

BROTHERS + SISTERS

GENDER, LEADERSHIP, AND MINISTRY AT NCC

EXPANDED VERSION



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1. SUMMARY

Because we at NCC believe that clarity is kindness, we want to be as clear, generous, thoughtful, and helpful in articulating how our understanding of gender shapes our practices. This conversation is more than policy. This is about how we see one another as brothers and sisters in Christ and how we ultimately reflect our Creator, Savior, and Lord.

Position Summary

At NCC, we hold to a generous complementarian position and aspire toward a posture of healthy and intentional mutuality. We succinctly summarize our position as: “equal *to*, different *from*, dependent *on*.” After a brief introduction and some important exegetical work, this summary will be more fully developed below.

Like many evangelical churches, we recognize that “a theological confession of complementarianism does not necessarily result in a uniform complementarian practice.”¹ We expect that some who call NCC home will see our practice as too conservative. Others will see it as too liberal. We ask for unity, support, and kindness as we seek to join God’s effort in building His church.

We want The North Canton Chapel to be a church where men and women thoughtfully reflect God’s image as we give mutual witness to His divine design. We hope this paper provides a theological vision for human flourishing that’s rooted in Scripture, informed by church history, and attentive to our context.

Church Staff, Boards, Gathering, and Groups

While many staff and leadership positions are open for women and men, we choose to reserve the roles of “pastor” and “elder” for men. Women and men serve alongside each other as deacons and members of our missions boards. Every role in the Sunday morning worship gathering is also open to both men and women except the task of preaching. Women and men are equally invited to baptize, host, pray, lead worship, and distribute the elements of communion, but the task of officiating communion is reserved for pastors.

We welcome men and women to lead equally in all group opportunities with the exception of gender-specific groups (men lead men-only groups, women lead women-only groups). Mixed-gender groups can be led by either a man *or* a woman, or both a man *and* a woman in co-leadership roles according to their gifts. We welcome women and men to lead and teach in mixed-group training environments (discipleship classes, membership classes, mission team training, etc.) including areas of biblical exposition, doctrine, and theology.

¹ *The Role of Women at The Village Church, condensed version.*

2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The discussion of gender roles—particularly that of women in ministry—is multifaceted and challenging for a variety of reasons. The scriptural passages which have bearing upon these issues are themselves complex, with nuanced biblical and cultural contexts that are layered and frequently disputed. Also, the convictions that each of us hold are shaped by church cultures, perspectives, traditions, and personal histories.

Because of this complexity, any conversation involving gender demands empathy, humility, and care. Sadly, women have often been sidelined in church contexts - extreme examples include toleration and coverup of abuse. However, the more common (and often more hidden) loss is experienced in the minimization of women's voices, roles, and the subtle disrespect of their viewpoints and contributions.

While the conclusions that NCC holds are important doctrinal matters, they are not dogma-level issues. Any discussion of these issues must be robed in humility with an intentional posture to hear one another well. We believe Christians are free to disagree on the finer points of application as long as we hold to the confession that men and women are equally valuable image bearers, intentionally designed with purpose and dignity, both necessary to faithfully engage the work to which Jesus has called us.

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At NCC, we want our posture to resemble that of New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg:

All of us who speak and write on gender roles would do well to begin “I could be wrong” and end every address with the caveats, “I respect the right of fellow evangelicals and evangelical churches to come to different conclusions, and I will cooperate with them rather than combat them for the larger cause of Christ and his kingdom, which so desperately needs such unity.”²

It's our hope that such tenderness, thoughtfulness, kindness, and genuine humanity are reflected in our doctrine, the practice of our doctrine, and the tone of this paper. We want to be as generous as scripture will allow us to be, submitting ourselves to God's good design and ultimately to His written Word.

² Craig Blomberg, “Women in Ministry: A Complementarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2005), 123.

