

The ordination of women: assessing the counter claims of complementarianism

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Complementarianism: its origins

During the 1980s a group of like-minded American Evangelical scholars became increasingly concerned that a growing number of fellow Evangelicals, supposedly influenced by feminist theology, were joining the ranks of those who supported the ordination of both men and women.¹ Determined to nip in the bud what they regarded as a disturbing trend, people under the leadership of John Piper and Wayne Grudem formulated a series of 'affirmations' that outlined their understanding of the biblical teaching on manhood and womanhood. The ten affirmations were finalised at Danvers, Massachusetts, in 1987, at a meeting of the newly formed Council on Biblical Men and Women (CBMW). The ten affirmations quickly became known as the Danvers Statement.² In December of the following year, the catch-all word 'complementarianism' was decided on at another meeting of CMBW as the word that best summed up the theory.³

The affirmations comprise a comprehensive package. They are not meant to be understood as the working principles of a particular hermeneutical stance, but as definitive and non-negotiable truths regarding the biblical witness as it pertains to the roles of men and

- 1 It is widely believed that the thesis that prohibits women from holding the pastoral office in the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand, finalised in 1950, and popularly known as TA 6.11 ('Theses on the Office of the Ministry', page A13 of *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia* [DSTO]), was also composed to forestall women's ordination, given its emergence in the Lutheran churches of Scandinavia in the early to mid-20th century. Immediately prior to the formation of the LCA, the joint faculties of Concordia and Immanuel seminaries in Adelaide prepared a statement titled, 'Statement on rights of women to vote at meetings of the congregations', that was then adopted by the LCA constituting convention in 1966. This document states that God has assigned women 'a subordinate position' by virtue of the creation and the fall (see *Doctrinal statements and theological opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia*, F1). Presumably the document was insufficiently clear to some on the topic of women's voting rights, so the next general synod, in 1968, resolved that 'the principle that the woman is to be in subjection to the man be safeguarded by recognising the right of the man to reserve the final decision on any matter to a male vote whenever the men desire to invoke this right' (DSTO, F1). Paragraph 3 of 'Rights of women to vote' also clearly shows that the church's opposition to the ordination of women was endorsed at the very first synod of the new church: 'This rule of the Apostle distinctly excludes women from the pastoral office (cf. TA 6.11) and from the office of elder.'
- 2 The full statement is readily accessed on the internet under the heading 'The Danvers Statement'. To this day the Danvers Statement is regarded as the definitive charter of complementarian theology.
- 3 American Evangelicals chose the word 'complementarianism' as the cover-all term for the movement because of the perceived negative overtones of the more accurate descriptors that they initially preferred: 'biblical hierarchy' or 'biblical patriarchy'. Churches that have adopted complementarianism as part of their official theological platform include the Evangelical and Southern Baptist Churches of the USA, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and the Sydney diocese of the Anglican Church of Australia.

women. Failure to accept and promote what complementarians regard as God's design for male-female relationships is then said to lead inevitably to the promotion of polygamy, adultery, divorce and homosexuality, all of which are turbo-charged by feminist theology.⁴

Before engaging with complementarianism and demonstrating its close match with the theological position of those who oppose women's ordination in the LCA/NZ, this essay will seek to spell out its affirmations, the main theological planks of the movement.⁵

Complementarianism: its affirmations

Complementarians take as their starting point the proposal that God has ordered the realm of creation in a fixed way that is not only revealed in the bible but is also clearly discernible in the natural world. Men and women have been designed to 'complement' one another by virtue of their distinct physical formation. The biological differences between men and women, most clearly indicated by their distinct but complementary sex organs and the distinct but complementary roles that men and women play in procreation, are then said to provide nature's backdrop to the distinct but complementary roles that the bible assigns to men and women, in family, church, and society.

Complementarians regard the God-given design for church, family and society as subordinationist. For some it has even been based on the 'eternal functional subordination' (EFS) of the Son to the Father within the Godhead itself,⁶ so that the subordination of

- 4 See Andreas and Margaret Köstenberger, *God's Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), especially 50–56 and 290–320.
- 5 The main claims of complementarianism that are referred to throughout this paper are spelt out clearly in books by its chief proponents, such as: *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Biblical Feminism*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 1991), and *God's Design for Man and Woman*, by the husband and wife team Andreas and Margaret Köstenberger (see footnote 4 for the reference). Without explicitly referring to complementarianism, the affirmations of the movement are closely matched in an array of essays by LCA/NZ theologians such as: John Kleinig, 'Ordered community: order and subordination in the New Testament,' *Lutheran Theological Journal* 39, nos. 2 and 3 (Aug and Dec 2005), 196–209; 'Disciples but not teachers: 1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15,' in *Ordination of Women: Interdenominational Perspectives*, ed. Cathy Thomson and Vic Pflitzner, *Interface: A Forum for Theology in the World* 8, no. 2 (Oct 2005), 48–61; and Adam Hensley, 'Divine blessing and order in marriage and the church,' *Lutheran Theological Journal* 54, no. 1 (May 2020), 43–59. See also a document of the Church's Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations (CTICR), '1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 and 1 Timothy 2:11–14 prohibit the ordination of women,' *Lutheran Theological Journal* 39, no. 1 (May 2005), 59. Over the years the CTICR has been asked to prepare papers on the ordination issue from a number of perspectives. None is understood to reflect an official CTICR stance.
- 6 One of the leading early proponents of EFS is Wayne Grudem, whose views are spelt out in *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994). Grudem's views are largely mirrored by Bruce A. Ware in his book, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005). Ware writes: 'The authority-submission structures in marriage and in church leadership are meant to be reflections of the authority and submission in the relations of the persons of the Godhead' (*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, 77). It is beyond the scope of this paper to spell out the controversy that EFS has led to among complementarian scholars. The main charge is that EFS amounts to a denial of orthodox trinitarian theology, which only knows of the Son's willing subordination to the Father during his earthly ministry but rules out eternal subordination role relations among the persons of the Trinity. A prolific critic of EFS is Kevin Giles. See, e.g., *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

the Son to the Father is mirrored in the headship of the man and the subordination of the woman (1 Cor 11:3). Church, family and society at large are at their best and their healthiest when they are structured in ways that accurately reflect God's carefully designed creation. The love of husbands for wives reflects Christ's self-sacrificial love for the church, and the willing submission of wives to their husbands reflects the church's submission to Christ (Eph 5:22–33). As husbands serve lovingly as heads of their wives and families, they provide a safe haven for wives and children to flourish and fulfil their God-given roles in willing subordination (Tit 2:3–5; 1 Pet 3:1–7). All in all, people are promised God-pleasing fulfilment when they gain a full appreciation of God's arranging, or ordering, of the creaturely realm and willingly conform to the biblical requirements of their station within that order.

Based ultimately on their subordination to men within God's created order, the exclusion of women from the ministry is said to receive further support from observations such as: Jesus only chose male disciples, Paul commanded women to remain silent in worship (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:12), Adam was created before Eve, and Eve was the one who 'was deceived and became a transgressor' (1 Tim 2:13, 14). Furthermore, the natural giftedness of men for leadership is said to make them more apt to serve in the ordained ministry. From these foundations it follows that the church can be confident that the blessings of the gospel and the sacraments are conferred as long as the ministry is ordered according to God's comprehensive subordinationist design.

