at the synod level would likely be viewed as the equivalent of adding a name to a call list from the floor at a voters’ meeting at the congregational level. Since this motion from the

---

<sup>288</sup> “WELS Bylaws,” 32.

congregational floor would need to be made by a voter, the analogous action at the synod level needs to be made by a male member of the WELS.<sup>289</sup>

I am thoroughly unconvinced that submitting a name for nomination violates the headship principle, and I would encourage the submitting of nominations to be viewed in the same way as receiving comments on nominations: actions that can be performed by any communicant member of a WELS congregation. However, a change like this would need to be undertaken with a specific eye towards discussion and education. Immediately allowing females to submit nominations without any explanation as to why the practice is changing would be at best a change some do not understand and at worst a change that is met with resistance and allegations of disregard for the principle of headship.

Intentionally communicating the reasons for the change, on the other hand, promotes an environment where questions are answered proactively rather than reactively and explanations are freely given rather than being angrily demanded. Ultimately, I am indeed advocating for a change in the nomination process. I understand, however, that this is a change to be worked toward rather than a change to be immediately implemented.

### **Can vs. Should Revisited**

In the situations considered in this chapter, I've taken great care to differentiate between "can" and "should." And in many of these situations, I've concluded that women

---

<sup>289</sup> This is not technically correct, and a note regarding synod membership is appropriate here. According to the WELS constitution, "The synod shall consist of all congregations, pastors, and male teachers who shall have joined the synod through their respective districts" ("WELS Bylaws," pg. 5). Therefore, male communicant members of WELS congregations who are not pastors nor teachers are not members of the synod. This makes the nominating restriction even less clear, because if the synod were intending to function like a local congregation, only pastors and male teachers should be able to submit names for nomination.

*can* serve in a certain way according to the headship principle—that serving in this way would not violate the biblical principle—but that they *should not* serve in this way for any number of reasons. There’s a perfectly reasonable follow-up question to be asked: if I am concluding that women should not serve in these ways, why discuss these situations at all? If I am not advocating for changes to our current processes and procedures, what’s the point of bringing up the subject?

One reason for bringing up the subject deals with a personal struggle of mine. But like many of my personal struggles, I suspect I am not alone in this regard. Before beginning discussions with my pastor on the headship principle, and particularly before beginning study of this topic through my MATS classes, I had basically no understanding of the difference between “can” and “should.” This lack of understanding was amplified by the way we tend to talk about the subject in our congregations and across the synod. For example, the St. John’s bylaws simply say that any male communicant member in good standing in the congregation may serve on a board. There is no discussion about whether this requirement is because of the headship principle or because of other, more practical and pragmatic reasons.<sup>290</sup> So I couldn’t see why I wasn’t permitted to serve in this way, because I was only viewing the restriction through the lens of the headship principle. By intentionally thinking about “can vs. should,” I’ve been able to widen my lens and see that although the headship principle shapes the discussion, headship is not the only consideration in determining whether a woman should or should not serve.

---

<sup>290</sup> The St. John’s bylaws clearly aren’t the right place for any sort of extended discussion on the topic, and I am unsure what the right place for such a discussion actually is. I only know that I never would have had the discussion if I had not started talking about headship with my pastor, and therefore I am virtually certain that the vast majority of females at St. John’s have not had this conversation either.

A second reason deals with how the conversation progresses from this point. If a woman *cannot* serve in a certain way because doing so would violate the headship principle, then the outcome of that conversation will always remain the same. Like all biblical principles, the headship principle is unchanging, and so a violation of headship in Paul's day would also be a violation of headship now as well as 2000 years into the future (if Christ doesn't return first). But if a woman *should not* serve in a certain way for any number of reasons—even though she would not be violating the headship principle by serving in that way—then the outcome of that conversation has the potential to change. The reasons that a woman should not serve in a certain way are going to differ from place to place and time to time. Reasons that are beneficial and appropriate at St. John's, Wauwatosa, in 2021 may not be beneficial and appropriate at a congregation in Mississauga, Ontario,<sup>291</sup> in 2021, nor at St. John's, Wauwatosa, in 2026. Unlike the "can" reasons coming from the biblical principle of headship, these "should" reasons need to be reexamined on a regular basis to determine if they are indeed sufficient reasons for restricting the service of women. It may be that women should never be able to serve on boards at St. John's. In contrast, perhaps sometime in the future the pros of women serving on St. John's boards may outweigh the cons, and so understanding the difference between "can" and "should" is crucial.