3. SCRIPTURE AND STUDY

At NCC, we want to maintain a high view of scripture, commonly called “verbal plenary inspiration.” We believe that both Old and New Testaments are the inspired revelation of God, given for our benefit as our primary authority. As an expression of that commitment, we want our understanding of gender—like all matters of life, faith, and doctrine—to be founded on how we understand the Word of God.

What follows is an abbreviated exegetical treatment (explanation, analysis, and application) of several biblical texts. While these scriptures are by no means exhaustive, they form a foundational understanding of gender as we are presented with in God’s word. The principles that follow are based on what we see in these scriptures.

We chose to shape the comments following each of these texts along similar lines, asking:

- What is this text saying?
- What does this text mean?
- What’s at stake in this text?
- How might God want us to apply this at NCC?
- Does our practice at NCC naturally flow from a fair and natural reading of this text?

It’s our hope that a thorough examination of the biblical text will lead us to principles and practices that honestly, fairly, generously, and thoughtfully reflect God’s heart for His church. Scripture citations and quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

GENESIS 1–2: GOD’S GOOD DESIGN

The Bible’s creation account is a rich and proper starting point for our understanding of gender. Here we see God creating “male and female” as two distinct genders (Gen. 1:27). Because it is a direct expression of God’s creation, gender should be seen not merely as a social construct but as designed by God and rooted in individual creation, each gender being equal in worth as bearing God’s image and being made after His likeness (Gen. 1:26).

Genesis 2 offers us a more expansive view of the creation account. Several details are worth mentioning. Noticeably, we see Adam created first (Gen. 2:7). While Genesis 1 gives us only a high-level picture of creation, Genesis 2 seems to suggest an indeterminate period of

time where Adam existed prior to Eve. It is worth noting that here, prior to the fall, Adam is given distinct responsibility over certain aspects of creation. This responsibility is more fully developed when we see Adam given both the duty “to work [the garden] and keep it” (Gen. 2:15) as well as the morally charged command to “not eat” from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen.

2:17). That these responsibilities are given to Adam prior to Eve’s creation and prior to the fall hint that God’s design for these two genders is somehow distinct from each other. This distinction will soon come into fuller focus after Eve’s creation.³

“Eve does not serve Adam’s purposes, nor is she merely an extension of his humanity. Rather, she is her own person with her own identity—an identity which God calls ‘very good.’”

Eve’s creation is equally crucial to our understanding of gender. Something is missing in Adam’s singularity. Against God’s overwhelming pronouncements at the goodness of His creation, the language jarringly jumps and suddenly shifts: “It is *not good* that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gen. 2:18, emphasis added). In response, God creates Eve out of Adam’s rib—his side. The Hebrew language and the visual imagery are both vitally important. The language suggests a posture of *deep mutuality*. The word “helper” should not be misconstrued to imply “less than,” “subservient to,” or diminution in any way. Eve does not serve Adam’s purposes, nor is she merely an extension of his humanity. Rather, she is her own person with her own identity—an identity which God calls “very good” (Gen. 1:31).

Bible commentator Matthew Henry beautifully and tenderly summarizes when he writes, “The woman was *made of a rib out of the side of Adam*; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his

³ The creation mandate given in Gen. 1:28 (“Be fruitful ... multiply ... fill the earth ... subdue”) is given to *both* Adam and Eve, indicating that each plays an important and essential role in God’s design.

heart to be beloved.”⁴ Henry’s observations should not be dismissed as either merely quaint or sentimental. It is God’s intention that the two genders He created serve alongside each other as equally worthy but functionally distinct.

Eve’s creation is depicted as God’s work to make humanity more complete. Importantly, Adam and Eve’s relationship is *not* primarily sexual or even initially marital (although these soon follow). Eve is designed as a partner who, together with Adam, more fully shows God’s design for humanity. The Hebrew expression in 1:18 and 1:20 translated “helper fit” is *keneg-doe* (“the same kind of different”), suggesting that Eve gives Adam something he can neither have with any other work of God’s creation nor enjoy by himself. Whatever else humanity will become in the biblical narrative, these first few scenes show us that Adam and Eve mutually give witness to each other as complementary expressions of God’s likeness.