In face of the charge that their theological stance creates the impression that complementarians regard women as second-class citizens in the church, they make much of the equality of men and women, in three important respects.⁷ Given that men and women are created in the image of God and as the pinnacle of creation, they are equal to one another before God in status and dignity (Gen 1:26–28). Secondly, the equality of men and women in creation flows into a shared and equal responsibility to care for the created realm and protect it, in keeping with the divine mandate to do so (Gen 1:26; 2:15). And thirdly, women are equal to men in that they too are 'heirs of the gracious gift of life' (1 Pet 3:7), and therefore they are in no way inferior to men in terms of their standing as the redeemed, sanctified, blessed and gifted children of God (Gal 3:28). No dispute arises here.

According to complementarianism, the new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17) does not restore the creation that God declared 'very good' from the outset (Gen 1:31). In fact, the creation of Adam before Eve is said to affirm male headship, even before male rule is prescribed and described following the fall (Gen 3:16). The church's transformation in Christ only 'removes the distortions introduced by the curse.'⁸ Applied to husbands, such distortions occur when they meekly abdicate their role as family head and leader, as Adam did in the Garden of Eden, or when they rule harshly and selfishly and fail to 'grow in love and care for their wives'. Wives distort the created order when they resist or usurp the authority of their husbands and fail to 'grow in willing, joyful submission to their leadership'. Applied to male church leaders, distortions set in when they are driven by the love of power, money or

7 See Denny Burk, 'Mere Complementarianism,' in *Eikon* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2019), 28–43, especially pp. 34–35.

8 *Affirmations*, 6. In fact, the fall account indicates that only the serpent and the ground are cursed (Gen 3:14,17), not the man and the woman.

prestige, or when they abdicate their spiritual responsibility. Applied to women, distortions to God's order pertaining to ministry roles arise when they 'neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries' or when they are swayed by their heartfelt but misguided sense of call to public ministry and ignore the biblical criteria for determining who may or may not be ordained.⁹

Complementarianism: an assessment of its chief claims (Old Testament)

Complementarians argue that men are established as the heads and leaders of women because Adam was created before Eve (Gen 2:7) and was then assigned the role of her teacher in that God gave to him, rather than to Eve, the prohibition regarding eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (vs. 17).¹⁰ The inference that women are subordinate to men is said to be confirmed by noting that Eve's formation was secondary and derivative. She was made from Adam's rib.¹¹

Tracing the story's plotline allows the reader to place the emphasis where it belongs. After the repeated references to God's positive evaluation of the created realm in Genesis 1 (vss. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), it is striking that the author of chapter 2 highlights a number of major hurdles in the creative enterprise, some at the start of the story and another halfway through. They are narrative complications that cry out for resolution. From the outset the reader learns that the created realm lacks vegetation, rain, and a farmer to till the soil (vss. 5, 6). Midway through the account a further imperfection is divulged—the human being¹² is alone in the world, lacking a helper as his partner (vss. 18–20).

In each case the Lord God takes the steps required to resolve the dilemma, and each resolution is marked by the verb 'to become'. By forming the human from the soil and breathing into him the breath of life, he 'becomes' a living being (vs. 7), resolving the dilemma of there being no farmer to till the soil and keep it. The river that flows out of

9 *Affirmations*, 4 and 6.

10 Köstenberger, *God's Design*, 27; Kleinig, 'Disciples but not teachers,' 58, 59.

11 With their understanding that naming rights are a further indication of male authority (Köstenberger, *God's Design*, 38, 49), complementarians are pleased to note that Adam named the animals (Gen 2:19) and then Eve (3:20). In the Old Testament, however, naming has far more to do with the discernment of the named person's character and conduct (see e.g. Gen 25:26; 27:35, 36; 1 Sam 25:25), and in the bible women are regularly the ones who name (see e.g. Gen 16:13; 29:31 – 30:43; Judg 13:24; Luke 1:31). Of the 46 examples of child-naming in the Old Testament, 28 are by women but only 18 by men.

12 The word is not 'the man' or 'Adam', but 'the human being' (*hā'ādām*), reflecting the creation of humans from the soil (*hā'ādāmāh*). Strictly speaking, the Hebrew does not allow the reader to conclude that the man Adam was created first, despite most English translations, reinforced by the perception that arises from popular story-telling and the way the text is employed at 1 Corinthians 11:12 and 1 Timothy 2:13. From Genesis 2:7 onwards the first human is invariably called 'the human being' (*hā'ādām*), without gender differentiation, calling into serious question any notion of male authority, or superordination, resulting from prior creation. The words for 'man' (*ish*) and 'woman' (*ishshāh*) are first used only after the woman has been created (2:23). The proper noun 'Adam' does not feature at all. The only occurrence of *ādām* without the definite article in these opening chapters is at Genesis 1:26, where it immediately becomes apparent that both male and female are meant (vs. 27). Nevertheless, complementarians assert that the name of the first human being is the masculine name Adam, and only he is meant at verse 26, before the word is used inclusively of both male and female (vs. 27). That is then regarded as proof that the headship of men and the subordination of women is even reflected in Genesis 1 (Köstenberger, *God's Design*, 31, 39).

Eden divides to 'become' four branches (vs. 10), resolving the dilemma of the waterless face of the earth and the lack of vegetation. And the man cleaves to his wife so that they 'become' one flesh, resolving the problem of the initial solitariness of the human being in the garden (vs. 24).

Viewed this way, the story is seen to move towards a fitting conclusion, overcoming the obstacles that stood in the creator's path. Viewed this way, the story is as little about the authority of men over women by virtue of their prior creation as it is about the superior dignity of women by virtue of their far grander construction.¹³ Viewed as a story with a clear plotline, it becomes clear that the story's relentless forward movement culminates in the resolution of the major obstacle in the second half of the story, the solitariness of the human being in the garden. Finally, the man is able to rejoice in the image of perfection that stands before him and become one flesh with her. Viewed this way, it is clear that the woman is not to be understood as less than the man or subservient to him, because she was taken from the man. Far rather, her derivation from the man highlights to the maximum extent the fact that they are made for one another. Equal partners in the journey of life, they are each other's 'other half'. That is the point where the story reaches its highpoint and its fitting conclusion, not in the creation of the woman. Already in the mid-12th century, the French theologian Peter Lombard wrote that Eve was not taken from Adam's feet to be his subordinate, nor from his head to be his master; she was taken from his side to be his partner.¹⁴

Little evidence can be found that complementarians have taken to heart the profound implications of the depiction of the woman as 'a helper as his partner' (*'ezer k^enegdô*, Gen 2:18, 20). They are happy to let the mistaken impression stand that God simply intends to provide the man with someone to ease the burden of the domestic workload. The English word 'helper' all too readily conjures up images of someone who assists with the household chores, a subordinate, a person with a clearly defined support role in the family, the church, and society at large. This is not so. Of the twenty-one occurrences of the word 'helper' in the Old Testament, fifteen are used as descriptions of God. God is helper precisely as the one 'who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry' (Ps 146:6,7). God is helper as the one who delivers those who plead for rescue in the face of torment, danger, sickness or impending death (e.g. Pss 70:5; 79:9; 119:86; 121:1; see also Ps 146:8,9). Used so frequently as a metaphor for God, or to portray the saving and creative deeds of God, it is out of the question to suggest that the word could mean anything like a subservient assistant when it is applied to womankind so early in the bible.

13 Five verbs are used for her formation, but only two for the man's; and the main verb is 'to build', a verb usually reserved for major building operations (2:22), whereas the man is formed simply using the verb for sculpting (vs. 7).

14 For the full text of Lombard's colourful words, which appear in chapter two of his major work, *The Four Books of Sentences*, see Douglas Galbi, 'Peter Lombard's *Sentences*: conjugal partnership, not courtly love,' <https://www.purplemotes.net/2017/03/19/lombard-conjugal-partnership>, accessed 3 November 2020. Lombard sought to contrast the bible's understanding of the created equality of men and women with the mediaeval notion of courtly love, whereby women were placed on a pedestal as objects of male devotion.