Consideration of these "should" conversations is one of my encouragements for our WELS theologians reading this thesis. There are many areas for future study on the

---

<sup>291</sup> I'm choosing this location in particular because of my familiarity with the congregation. In chaperoning teen mission trips, I've been to Mississauga three times and have had some interesting discussions with their pastor on the roles of men and women. Their congregational structure is different from St. John's, and so their applications of headship also differ somewhat. But respect for and desire to stay within the biblical principal of headship still holds.

biblical principle of headship itself, and any number of these would be good and beneficial. From a female perspective, however, my greater encouragement for future study is this: continue to look at the “should” situations. Identify the situations in your own local congregation or across the synod where women are not currently being permitted to serve for “should” reasons. Explain to women that these are “should” situations rather than “can” situations. And commit to looking at these situations on a regular basis through dual lenses: 1) the “should” reasons that currently exist and 2) whether those reasons still carry enough weight to restrict women’s service. I understand that doing so will take time and energy and will add to already full ministerial plates. As a female in the WELS, I assure you that despite this needed time and energy, these conversations and considerations are indeed worth the effort.

### **What? So What? Now What?**

In planning my mathematics classes, I try to follow the “What? So what? Now what?” model. What is the basic mathematical concept that I’m trying to teach? Why should my students care about this concept? And once they understand the concept, how are they going to continue using it—what’s next? That same “What? So what? Now what?” model is also useful when it comes to the roles of men and women in the church. Most of this thesis has dealt with the “What?”: that principle of headship as taught in Scripture, as it was exemplified by females during the time of Acts and the Pauline Epistles, and as it plays out for me in the church today as seen through my various callings and vocations.

So what? Besides a desire to honor the biblical principle, why are conversations about the headship principle important? These conversations are important because as a WELS female, I do struggle with this doctrine, and I know that I am not alone. This was by far the most often-heard piece of feedback from the summer *Reflections* series: women thought they were alone in their struggle with the headship principle, and hearing from other females associated with WELS Women's Ministry gave voice to these women's struggles. As long as one is not actively rebelling against the biblical doctrine, there is nothing sinful about that struggle. Yet at times, women feel as though their struggles are subversive and their questions are challenges. Cultivating an open and honest environment where struggles are acknowledged and questions are encouraged has been extremely beneficial for me, and I am confident such an environment will be beneficial for other women as well.

These conversations are also important because, like the vast majority of WELS women, I am not trying to challenge the headship principle at every turn or, little bit by little bit, take as much ground as I can. I ask questions about the headship principle and give voice to my struggles because I desire to use my God-given gifts and talents as best as I can. I strive to understand the applications of the headship principle and to define these applications in the least restrictive way possible so that I can live within and celebrate God's marvelous design of headship and advance the gospel message at my church, my college, and across my synod—all while not creating extra fences. I have no desire to go beyond the biblical principle outlined in the Word, but neither do I desire to stop far short of that principle. In addition to the blessings the headship principle brings and the partnerships it cultivates, I accept the restrictions it places on me, and I seek to

serve as fully as possible within those restrictions. But I also see some restrictions as unnecessary. If, after careful study and attention, these restrictions are truly deemed unnecessary, then I will call for change—change that comes from a desire to carry out ministry to the best and fullest of my abilities.

Although that change is the best possible answer to “Now what?”, I also understand that changing congregational or synod-wide practices takes significant time and effort. As much as I would love to see each and every “can vs. should” situation examined on a regular basis and revised if the current practices are unnecessarily restrictive to women, the practical side of me admits this simply isn’t possible. That doesn’t mean we should be content with the status quo, though, especially not in our local congregations. In some situations, small changes to practices or small tweaks to our wording can make a significant difference when it comes to women’s perceptions of the doctrine of headship. The suggestions below are made with St. John’s practices and policies and procedures in mind, but they are also easily transferable to other congregations across the WELS.<sup>292</sup>

Regarding voters’ meetings, an easy place to start is intentionally phrasing the voters’ meeting announcement (written or verbal) to make it clear that men and women alike are invited—and encouraged!—to attend the meeting. This can be as simple as including wording like “All congregation members are invited to attend” at the end of the voters’ meeting announcement. Many congregations (St. John’s included) combine voters’ meetings with open forums—a practice that also helps women to feel less out of place at the meeting. Avoiding an intentional separation of the “open forum” and the

---

<sup>292</sup> Virtually all of these suggestions have been alluded to elsewhere in this thesis, but they are also important enough to state explicitly one more time.