GENESIS 3; ROMANS 5: CONSEQUENCES

Sin enters in Genesis 3 as a disruption to the goodness of creation. The serpent addresses and appeals to Eve as she is deceived first. This fact (one that Paul resurfaces in 1 Tim. 2:14) does not imply that Eve is necessarily more gullible (the context implies that Adam was present) or that women are affected by Eve’s gullibility and therefore more susceptible to spiritual deception. That interpretation irresponsibly pushes the text beyond its intention and opens the door for denigration and abuse.

On the heels of Eve’s sin, Adam soon follows. The result is swift: mutually shared shame. As an immediate result, God reenters the scene and appears to *both* Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:8). Noticeably, however, God calls out to Adam, not Eve, subtly suggesting that although Eve was the first to sin, Adam is in some way more culpable than Eve. God then pronounces the punishments: for Eve, pain in childbearing along with a conflictual relationship with her *keneg-doe*; for Adam, working in frustration in a perpetually unfulfilling, “cursed” environment. Genesis 3 establishes a paradigm: While Adam and Eve are mutually affected by sin, each bears a different responsibility and different consequences. There is also a representative element to Adam and Eve’s relationship in view: Adam somehow stands as a representative for Eve and, in fact, for all humanity.

As we look to the New Testament, we see Paul extending this paradigm of representation in Romans 5, where Paul seeks to explain Christ and His work of representative righteousness by comparing him to Adam as a literary foil: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through

⁴ Matthew Henry, commentary on Genesis 2:22.

sin, and so death spread to all men...” (Rom. 5:12). Paul continues and reemphasizes, “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men” (Rom. 5:18). Paul’s point is that just as Adam was our representative in sin (therefore cascading his sin to all who’d follow him in humanity), Christ is our representative in righteousness (therefore opening the door for anyone who would come in faith). Notably, despite being the first to taste the fruit and the first to fall into sin (Gen. 3:6), Eve is not mentioned in Romans 5—only Adam. Once again, as in Genesis 3, we see Adam as serving as representative for both Eve specifically and humankind generally.⁵ Paul applies this same concept specifically to marriage in Ephesians 5:23, where he teaches that a husband bears responsibility for his wife—in some way—that a wife does not bear for her husband.

Importantly: As individuals, men and women still answer for their own individual sin. What’s in view in Genesis 3, Romans 5, and Ephesians 5 is the interplay between genders in marriage and the shape of God’s design, which mirrors a deeper theological truth: God’s relationship with His creation is best understood by the complementary relationship between men and women.

“God’s relationship with His creation is best understood by the complementary relationship between men and women.”

THE GOSPELS: MUTUAL WITNESSES

Throughout the Gospels we find stories of women who were front and center in the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. In a culture in which devout Pharisees thanked God that they had not been made women⁶ the glimpses we get from these mentions in the text should jump off the page to us.

In the story of Jesus’ birth, we obviously encounter Mary and Elizabeth having vital parts to play as the mothers of Jesus and John the Baptist, respectively. Later, when Mary and Joseph present the infant Christ at the temple, we are introduced to a prophetess named Anna. Luke 2:37–38 notes of Anna, “She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.”

⁵ The fuller, richer word *imputed* comes into view here: Just as Adam’s sin was imputed to humanity, Christ’s righteousness is imputed to those who come in faith.

⁶ Tosefta Berakhot 6:18.

Anna is not the first “prophetess” (Luke 2:36) we find in Scripture. Miriam, the sister of Aaron, is referred to as a prophetess in Exodus 15:20. Deborah, perhaps better known as a judge over Israel, is described as a prophetess in Judges 4:4. In 2 Kings 22:14, after Josiah has found the lost Book of the Law, he sends Hilkiah the priest and others to inquire of the Lord for him, and these men go and consult a prophetess named Huldah, who gives them the word from the Lord in 2 Kings 22:16–20.