Women's subordinate standing is affirmed by the fall account, complementarians argue, because Eve was the one who was deceived by the serpent and succumbed to its temptation (Gen 3:1–7). After all, St. Paul's words to Timothy are said to make it clear that Eve has to accept greater responsibility for the fall: 'Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor' (1 Tim 2:14). The fact that Adam was present during the conversation with the serpent (Gen 3:6) is interpreted to mean that he allowed Eve to usurp his rightful authority. It simply stands as a warning to men not to abandon their role as head and teacher.

Eve usurped the spiritual headship of Adam by ceasing to be a student of her husband, while Adam dodged his responsibility to teach his wife by weakly following her teaching, with tragic consequences for both. So, women were not to assume this role again, and the men were not to renege on it.¹⁵

With complementarianism as the chief lens for reading the fall narrative, the profound theology inherent in the text as it stands is at best marginalised, or at worst completely missed. For example, the insidious suggestiveness of temptation per se, all too clear in the diabolical dialogue of Genesis 3:1–7, is overlooked in favour of a reading that suggests that the serpent knew to engage the woman rather than the man in the conversation (vss. 1–5) because she represented the weaker sex (1 Pet 3:7).¹⁶ Once Eve has been deceived she is immediately said to lead the man astray (Gen 3:6). She is the arch-seductress, the temptress extraordinaire; and as was the woman in the garden, so also are women in general ever since.¹⁷ But the notion that the woman should be understood as the greater sinner is undermined by the text itself, when close attention is paid to the responses of the man and the woman when God calls them to account for their disobedience (vss. 8–13), and when close attention is paid to the respective judgments that are pronounced (vss. 15–19).

Similarly, the literal observation that Eve only received the prohibition second-hand because she had not yet been created when Adam received it overlooks the profound significance of the changes that occur between the prohibition as given to the man (Gen 2:16,17) and the woman's take on the prohibition in her conversation with the serpent (3:2,3). The shifts in the reception of the prohibition are by no means the province of women alone. They speak to the sinful condition of all people before God. Ready access to the deeper meaning of the changes is gained by reading the prohibition (Gen 2:16,17) in close connection with Eve's

15 CTICR, 'Prohibit', 59 (see footnote 5 for the full reference).

16 Luther repeats with approval the traditional opinion that 'the serpent was afraid of the male, as the master, and approached the woman; for although she herself was also holy, nevertheless, as the weaker creature, she was more likely to yield to persuasion' (*Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol. 1, 182). Luther's words reflect a long and sorry tradition that regards women as more gullible than men, and therefore more susceptible to temptation.

17 The church father Tertullian wrote, 'Woman, you are the devil's doorway. You have led astray one whom the devil would not dare attack directly. It is your fault that the Son of God had to die; you should always go in mourning and in rags'. And Ambrose: 'Adam was led to sin by Eve and not Eve by Adam. It is just and right that woman accept as lord and master him whom she led to sin'. Those who share the complementarian outlook don't express the matter quite so harshly, but the point is similar. For copious references to early church theologians' opinions on gender relations, see Val Webb, *Why We're Equal: Introducing Feminist Theology* (St Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1999), 14–27.

subsequent report of the prohibition in her dialogue with the serpent (Gen 3:2,3).¹⁸

By defending God against the serpent's misleading claim that the fruit of all the trees in the garden are out of bounds, Eve places God under critical scrutiny and thereby becomes the first suspicious theologian. Her reply downplays God's remarkable largesse in freely providing all creatures with all the delights of the created realm for their pure enjoyment. Then, Eve's failure to name the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as the prohibited tree speaks to the human quest for autonomy from God. It speaks to the human desire to take God's place on the throne as the one who knows all, and in particular as the one who knows all that best ensures the health and well-being of humans and the whole created realm. This has the disastrous effect of ignoring highly specific destructive prohibitions because of the supposed restrictions they place on human autonomy.

Eve's additional words, 'nor shall you touch it' (Gen 3:3 NRSV), indicate the all too human tendency to create or imagine prohibitions where they don't exist, to speak of God in blanket terms as a mean-spirited spoilsport, constantly looking down from above to spy on human misconduct. And finally, by omitting the words 'in the day that you eat of it' and the adverb 'surely' before the verb 'you shall die', Eve gives voice to the innate human inclination to conceive of God as a toothless tiger or, to change the cliché, a dog that is all bark but no bite. Crafted to destroy, temptation's guile can never be underestimated, this text is saying. In the final analysis temptation is no respecter of a person's gender. The fall account in Genesis 3 doesn't speak of anything as tedious as a woman's greater susceptibility to temptation or her particular aptitude for leading men astray.

The radical equality, mutuality and correspondence between men and women in creation are confirmed by the composite picture that is presented in Genesis 1–3. The story nature of the accounts means that their profound theological truths aren't always spelt out in so many words. But the wider biblical witness lets it be seen that God also forms women from the soil (Ps 139:15) and breathes into them the breath of life so that, when God withdraws his breath, they too return to the soil from which they were taken (Ps 104:29,30). Likewise, women have the same responsibility as men for working the soil and preserving the created realm, men and women alike are known to suspect God's goodness and underestimate his wrath, and neither gender outdoes the other in tempting, deceiving and leading others astray. The countless attempts to draw inferences from the sequencing of episodes in these texts have led to nothing but bottomless pits.

Except by questionable inferences drawn from prior assumptions, it cannot be said that the creation and fall accounts establish a male-female authority-subordination hierarchy, or that they assign gender specific roles. These pivotal texts don't even mention the distinctive male and female reproductive organs or the distinctive roles that men and women play in procreation, which might suggest gender-related assignments. Far rather, God's remarkable words, addressed to men and women alike in the first creation account, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth' (Gen 1:28), and their becoming one flesh in the second account (2:24), show that even childbearing and child-raising are portrayed as

¹⁸ Walter Brueggemann reflects helpfully on this matter in *Genesis, Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 48, 49.

shared assignments in the foundational creation accounts.

Complementarianism: an assessment of its chief claims (New Testament)

It has become increasingly apparent that the main arguments that are used to oppose the ordination of women in the LCA/NZ conform in many, if not most, respects to the affirmations of complementarianism. For the most part complementarians are happy to base their case for excluding women from the office of the public ministry on (a) the New Testament household codes (Eph 5:21 – 6:9; Col 3:18 – 4:1; 1 Tim 2:8–15; Tit 2:1–10; 1 Pet 2:11 – 3:22),¹⁹ (b) Paul’s claim that the man is the head of the woman, and the husband the head of the wife (1 Cor 11:3), and, above all, (c) the two pivotal texts in the ordination debate within the LCA/NZ (1 Cor 14:34,35 and 1 Tim 2:11–14).

The challenge to complementarianism that follows proceeds as follows: reflections on the New Testament’s household codes, with particular focus on Ephesians 5:21–33 and a brief comment on slavery and the subordination of women, and twelve concluding comments that spell out the writer’s chief issues with the complementarian agenda.