“voters’ assembly” portions will likewise convey to women that they are welcome to share their thoughts, opinions, and concerns throughout the meeting. Having a male intentionally seek out the opinion of females (especially single females) during the meeting makes it much less intimidating for females to share these thoughts, opinions, and concerns. And finally, if a vote is to be conducted by written ballot, simply handing out the ballots is a much better practice than asking “Does everyone have a ballot?” This question is asked at virtually every St. John’s voters’ meeting, and I am confident that the phrasing is intended in a completely innocent way. It still rankles, though, that I don’t have a ballot because I’m not permitted to vote.

When it comes to electing board members or filling other congregational leadership positions, communication is once again crucial. If there are vacant positions after the slate of candidates is elected, think about how to explain which positions are vacant and—more importantly—why those positions are vacant. If possible, give an expected timeline as to when these vacant positions might be filled. Making it clear that vacant positions do not necessarily correlate with a lack of male leadership or a dearth of males willing to serve will also go a long way. And, most importantly, these announcements should be made more than just once at the electoral voters’ meeting. Strive for regular communication over the course of the next several months: when the list of newly-elected board members is published in the weekend announcements, when these newly-elected board members are installed, at the annual congregational meeting, etc. This regular communication will help get the message out to the entire congregation.

Finally, consider identifying a female in the congregation—called worker, staff member, or lay leader; married or single (my preference is for single)—who can give



well-informed and honest feedback on congregational communication. This doesn't have to be done in any sort of formal way; it can be as simple as asking for her opinion on the wording of written or verbal announcements, checking in from time to time to see where there might be areas of frustration with regard to the roles of men and women, and giving her the opportunity to weigh in on practices that are working well and practices that could be improved. My responsibilities as Communications Coordinator allow me to fill this role at St. John's, and I am thankful that my female perspective is welcomed, valued, and sought after by my pastors and congregational leaders. I pray that this female perspective might help in navigating some of the "sticky situations" addressed in this chapter as the church—men and women alike—works together to advance the spread of the gospel and carry out our Great Commission calling to be salt and light to a sin-darkened world.

## CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, one of my pastors and I had an extensive set of conversations a few years ago on the headship principle and the roles of men and women. These conversations spanned the course of several months. It was easier for both of us to carry out these conversations over e-mail, and the back-and-forth was really quite epic.<sup>293</sup> At some point, I remember my pastor suggesting that I would benefit from more study on the topic, and I also remember again being extremely frustrated with him. How was I possibly going to study this topic in a systematic and meaningful way? What resources did I have at my disposal? Yes, I could do some reading on my own, but I had no idea where to start. And even if I did find a place to start, I didn't feel that I knew enough about the subject to accurately weigh whether or not what I read was in harmony with the biblical principles.

It's amazing how sometimes, it's so clear how God gives you exactly what you need. About a year and a half after that conversation, the MATS program was created. Through this program, I found my way of doing this suggested continued study on the headship principle along with the broader theological background, understanding, interpretive skills, and mindset needed to evaluate various theological writings and determine their faithfulness to the biblical text. That study culminates in this thesis: a labor of love that brings together my unique thoughts and perspective on the doctrine of headship with well-researched and well-reasoned arguments on the subject.

---

<sup>293</sup> My pastor and I used the "see below" technique to reply to each other—changing the font color or style each time—and I remember resorting to "orange bold italics caps" at one point because virtually every other font color and style combination had already been used in that particular e-mail thread.

I pray that others who desire to think more deeply about the doctrine of headship, wish to have some of their questions answered, or simply want to engage in a discussion that feels off-limits and taboo at times might benefit from my work. A thorough understanding of the biblical principle of headship is an absolutely necessary starting point. Without agreement on this principle, discussion of the applications will turn into an “I think...” game rather than a well-reasoned discussion of how to faithfully apply the principle. Examples of female church leaders in Acts and the Pauline Epistles demonstrate the ministry partnerships present from the very earliest days of the Christian church. Although there are many unanswered questions about the specific roles and responsibilities these women filled and carried out, we can be certain that they worked in harmony with the biblical principle as best as they could. Working in harmony with this principle also has the potential to bless the church today and allow everyone—called workers and lay members alike—to carry out ministry to the best of their abilities. At the same time, there are situations where women could serve more fully without violating the headship principle. There are good reasons for some of these situations and not-so-good reasons for others, and therefore the conversation on all these “should” situations will ideally always be a work in progress.