Women also quietly played a crucial role in the day-to-day ministry of Jesus and His disciples. Luke 8:1–3 gives us this intriguing short description:

Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

We know frustratingly little about women like Joanna and Susanna, but the fact that Luke mentions them as traveling with Jesus and His disciples, providing for them out of their means, is significant. Women were welcomed in Jesus’ inner circle and vital to His ministry.

The well-known story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38–42 also gives us a small glimpse of this fact. As Jesus comes to stay in their home, Martha fills the culturally expected role of bustling about to provide a hospitable welcome for the famous rabbi, whereas Mary is welcomed and affirmed in her decision to simply sit at His feet in the posture of a learner and disciple. This posture is the exact thing Paul advocates for and encourages the early church to promote and make sure happens in 1 Timothy 2:12.

Any discussion of this topic would be inadequate if it did not mention the encounter of Mary Magdalene with the risen Christ in John 20:11–18. After Jesus’ resurrection, Mary lingers behind at the empty tomb, confused and distraught over what has happened to His body. He appears to her personally, calls her by name, and gives her the incredible task of being the first witness to the resurrection:

Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her. (John 20:17–18)

In the present day, the significance of Jesus entrusting this task to Mary is sometimes lost on us. Women were not culturally recognized as reliable witnesses, and yet Jesus entrusts the message of His bodily resurrection to one female witness.

Given the broad scope of the Gospel accounts, we can safely conclude that God intends that women should be not simply bystanders of the Gospel but witnesses to and fellow proclaimers of its message.

ROMANS 16: PART OF THE FAMILY

Romans 16 gives us a fascinating look into the partnership of men and women within the first-century Roman church as Paul addresses his spiritual brothers and sisters by name, specifically commending many of them for their service and faithfulness. At the beginning of this chapter, Paul introduces Phoebe, the bearer of the letter: “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well” (vv. 1–2).

Phoebe is described as “our sister” and “a servant of the church.” These are not insignificant descriptions. Specifically, the word translated in the ESV as “servant” is the Greek word *diakonos*, which has a range of usages. While this point is frequently disputed, it is very likely that Phoebe held an official role as a deacon. Paul often uses this word to refer to those in the official role of deacon and fellow “ministers” of the gospel. In Philippians 1:1, Paul uses the word *doulos* (“servant,” “slave”) to describe himself and Timothy, then addresses the letter to “all the saints ... with the overseers and deacons (*diakonos*).” There is precedent from the church fathers to consider this a reference to the office of deacon, not simply a description of a role of service. As Belleville summarizes,

Origen (third century) states that “this text [Rom. 16:1] teaches with the authority of the apostle that even women are instituted deacons in the church” (*Epistle to the Romans* 10.17). John Chrysostom (fourth century) notes that Paul “added her rank by calling her a deacon [*diakonon*]” (*Hom. Rom.* 30 [on Rom. 16:1]).⁷

In addition to referring to her as a *diakonos*, the fact that Paul has sent Phoebe as the bearer of this theologically weighty letter has significant implications. As New Testament scholar Craig S. Keener points out, “Paul no doubt emphasizes Phoebe’s spiritual qualifications for two reasons: Jewish and Greco-Roman

⁷ Linda L. Belleville, “Women in Ministry: An Egalitarian Perspective,” in *Two Views*, 61.

circles did not usually have high regard for women's religious wisdom; and she will need to minister to them, explaining to them by word of mouth anything in Paul's letter that the hearers would not understand."⁸ Phoebe has, against cultural expectations at the time, been entrusted with the book of Romans, and there is very good reason to expect that as Paul's representative, she will be speaking on his behalf to the gathered listeners.

"Ministry in the early church was never confined to men; women engaged in ministries just as important as those of men."