Household codes (Haustafeln)

The household codes of the Greco-Roman world were inherently hierarchical.²⁰ Free Roman male citizens were regarded as the ‘father of the family’ (*paterfamilias*), and exercised unquestioned authority over their household, commanding the absolute obedience of all members, their wife, their children, and their slaves. Wives certainly functioned as leaders within the domestic realm, as ‘the mother of the family’ (*materfamilias*); but they were regarded as inherently inferior to their husbands—by law, custom and nature—and their duties, such as making clothes for the family, doing the laundry, bathing the family, providing meals, and bearing and raising children, were seen as vastly inferior to those of their husbands. In an honour-shame culture, the wife’s piety, domesticity, industry, modesty, chastity and submissive obedience defined her as truly devout. Her chief role was to bring honour and glory to her husband in the public arena. Men represented the ideal human being with their traits of physical strength and political aptitude, rationality, spirituality and activity. Women, on the other hand, were understood to manifest characteristics typical of their gender: weakness, irrationality, fleshliness and passivity.²¹ Nicholas Smith writes that for Aristotle the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the male is the ruler and the female the subject, the female is an incomplete male—a deformity—fully endowed with emotional responses not so readily associated with men, such as impulsiveness,

19 Elements of such codes can also be found at 1 Timothy 5:1,2 and 6:1,2. The German term *Haustafeln* (literally, house tables) is widely used in commentaries and scholarly papers on the topic.

20 Much of what follows in this section is dependent on the first chapter of the book by Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle’s Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016).

21 One of the earliest and most extensive household management codes of the ancient world is found in Aristotle’s *Politics*. There were few social and legal constraints to curb the widespread sexual promiscuity that typified the free and privileged life of the *paterfamilias*, but their moral excesses were curbed to some extent by the strict legal reforms of Emperor Octavian (18 and 9 BC) that reintroduced the stricter moral codes of the Republic (see Westfall, *Paul and Gender*, 5).

jealousy, despondency, tearfulness, and being difficult to stir to action.²²

The views of later Jewish scholars were more moderate. For example, the philosopher, Philo of Alexandria (born shortly before Jesus), wrote in his *Apology*: 'Wives must be in servitude to their husbands, a servitude not imposed by violent ill-treatment but promoting obedience in all things.'²³ And in his *Against Apion*, the historian Flavius Josephus wrote: 'Let the wife, therefore, be obedient to him, not so that he should abuse her, but that she may acknowledge her duty to her husband; for God hath given the authority to the husband.'²⁴ The ideal, however, may not always have been matched by the practice.²⁵ For example, the New Testament provides evidence of socially prominent and independently wealthy women, who were heads of households and generous benefactors of early Christian communities.²⁶

For all the familiar terminology and content of the New Testament's *Haustafeln*, the first readers would have immediately noticed that Paul and Peter have extensively reworked the traditional Greco-Roman and Jewish codes, and even subverted them in significant places. Paul in particular makes ground-breaking changes. First and foremost, he places the Lord Jesus at the centre of each of his *Haustafeln* as the one who sets all people free through the gospel and the one whose conduct provides the example for all members of the household to emulate.²⁷ By making Jesus the focus of his admonitions Paul replaces the top-down and unilateral subordinationism of the Greco-Roman and Jewish codes with the Christian ethic of mutual, or reciprocal, subordination.

Complementarians, however, either trivialise or dismiss Paul's call for mutual subordination out of reverence for Christ (vs. 21) by claiming that it is little more than a heading regarding the general Christian ethic of service that introduces the far weightier instructions to women (vss. 22–24) and to men (vss. 25–31) that follow; they say the main subordination required of men is their subordination to Christ.

When Paul writes that to be subordinate to one another is to show 'reverence for Christ' (vs. 21), he is drawing the reader's attention to Christ's life of sacrificial service to those who lacked status in the world. The same connection is made in his letter to the Philippians,

22 Smith draws these snippets from Aristotle's *Politics*, in 'Plato and Aristotle on the nature of women,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 21, no. 4, (1981), 467–478.

23 Quoted by David L. Balch, in his book, *Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter*, SBLMS 26 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 54.

24 See William Whiston, translator, *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus* (Philadelphia, PA: John C. Winston Company, 1936), 895. Not one to mince his words, Luther put it more graphically. 'The rule remains with the husband, and the wife is compelled to obey him by God's command. He rules the home and the state, wages wars, defends his possessions, tills the soil, builds, plants, etc. The woman, on the other hand, is like a nail driven into the wall' (*Luther's Works*, vol. 1, 202).

25 Zeba Crook writes that many women played an active role in public life, had the upper hand in the management of their household, served as patrons and benefactors, gained wealth independently of their husbands, and in some cases even outstripped their husbands in receiving public honours. See her essay, 'Honor, shame, and social status revisited', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 3 (Fall 2009), 591–611; see especially page 609.

26 Some examples are Nympha in Laodicea (Col 4:15), Chloe in Corinth (1 Cor 1:11), Mary the mother of John Mark in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12), and Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:14,15).

27 There are 10 references to Christ in Ephesians 5:21–33, and seven in Colossians 3:18 – 4:1.

where he writes: 'Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus' (Phil 2:4,5). Jesus ate and drank with public sinners, touched the untouchable, healed the sick, provided for the poor, and showed mercy to those who were shunned by polite society. He shocked his disciples by washing their feet, the role of the household slave (John 13:3–5), and when James and John demanded that Jesus seat them at his right and left hand when he came in glory, he replied that 'whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45).

English translations of the three verses dealing with the submission of wives to husbands (Eph 5:22–24) are misleading. The command 'be subject' is lacking in the Greek words at the start of verse 22, which simply read, 'Wives to your husbands as to the Lord'. These introductory words show far more clearly the close connection between verses 21 and 22. Mutual subordination defines life within the household (vs. 21); then Paul goes on to demonstrate how wives will express subordination (vss. 22–24), followed by the far more extensive and detailed demonstration of the way husbands will express subordination in their relationship with their wives (vss. 25–31). The words for subordination and headship certainly appear in verses 22–24, a clear indication that Paul is taking care not to make such radical changes to the familiar codes of the day that their fresh expression would be barely recognisable to his readers, and if implemented pre-emptively would have a negative impact on the cause of the gospel. It is also important to note that Paul's view that the Parousia was imminent (1 Thess 4:15) led him to caution the church against making all the changes that might otherwise result from the conviction that Christ's advent had initiated the new creation, so that all the traditional barriers of race, religion and gender had to be dismantled immediately (1 Cor 7:17–24).

Complementarians say that Paul's analogy whereby Christ is to the church as the husband is to his wife confirms their view that wives are called to subordinate themselves to their husbands at home and to men more generally in the church.²⁸ This presses the analogy far beyond Paul's central concern, which is to undermine destructive notions of male privilege that are embedded in the Greco-Roman and the Jewish household codes of his day. To do so he calls on men to model themselves on the radical self-giving conduct of Christ, and rather than calling on men to think of themselves as the head of their subordinate wives, he closes with a reminder of the radical equality of husbands and wives (vs. 31).

Paul's call for mutual subordination in Ephesians 5 culminates with his instructions to husbands (vss. 25–31), that is, to those who, as *paterfamilias*, were traditionally regarded as subordinate to few others. Here the New Testament household codes are at their most radical. This is where the weight is placed, because this is where the problems lay. This is where subordination *par excellence* is to be displayed. This is where a totally counter-cultural role reversal is required in Christian communities. The husband's traditional totalitarian control is to give way to self-sacrificial love for his wife. Rather than prioritising his own interests and practising his freedom to the maximum extent at home and in the

²⁸ Hensley, 'Divine blessing and order,' 45, 46.

community, he is called to prioritise his wife's interests; in fact, he is asked to reflect Christ's willingness to give his life for the church in his relationship with his wife. Ironically, but surely intentionally, Paul alludes to a suite of duties associated with the supposedly lower status domestic realm to show how the believing husband's spousal love should model Christ's lifesaving and life-renewing work in the church. The husband is to cleanse his wife, wash her, beautify her, remove her stains, wrinkles and blemishes, and he is to feed and nourish her (vss. 25–29). These are hardly the duties that occupied the *paterfamilias* on a daily basis.