That “work in progress” is my specific prayer for this thesis. As the WELS continues to wrestle with and discuss the roles of men and women at the congregational level, in our educational system, and on a synod-wide level, I pray that the material here might add to that discussion. In particular, I pray that my perspective—my *female* perspective—might add to the discussion in a more systematic and formal way than has happened before. And I pray that both the joys and the struggles of applying the headship

principle that I've shared in this thesis might give women the comfort that they are not alone and pastors the encouragement to have open and honest conversations about the topic with their female members. I have been blessed to have many of those conversations, and I pray this thesis might be a starting point for others to experience those blessings as well.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Wisconsin Lutheran College Academic Catalog. "Academic Goals and General Education Outcomes," July 1, 2021.  
<http://catalog.wlc.edu/content.php?catoid=14&navoid=459>.
- "Ancillary." In *Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d. <https://www-oed-com.wlc.ezproxy.switchinc.org/view/Entry/7258?redirectedFrom=ancillary#eid>.
- "Auxiliary." In *Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d. <https://www-oed-com.wlc.ezproxy.switchinc.org/view/Entry/13568?redirectedFrom=auxiliary#eid>.
- Bacchiocchi, Samuele. *Women in the Church: A Biblical Study on the Role of Women in the Church*. Berrian Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1987.
- Balge, Richard D. *Acts*. The People's Bible. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1988.
- Becker, Bruce, and Paul Kelm. "Women and the WELS: Connecting Church Practice With Scriptural Teaching," May 2018.
- Belleville, Linda L. "Teaching and Usurping Authority." In *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, edited by Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, 205–23. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- . "Women Leaders in the Bible." In *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, edited by Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, 110–25. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- "Bible Study--Male and Female He Created Them--Participant Study." Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, October 2019.  
<https://synodadmin.welsrc.net/download-synodadmin/en-cristo/?wpdmdl=3422&refresh=619169ae60e231636919726&ind=1574689654338&filename=SAMaleandFemaleinGodsWorld-official-11252019.pdf>.
- "Book of Reports and Memorials." Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, May 2019.  
<https://synodadmin.welsrc.net/download-synodadmin/official-synod-reports/>.
- Burer, Michael H., and Daniel B. Wallace. "Was Junia Really an Apostle? A Re-Examination of Rom 16:7." *New Testament Studies* 47, no. 1 (January 2001): 76–91.

- Burton, Keith A. "1 Corinthians 11 and 14: How Does a Woman Prophesy and Keep Silence at the Same Time?" *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 10, no. 1–2 (1999): 268–84.
- Calpino, Teresa J. "'The Lord Opened Her Heart': Boundary Crossing in Acts 16:13-15." *ANNALI DI STORIA DELL'ESEGESI* 28, no. 2 (2011): 81–91.
- Clark, Stephen B. *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1980.
- "Constitution and Bylaws of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Constitution for the Districts," August 2021.  
<https://synodadmin.welsrc.net/download-synodadmin/official-synod-reports/?wpdmdl=3263&refresh=61a8db64cc06e1638456164&ind=1630612434593&filename=sa-WELSConstitutionandBylaws-082021.doc>.
- Dzubinski, Leanne M., and Anneke H. Stasson. *Women in the Mission of the Church: Their Opportunities and Obstacles throughout Christian History*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021.
- Engberg-Pedersen, Troels. "1 Corinthians 11:16 and the Character of Pauline Exhortation." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 679–89.
- Epistolanum Ad Romanos*. Vol. 31. 161 vols. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, n.d.
- Epp, Eldon Jay. *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005.
- Fee, Gordon D. "Praying and Prophesying in the Assemblies." In *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, edited by Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, 142–60. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Felix Sr., Paul W. "The Hermeneutics of Evangelical Feminism." *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 35–46.
- Flesher, LeAnn Snow. "What the @\$! Is a Helpmate?" *Review & Expositor* 115, no. 4 (2018): 453–66.
- Gawrisch, Wilbert R. "The Place of Women in the Life and Work of the Church," 1968.  
<http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/1769/GawrischPlace.pdf>.
- Giles, Kevin. "House Churches." *Priscilla Papers* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 6–9.