Slavery and the subordination of women

In light of the centuries-long recognition among the churches that slavery is wrong, it is remarkable that complementarians still uphold female subordination when more verses and more stringent verses in the New Testament are devoted to the subordination of slaves to their masters (Eph 6:5–8; Col 3:22 – 4:1; 1 Pet 3:18–25) than to the subordination of wives to their husbands (Eph 5:22–24; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1–6). Most strikingly, neither Paul nor Peter say anything that might be interpreted as a call for the abolition of slavery.²⁹ Instead, they urge slaves to obey their masters and submit to them, no matter how cruel and unjust their behaviour (Eph 6:5–8; 1 Pet 2:18–25). Paul even advises slaves who could gain their freedom not to do so, having been freed from captivity to the slave-master sin and made Christ's slaves (1 Cor 7:21–24). While acknowledging that slavery is a scourge, complementarians tend to divert attention away from the perennial challenge the church faces to confront slavery by arguing that what Paul and Peter wrote to masters and slaves now applies to employer–employee relations.³⁰ If the church quite rightly challenges slavery to this day, having wrestled theologically and ethically, year in and year out, with the apostles' appeal to slaves to observe their subordinate status by staying in their masters' service, it is inconsistent for complementarians to continue to insist that women remain under the authority of men, especially in light of the apostolic call for mutual subordination. The codes reflect the time of writing, not a fixed top-down Christian subordinationist agenda.

Engaging with the chief claims of complementarianism

The following twelve sections seek to highlight the main theological and exegetical problems that emerge from the complementarian project.

1. The main problem with complementarianism is that the whole edifice is built on a shaky foundation. That foundation is the conviction that top-down male authority is

²⁹ For an extended discussion see Kevin Giles, 'The bible and human liberation: slavery and women', chapter 8 of *What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018). Paul's firm yet courteous expectation that Philemon might release Onesimus from slavery (Phlm 4–21) shows where the apostle's heart lies on the matter.

³⁰ The Köstenbergers make the fanciful claims that 'subsequent history has witnessed the abolition of slavery' and Paul's reference to masters and slaves now applies to 'relationships in the workplace' (*God's Design*, 166, 167). However, compared with the 13 million people captured and sold as slaves between the 15th and 19th centuries during the transatlantic slave trade period, it is estimated that there are more than 40 million slaves in the world today. See Kate Hodal, 'One in 200 people is a slave,' *The Bulletin*, 25 February 2019.

embedded in the biblical creation accounts, and likewise the assignment of gender roles. By creating 'Adam' first and telling him about the forbidden tree, God is said to have made men heads with authority over women in perpetuity.³¹ This means that male headship is not changed by the restoration and renewal of creation in Christ, because it is built into the very 'order of creation' (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 3:23–29). And women's role as subservient helpers remains unchanged. Complementarians distinguish between what they regard as the fixed and God-pleasing male hierarchy implied by Genesis 1 and 2 and the 'rule' of women by men in chapter 3. The former is permanent, the latter is the domineering and oppressive rule of men who fail to practise loving and self-giving headship. It is only this kind of harsh rulership that complementarians say is changed by Christ and the new creation. The complementarian proposal is read into the text, based on prior assumptions about male-female relationships. It certainly can't be said to arise out of a plain reading of the text. Rather, it leads to a host of exegetical decisions that are pressed into the service of the ideological starting point. It is diametrically opposed to the apostolic injunction: 'Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ' (Eph 5:21). And as for the assignment of roles, the only one that God could be said to assign in Genesis 1 and 2 is in the form of a joint blessing: 'God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth".' (Gen 1:28)

2. The complementarian assertion that the unity we have in Christ as God's beloved children through baptism does not have flow on effects in the communal life of believers flies in the face of the biblical witness. Through baptism into Christ believers are 'clothed with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise' (Gal 3:27–29). The unity of believers certainly does not remove natural distinctions based on race, class, or gender. But it has decisive ripple effects, dismantling all other barriers between Jews and Gentiles, masters and slaves, and men and women. The Galatians text appears to allude to the Jewish morning prayer: 'I thank God that I was born a Jew and not a Greek, a free man not a slave, a man

31 As noted already (footnote 12), the first human created is invariably called 'the human being', not 'Adam' or 'the man'. Similarly, in Paul's so-called 'Adam-Christ typology' (Rom 5:12–21), the representative human being, the source of sin and death, is invariably called 'the human being' (*ho anthrōpos*), again rather than 'Adam' or 'the man' (despite most English translations). Likewise, Christ, the source of the free gift of grace to all people, is referred to exclusively as 'the human being', not 'the man' (Rom 5:17–19). The literal translation, 'the human being', provides the true meaning, whereas in both cases 'the man' offers the better—but misleading—English expression. In depicting the incarnation, the Apostles' and Nicene creeds use the general terms for the human being when speaking of Christ, both in the Greek and the Latin versions (Greek, *anthrōpos*; Latin, *homo*). Referring to Christ's assumption of human nature in its totality—as body, soul and spirit—Gregory of Nazianzus wrote: 'For that which he [Christ] has not assumed, he has not healed; but that which is united to his Godhead is also saved' (quoted in Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind: Reason, Order, and Openness in Theology and Natural Science* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2015], 9). By clear implication Christ's human nature included both the male and the female, with further implications for those who teach misleadingly that women may not be ordained because Christ was a male; that is, to be served by a male pastor is to be served by someone who is clearly seen to stand 'in the person of Christ' (*in persona Christi*). Neither the bible nor the church's creeds provide any support for the notion.

not a woman.’ In Judaism only males received circumcision, the visible seal on the body that they had truly become ‘Abraham’s offspring’. Baptismal incorporation into Christ does away with this clear sign of male privilege, but Peter and members of the ‘circumcision faction’ had to travel by a long and tortuous path before they learnt to behave in ways that were consistent with ‘the truth of the gospel’ (Gal 2:11–14; Eph 2:11–22; Acts 10:1–48). Sometimes compromises were necessary in places where the radical implications of the gospel had not yet taken effect (Acts 16:3). Despite the weight of authority that lay behind some biblical edicts that were necessary at the time under the prevailing circumstances, they are no longer enforced in the church today (Acts 15:19–21, 28, 29). Yet even without one word in the New Testament that can be construed as prohibiting the ordination of women, the gospel that abolishes the barrier between men and women has still not overcome the obstacles put in its path by many parts of the church. Rather than applying the codes today woodenly and literally, the church would be better served by noting how they call out the harsh excesses, cruelty, and oppression of the ancient codes, and then see how the apostles place the freedom of the gospel and the self-sacrificial example of Christ at the heart and centre of their *Haustafeln*, for readers of successive generations to discover how they provide the necessary impetus for breaking down those hierarchical arrangements that are unscriptural, counterproductive and unjust.

3. With their focus on the frequent use of the word ‘head’ in 1 Corinthians 11, complementarians have repeatedly drawn attention away from the main topic of the chapter—women wearing head covering when they lead in worship. The Western mindset all too readily assumes that here Paul is addressing certain unruly women who were flouting their freedom in Christ by throwing off their veils in protest against an offensive marker of their required submission to male authority.³² But this fails to do justice to the text. The veil is not here a sign of female submission, which is implied by most English translations: ‘A woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head’ (vs. 10). The word ‘symbol’ is not in the Greek text. The women prophets simply have ‘authority’ on their head to indicate their God-given authority to provide prophetic leadership in worship (vs. 5).³³

Members of the Corinthian house churches were drawn largely from the lower strata of society (1 Cor 1:26–31), so they were well aware that female slaves, freed slaves and prostitutes, among others, were required by Roman law to go about unveiled, marking them as sexually available and providing immunity before the law for men who thought of them as fair game, sexually speaking.³⁴ A reading that resonates more closely with the text is to understand that those who were proving argumentative were chiefly the men—or even a disputatious individual (vs. 16)—

32 Köstenberger, *God’s Design*, 172, 173, 178.

33 See Vic Pfitzner, *First Corinthians*, ChiRho Commentary Series (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1982), 171.

34 See Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle’s Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2016), especially chapter one, ‘Culture’, 1–31. A woman’s hair was regarded as potentially arousing, so a woman who showed her hair was understood to be soliciting men for sex.

who wanted to make a show of their freedom in the gospel by calling on the women to cast off their head covering.³⁵ With that in mind, Paul fully supports the women in their determination to retain the practice of covering their heads, first to show that they are free to serve as prophets—as long as they are clearly identified as women in doing so—and secondly as a mark of modesty, decorum and protection in the church, which ought to be known as a ‘safe place’. The further arguments that Paul draws on to make his case don’t stand alone, but complementarians freely use them to provide further support for their definitive doctrinal assertions about the subordination of women. In the scholarly world this has led to endless unseemly squabbles about the meaning of one conundrum after another in a perplexing chapter, so that Paul’s overall intention to deal pastorally with a vexed issue that was bedeviling the Corinthian church communities has been consistently bypassed.³⁶

4. Complementarians find it hard to reconcile Paul’s words: ‘Women should be silent in the churches’ (1 Cor 14:34,35)³⁷—the verses that are central to the claim that the bible forbids women from providing authoritative leadership in worship—with the fact that women exercised the gift of prophecy in the New Testament church (1 Cor 11:5). Presumably this is because it would be out of the question to acknowledge that women were engaged in a ministry second only to the ministry of the apostles (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). But women did in fact pray and prophesy in worship (1 Cor 11:5; see Acts 2:14–18; 21:9). Complementarians try to skirt around this inevitable conclusion with the baseless claim that the women prophets may well have spoken ‘in the Spirit’ or been given a revelation (1 Cor 14:29,30), but only male prophets received the greater gift of interpreting prophecies (1 Cor 14:29).³⁸ However, the text cannot be fudged that way. The text becomes clear and consistent only when it is seen that Paul’s plea for silence from a number of wives³⁹ who were disrupting worship is not a call for silence

35 Paul’s admonition to the men at Ephesus to refrain from anger and argumentativeness (1 Tim 2:8) adds support to the proposal that it is mainly the male members of the Corinthian church that Paul is specifically admonishing about the wearing of veils.

36 The main point of contention has been the inconclusive question about whether ‘head’ means primarily the uppermost and hence the leading and authoritative part of the body, or the ‘source’ of the body, as Adam was the ‘source’ of Eve, and ever after women have been the ‘source’ of men (1 Cor 11:12). Complementarians have tended to place the weight on the former interpretation, egalitarians on the latter. Paul’s ability to make one word stand for more than one thing makes the question something of a non-issue.

37 The strong scholarly consensus is that 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 consists of a non-Pauline interpolation (a) because at first glance it appears to apply more widely than to the unruly worship practices in the Corinthian house churches, the subject of the rest of chapter 14, (b) because it appears to be inconsistent with Paul’s egalitarian views, and (c) because some manuscripts place the verses after verse 40, rather than after verse 33. These factors suggest that it started life as a marginal note that copyists have inserted in two different locations. Whether or not this is the case, the verses appear in all extant manuscripts of 1 Corinthians, and as such they form a constitutive part of the authoritative text. For helpful discussions of the issue see Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 245–49, and Ray R. Schulz, ‘Another look at the text of 1 Corinthians 14:33–35,’ *Lutheran Theological Journal* 32, no. 3 (December 1998), 128–31.

38 Köstenberger, *God’s Design*, 179, 180; Hensley, ‘Divine blessing and order,’ 49, 51–53.

39 Wives are meant, not women in general, as is clear from ‘their own husbands’ (*tous idious andras*) in the following verse, vs. 35 (see also 1 Cor 7:2, where husbands and wives are clearly in mind).

on the part of all women during worship. The wives whom Paul urges to take up their questions with their husbands at home (14:35) are by no means the same people as the female prophets whom Paul mentions at 1 Corinthians 11:5. Quite simply, Paul includes women among the ranks of the prophets, whose tasks were to build up⁴⁰ the church by clearly speaking the word of God, to instruct⁴¹ people in the gospel (vs. 19), and to lead them to repentance and faith (vss. 13–19,24,25).

Complementarians say that their case is confirmed by the weight Paul gives to the prohibition. It is observed in all the churches of the saints, it has the support of the law and contemporary culture, and it is based on a command of the Lord (vss. 34–37). But the gospels offer no command of the Lord prohibiting women from leading, teaching and prophesying during worship. Paul's repeated calls in 1 Corinthians for the believers to observe the practice of self-giving love (4:21; 8:1; 13:1–13; 14:1; 16:14, 24) make it far more likely that 'the command of the Lord' is the love commandment, the commandment supreme above all others (Matt 22:34–40). John Kleinig argues:

The appeal of Paul to such a full range of authorities discloses the gravity of the matter under discussion. If he were dealing with culturally inappropriate behaviour or disruptive chatter by women, he would have had no need to employ all these authorities. Indeed, its force would be totally disproportionate to the alleged offence, much like the use of a steamroller to squash a bull ant.⁴²

Paul's appeal to the weighty authorities is indeed required, but for a far weightier reason than simply to combat the disruptive conduct of certain women. In order that the worship life at Corinth be marked by edification and order, it needed a mighty injection of the greatest spiritual gift of all, love (1 Cor 13:13; 14:1), the gift that applies across the churches both then and now (14:33). The love command—clearly indicated also by the hymn to love in chapter 13 and the command to 'pursue love' that introduces all that follows in chapter 14—doesn't apply only to the conduct of the disruptive wives, but also to the full range of self-promoting displays of spiritual giftedness that Paul contends with throughout the chapter and were making a mockery of worship.

5. As opposed to the *Haustafeln*, which call on wives to submit to their husbands in the domestic realm (and husbands even more so to their wives), they are not called to do so in either of the two passages that have been drawn on to withhold ordination from women. Even though the verb 'to be subordinate' appears at 1 Corinthians 14:34 and the noun 'subordination' at 1 Timothy 2:11, it can well be argued, both at Corinth and in Ephesus, that those to whom they are asked to submit are those who are responsible for the good order and edification of worship. At Corinth Paul admonishes those who speak in tongues to be silent if there is no one to interpret (vs. 28); similarly those who prophesy ecstatically are called to silence until their utterances can be weighed by

40 Both the verb 'to build up' (*oikodomein*) and the noun 'building up' (*oikodomē*) appear three times in the chapter (vss. 3,4 [twice],5,17,26).

41 The verb is *katēcheein*, from which the verb 'to catechise' is derived. It implies thorough instruction in spiritual matters (Luke 1:4; Acts 18:25; 21:21, 24; Rom 2:18; 1 Cor 14:19; Gal 6:6).