- Grudem, Wayne. *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 1000 Disputed Questions*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004.
- Heger, Paul. *Women in the Bible, Qumran, and Early Rabbinic Literature*. Boston, MA: Brill, 2014.
- “Helper.” In *Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d. <https://www-oed-com.wlc.ezproxy.switchinc.org/view/Entry/85744?rskey=XnP18N&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>.
- Hoerber, Robert G., ed. *Concordia Self-Study Bible: New International Version*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1986.
- Keener, Craig S. “Learning in the Assemblies.” In *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, edited by Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, 161–71. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Keller, Marie Noel. *Priscilla and Aquila: Paul’s Coworkers in Christ Jesus*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010.
- Klassen, Randy. “Ezer and Exodus.” *Direction* 35, no. 1 (2006): 18–32.
- Kuske, David. “An Exegetical Brief on 1 Timothy 2:12.” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 88, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 64–67.
- Kuske, David P. *A Commentary on Romans 9-16*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2014.
- . “Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11:3-16.” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (April 1981): 83–103.
- Lawrenz, Carl J. “The Role of Man and Woman According to Holy Scripture,” n.d. <http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/2951/LawrenzRole.pdf>.
- Lawrenz, Carl J., and John C. Jeske. *A Commentary on Genesis 1-11*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004.
- Lee, Dorothy A. *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament: Reclaiming the Biblical Vision for Church Leadership*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2021.
- Lewis, Robert M. “The ‘Women’ of 1 Timothy 3:11.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136, no. 542 (June 1979): 167–75.
- Lockwood, Gregory J. *1 Corinthians*. Concordia Commentary. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2000.

Luther, Martin. *Luther's Catechism*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2017.

"Male and Female in God's World." Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, October 2019. <https://synodadmin.welsrc.net/download-synodadmin/en-cristo/?wpdmdl=3422&refresh=619169ae60e231636919726&ind=1574689654338&filename=SAMaleandFemaleinGodsWorld-official-11252019.pdf>.

Malone, Mary. *Women & Christianity: The First Thousand Years*. Vol. 1. 3 vols. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001.

Mathews, Kenneth A. *Genesis 1-11:26*. Vol. 1A. The New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996.

Merkle, Benjamin L. "Paul's Arguments from Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 and 1 Timothy 2:13-14: An Apparent Inconsistency Answered." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 3 (September 2006): 527-48.

Miller, Amanda C. "Cut from the Same Cloth: A Study of Female Patrons in Luke-Acts and the Roman Empire." *Review and Expositor* 114, no. 2 (2017): 203-10.

Miller, J. David. "What Can We Say about Phoebe?" *Priscilla Papers* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 16-21.

Moo, Douglas J. *The Epistle to the Romans*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.

———. "What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?: 1 Timothy 2:11-15." In *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, 179-93. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991.

Mueller, Wayne. "The Role of Women in the Church with Special Reference to Genesis 1-3," 1980. <http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/3379/MuellerWomen.pdf>.

Nicole, Roger. "Biblical Hermeneutics: Basic Principles and Questions of Gender." In *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, edited by Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, 355-63. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.

Osiek, Carolyn, and Margaret Y. MacDonald. *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006.



- Payne, Philip B. "Wild Hair and Gender Equality in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16." *Priscilla Papers* 20, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 9–16.
- Pierce, Ronald W., and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds. *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Powers, B.W. "Patterns of New Testament Ministry II - Deacons." *Churchmen* 87, no. 3 (1973): 166–81.
- Reid, Barbara E. *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke*. Collegeville, MN: The Order of St. Benedict, Inc., 1996.
- Rosenzweig, Michael L. "A Helper Equal to Him." *Judaism* 35, no. 3 (Summer 1986): 277–80.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. "The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching." In *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, 209–24. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991.
- Schuetze, Armin W. *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*. The People's Bible. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991.
- Smith, Susan. "Women's Human, Ecclesial and Missionary Identity: What Insights Does the Pauline Correspondence Offer the Contemporary Woman?" *Mission Studies* 27, no. 2 (2010): 145–59.
- Spurgeon, Andrew B. "1 Timothy 2:13-15: Paul's Retelling of Genesis 2:4-4:1." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no. 3 (September 2013): 546–56.
- Thompson, Glen L. "The Role of Women in the Public Ministry: New Testament Exegesis in the Twenty-First Century," Unpublished essay. April 6, 2019.
- WELS Together Archives. "Together: WELS Female Called Workers Eligible for Parsonage Allowance," July 7, 2020. <https://wels.net/wels-female-called-workers-eligible-for-parsonage-allowance/>.
- Wendland, Paul O. "An Overview of Lutheran Hermeneutics in the 21st Century." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 110, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 183–94.
- Wilder, Terry L. "Phoebe, the Letter-Carrier of Romans, and the Impact of Her Role on Biblical Theology." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 56, no. 1 (Fall 2013): 43–51.

“Wisconsin Lutheran College: Academics,” n.d. <https://www.wlc.edu/academics/>.

Zell, Paul E. “Romans 16:1, 7: Phoebe, a Deacon? Junia, an Apostle?” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 111, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 102–7.