42 Kleinig, 'Disciples but not teachers,' 54.

prophets with the gift of interpretation (vss. 29–33). The former are required to submit to the latter (vs. 32). Flowing directly from his injunctions regarding behaviour that repels unbelievers (vss. 22, 23), Paul then calls on the disruptive wives to be silent and subordinate and thereby stop bringing shame on the cause of the gospel (vss. 34, 35). If these two verses are interpreted simply as a blanket ban on women leading in worship, they don't mesh readily with Paul's local concerns in the chapter to this point, nor with the fact that women did in fact lead in worship at Corinth.

6. On an initial reading, Paul's advice to Timothy, the pastor of the church in Ephesus, appears unequivocal. He writes: 'I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to remain silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor' (1 Tim 2:11–14). Reading more widely, however, it becomes apparent that the letters to Timothy reveal Paul's deep concern about the inroads that false teachers were making into the sound teaching of the gospel in Ephesus (1 Tim 1:10,11). It is possible that the false teaching consisted of a fusion of the fledgling Christian faith and the cult of the Ephesian goddess Artemis (Acts 19:23–41). Some women were too easily swayed by the false teachings (2 Tim 3:6,7). For some the new teachings had led to pleasure seeking, the love of expensive clothes and fancy jewellery, and idle gossip (1 Tim 2:9–15; 4:7; 5:6,11–15; 2 Tim 3:6,7). Strict dietary regulations and even the prohibition of marriage were other features of the false teachings (1 Tim 4:3), possibly as a result of early Gnostic thinking.⁴³ These views were expounded harshly and aggressively,⁴⁴ and the men were becoming angry and argumentative (1 Tim 2:8; 6:4,5). Just as Eve received her instruction belatedly and second-hand and therefore was readily deceived, so also the women at Ephesus were easy targets for the charlatans who had insinuated themselves into the church, because for the most part first century women were not so well grounded in the Torah due to the constraints placed on them by tradition and custom. So Paul draws on the literal sequence of Adam and Eve's creation to make his point. And he calls the women—and the Ephesian church at large—back to a renewed appreciation of marriage and childbearing, and the exercise of quiet decorum and self-effacing modesty (1 Tim 2:9,10; see also 1 Pet 3:1–6) to make even clearer the demarcation between practitioners of the Artemis cult and the early Christian community. Women could pursue their studies in the Christian faith at the feet of a teacher, as Mary sat at Jesus' feet (Luke 10:39; see also Acts 22:3), but they should do so reverently and quietly (1 Tim 2:11,12),⁴⁵ awaiting the day when they

43 Many early Gnostics also taught that strict ascetic practices, such as virginity, were a mark of a superior spirituality. If so, Paul may well be countering the notion that salvation is best assured through virginity and an ascetic lifestyle—rather than through marriage and child-bearing—when he says that women 'will be saved through childbearing' (1 Tim 2:15).

44 This is apparent from the word that Paul uses when he prohibits a woman from 'exercising authority' over a man (vs. 12). The Greek verb (*authentain*) appears only this once in the New Testament and, based on extra-biblical usage, it is widely agreed to mean an aggressive and domineering exercise of authority over others, lording it over them, not the everyday exercise of rightful authority. Luther translates the verse, 'I do not permit a wife to be her husband's lord' (Luther Bible, 1545).

45 The word does not mean silence, but a respectful and deferential quietness. The word is not the same as the one employed at 1 Corinthians 14:34.

would be fully equipped to teach, and the time and setting allowed it. Paul's words are highly situation specific.

7. Inconsistent application of Paul's injunctions is another feature of complementarian scholarship. Eager to enforce Paul's words that appear to regulate women's involvement in worship, complementarians are more relaxed about his equally strong demands that Christian women avoid up-market clothing, top of the range jewellery, ostentatious hairdos, and that they practise good works (1 Tim 2:9, 10; see also 1 Pet 3:1–6). Parts of the church certainly have insisted on such marks of 'reverence for God' from time to time; some to the present day.⁴⁶ Another example of inconsistent application is the repeated reference to Paul's requirement that the bishop (*episkopos*, literally 'overseer') must be 'the husband of one wife' (1 Tim 3:2) as a further reason that women cannot be ordained, even though a few verses later Paul applies the same rule to deacons (vs 12), and Phoebe is both a woman and a deacon (Rom 16:1,2). The only consistent conclusion that can be drawn is that different regulations applied in different regions of the early church. It is totally inconsistent to argue that Phoebe must have been a different kind of deacon, in fact a deaconess. No, what was allowed in Rome and at Cenchreae was disallowed in Ephesus. A final example worth noting is complementarians' willingness to acknowledge that the church is duty bound to oppose slavery—despite Paul's fervent appeal to slaves to obey their masters and remain subordinate to them—while refusing to apply the same theological reflection to the alleged subordination of women in the bible.⁴⁷
 8. The complementarian default position is to sidestep or downplay the New Testament evidence that several women were engaged in ministries that were no different from those of men.⁴⁸ In his final greetings to the churches of Rome, Paul commends to them a certain Phoebe, whom he designates as a 'deacon of the church at Cenchreae' who has been a 'benefactor (*epistatis*) of many and of myself as well' (Rom 16:1,2). This is the only occurrence of the feminine noun, *epistatis*, in the New Testament; the word is usually translated as benefactor, or sometimes 'helper'.⁴⁹ However, the
- 46 Paul also says, 'she (the woman) will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty' (1 Tim 2:15). One attempt made by complementarians to avoid the apparent theological discrepancy between vs. 15 and Paul's clear teaching that salvation is by faith alone is to suggest that in 1 Timothy he is speaking of the birth of Christ, by whom people are saved. However, the Greek word '*teknogonia*' means 'childbirth', not 'the birth of the child' (see 1 Tim 5:14). It is also clear that women are meant, not the mother of our Lord, because of the plural verb, 'provided *they* continue...'. Another means of avoiding the verse's theological problem is by saying that faithful Christian women will be 'kept safe' during childbirth; if so, it certainly introduces a fascinating condition for ensuring a safe delivery. But see footnote 43 for a plausible background for the otherwise strange verse. For a complementarian's interpretation, see the short internet article by John Piper, 'How are women saved through childbearing? A careful study of 1 Timothy 2:15', <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-are-women-saved-through-childbearing>, accessed 5 November 2020. And for another take on the difficult verse, see Köstenberger, *God's Design*, 214–216.
- 47 See the discussion, above, and footnotes 29 and 30.
- 48 This tendency is evident, for example, in the Köstenbergers' resistance to giving full weight to titles such as deacon, prophet and apostle when applied to women, e.g. Phoebe, the daughters of Philip, and Junia (*God's Design*, 145–157).
- 49 The Greek word for 'helper' is *boēthos* (Heb. 13:6). It is not used to describe Phoebe.

verb from which *epistatis* comes, *epistanai*, means, among other things, 'to be in charge of a group as their leader or overseer' (see Rom 12:8), and includes those in charge of a church (1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 5:17). So, to say that Phoebe is nothing but a benefactor seriously dilutes the meaning of the word *epistatis*. Furthermore, when Paul applies the word 'deacon' to himself and other males, such as Tychicus (Eph 6:21), Epaphras (Col 1:7), and Timothy (1 Tim 4:6), translators tend to prefer the word 'minister' to 'deacon', for no other reason, apparently, than that they were men. But Phoebe's ministry as deacon of a specific church, Cenchreae, suggests she held a recognised leadership position in that community, leadership from which Paul says he himself had benefitted. It is likely that Phoebe was one of Paul's travelling companions not known so well in Rome, so he is appealing to Rome's churches to welcome her warmly and give her whatever she asks of them (Rom 16:2). The request may suggest that she was responsible for Paul's travel plans and for gathering the money and provisions that would have been needed for his further travels. Paul's high acclaim for Phoebe that heads the final chapter of Romans has led to the further suggestion that she served as the courier of the letter, which would have entailed learning and subsequently expounding its contents by means of clear teaching in the various Christian communities scattered throughout Rome.

Another way of downplaying the fact that Phoebe was a deacon presiding over a worshipping community is the suggestion that Phoebe was strictly speaking a deaconess, a person engaged in a ministry of service,⁵⁰ unlike the men whom Paul also describes as deacons, or ministers, including himself and Jesus (Rom 15:8; 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6; 6:4; Gal 2:17; Eph 3:7; 6:21; Phil 1:1; Col 1:7,23, 5; 4:7; 1 Thess 3:2; 1 Tim 4:6). But the word 'deaconess' does not appear in the New Testament. Far rather, the verb 'to serve', literally 'to deacon', is the very verb that Jesus chose to encapsulate his entire earthly ministry. 'Whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave (*doulos*) of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve (*diakonein*), and to give his life a ransom for many' (Mark 10:44,45).⁵¹ It is highly likely that Phoebe was the minister of a specific church, and proclaiming Jesus' redemptive ministry lay at the heart and centre of her ministry.

A range of creative attempts continue to be made to minimise the significance of the ministries of Mary Magdalene ('apostle to the apostles'),⁵² the hard-working Mary (Rom 16:6), and Euodia and Syntyche who, Paul wrote, 'struggled beside me⁵³ in the work of the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers (*synergoi*) whose names are in the book of life' (Phil 4:2,3). The word 'co-worker'

50 Köstenberger, *God's Design*, 151.

51 Apart from its central position in Mark's Gospel at 10:45, the verb that epitomises the core of Jesus' ministry, 'to serve', is applied to the angels who ministered to Jesus during his temptation in the wilderness (1:13) and otherwise only to women who, like the angels, ministered to Jesus (1:31; 15:41).

52 In the 13th century Thomas Aquinas described Mary Magdalene as 'the apostle to the apostles'. Recently, the liturgical celebration of Mary Magdalene in the Catholic church has been upgraded from a memorial to a feast, and her title has been changed to 'apostle'.

53 Literally, Paul says 'they were my fellow athletes'.

signifies total parity in mission and ministry, not a subordinate team member. Prisca (Priscilla) is also referred to as one of Paul's co-workers (Rom 16:3), alongside her husband Aquila, Priscilla seems to have played the major role in rounding out the theological formation of the early church leader Apollos (Acts 18:26) who is described as 'an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures' (Acts 18:24). He may have been the author of the letter to the Hebrews.⁵⁴ In all but two instances (Acts 18:3; 1 Cor 16:19)—when Aquila is mentioned first simply because Paul got to know him first—Priscilla is named first (Acts 18:2,24–28; 2 Tim 6:19), indicating that she was the leader in teaching others the faith, a task she fulfilled with clarity and precision.

9. Complementarians find it hard to accept that the woman Junia was an apostle of the New Testament church, despite her depiction, together with Andronicus,⁵⁵ as 'prominent among the apostles' (Rom 16:7). The chief argument that complementarians advance is simply that it is out of the question for a woman to be included among the apostles, and argue instead that Junia was 'well known' to the apostles.⁵⁶ But the bible is clear that the apostolic circle extended far beyond the original twelve (1 Cor 15:5–11). The problem that complementarians have with the biblical evidence is clear when it is considered that apostles head the list of early church ministers of the gospel (1 Cor 12:28,29; Eph 4:11). But it is beyond dispute that Paul numbers the woman Junia among those within the New Testament church who were gifted by the Spirit, poured out on all flesh at Pentecost, 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all...come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God' (Eph 4:12, 13).⁵⁷
10. Complementarians read the bible as a repository of proof texts that undergird irrefutable dogmatic propositions drawn up in advance. Their absolute certainty that their view alone is faithful to the scriptures leads them to ignore, downplay or misrepresent contrary exegetical opinions; it leads them to claim that those who

54 See Vic Pfitzner, *Hebrews*, ChiRho Commentary Series (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1979), 16, 17.

55 The Köstenbergers cannot conceive of Junia as an apostle in the full sense of the word. On the plausible assumption that Andronicus and Junia were husband and wife, they surmise, without biblical support, that she must have been 'a missionary wife' serving 'in cross-cultural ministry alongside her husband'. Her ministry would have been exclusively 'with other women' (*God's Design*, 155). Similarly, Douglas Moo writes that Paul applies to Junia the title 'apostle' in a 'looser' sense. She cannot have occupied an 'authoritative leadership position'. See *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 923.

56 The Greek preposition 'en' (i.e. 'in', or 'among') does not permit the translation, 'well known "to" the apostles'. As for Junia's gender, all the earliest extant manuscripts read 'Junia'. From the 13th century, however, NT manuscript editors and commentators started proposing that the person in question might be 'Junias', a man. However, the name is clearly Junia, transliterated into Greek from a Latin feminine proper noun. For a thorough account see Dennis J. Preato, 'Junia, a female apostle: an examination of the historical record,' *Priscilla Papers: The Academic Journal of CBE International*, 25 April 2019, <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/article/priscilla-papers-academic-journal/junia-female-apostle-examination-historical>, accessed 17 November 2020.

57 Both the early church theologian and bible translator, Origen (185–254 AD), and the Bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom (347–407 AD), affirmed the two matters that have been persistently disputed. Native Greek speakers, Origen and Chrysostom had no doubt that Junia was a woman, not a man called Junias, and that she was prominent (or distinguished) among the apostles.

disagree have been swayed by various manifestations of political correctness—feminist theology in particular—embarrassed by the bible’s counter-culturalism. Complementarian certainty gives its proponents carte blanche to call into question the commitment to the inspired and authoritative word of God of those who challenge their findings and leads to the unfounded charge that the teaching of mutually subordinate gender relationships results in the general breakdown of authority structures and moral conduct in family, church and society. As the final nail in their coffin, those who contest complementarianism’s understanding of the divine ordering of marriage and the pastoral office are said to have fundamentally failed to observe all that Jesus has commanded (Matt 28:20). However, by treating the texts as definitive statements about male-female relationships, without close attention to contextual and background matters, complementarian exegesis has the effect of falsifying what the Genesis texts actually say about gender relations, vilifying women as the more gullible and deceitful sex, and excluding women from roles in the church to which they feel called and for which they are well suited.

11. In the only New Testament texts where the kind of ministry undertaken by pastors today is reflected to some extent, they are invariably referred to with a generic plural noun: elders (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:1–4), pastors (Eph 4:11), and leaders (Heb 13:7,17). Their tasks include spiritual oversight of their people, carried out eagerly and humbly rather than for financial gain; and in all things they are to serve as examples to their flock. There is no requirement in these texts that elders, pastors or church leaders be male. That is a significant omission if the New Testament church had intended that they be male only.
12. The Lutheran Confessions teach that the ministry has to do with nothing but the propagation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments by duly called and ordained pastors, so that saving faith is created and sustained in people’s hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit (Augsburg Confession 5 and 14). Likewise, the three texts used in the LCA/NZ’s rite of ordination make no mention of gender but focus instead on the heart and soul of pastoral ministry: Christ’s command to make disciples of all nations by baptising and teaching (Matt 28:18–20), the absolution (John 20:21–23), and the administration of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:23–26). No set form is prescribed for the ordained ministry. The bible, the Lutheran Confessions, and the LCA/NZ’s rite of ordination do not mandate a male ministry. Continuing to inject a non-scriptural and non-confessional prohibition into the heart of the teaching of the office of the ministry runs counter to everything that matters for Lutherans.

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