Note that Phoebe is also described as Paul's "patron." This indicates that she was a woman of significant financial means and had supported Paul's ministry and others' out of her own resources, similarly to how the women in Luke 8:1–3 supported Jesus' ministry. Given Paul's description of Phoebe as a deacon and personal benefactor, it's safe to conclude that she played a significant part in the ministry at Cenchrea.

As we continue to read through Romans 16, we encounter multiple women in various leadership roles within the church as Paul openly acknowledges and honors the contributions women have made in service of the gospel. In 16:3, Priscilla ("Prisca") is listed alongside her husband Aquilla as one of those who had "risked their necks" (v. 4) for Paul's life—and, significantly, she is listed first. In 16:6, we find Mary, "who has worked hard for you." In 16:7, we discover Andronicus and Junia, "my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me." The translation of this verse is the subject of much debate, but the text seems to indicate that Junia was a woman of significant role. One thing that rings clear in this chapter is that, in the words of New Testament scholar Douglas Moo, "ministry in the early church was never confined to men; these greetings and other similar passages show that women engaged in ministries and work just as important as those of men."⁹

1ST CORINTHIANS 11: GENDER AND HONOR

In some ways, 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 are the toughest sections in the NT regarding gender. Paul's words about head coverings (11:2–5) and hair length (11:6–16) and his exhortation that women "keep silent" in the gathered church (14:34–35) seem alien to twenty-first-century Western culture. Helpfully, Ciampa and

⁸ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 446.

⁹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 927.

Rosner remind us that “these verses have created interpretive difficulties since they were first penned.”¹⁰ How do we reconcile these very difficult passages and concepts to our modern world?

When considering both of these passages, it’s crucial to understand the immediate cultural context and provenance of first-century Corinth. It seems likely that some members of the Corinthian church may have been seeking to blur the lines of gender as an expression of their new identity in Christ.¹¹ Against that backdrop, Paul writes to specifically correct their practice.

Paul’s corrective is twofold. His first concern, and the focus of chapter 11, is the maintenance of order in the context of gathered worship. Notably, the phrase “when you come together” is used repeatedly in this section, suggesting that Paul is speaking specifically about worship gatherings. He begins his teaching by appealing to the order implicit in gender roles in marriage, noting that a “man” (helpfully translated specifically as “husband” in the ESV) is the head of “woman” (“wife”). Setting the language in the context of marital relationships is important, as it will resurface in chapter 14. The mention of a head covering speaks of a woman’s marital status, thus confirming that Paul is specifically talking about those who are married, though he may also have the unmarried in view.

The word “head” (referring both to the husband and to Christ) is complicated, as the Greek word itself has several meanings. We shouldn’t see Paul’s use of “head” as meaning “more important,” “source,” or authoritative in any hierarchical sense but rather “that which is representative by virtue of its prominence.”¹² This interpretation is in keeping with the cultural context of Corinth, where men (more specifically, husbands) would have likely been seen as more prominent than women (more specifically, their wives). As The Village Church, summarizing a point by Ciampa and Rosner, puts it, “To Paul’s mind, everyone (except God) has a head, and it’s important to understand who your head is.”¹³

With the principle of order under his feet, Paul then pushes into his second concern: insisting that properly expressing gender is important for the healthy expression of church. This expression is rooted in creation but, at least to some extent, contextualized by cultural norms and expectations. Most narrowly, Paul concerns himself with the Corinthians’ attire—and, still more narrowly, head coverings. For both Paul and

¹⁰ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 718.

¹¹ Much of modern androgyny and gender fluidity would have been at home in first-century Corinth. As can hardly be missed in Paul’s letters, the Corinthians were known for taking liberty along sexual lines.

¹² A. C. Perriman, “The Head of a Woman: The Meaning of κεφαλή in 1 Cor. 11:3,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 45:602–22, quoted in David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 516. Helpfully, Garland further suggests that Paul’s purpose is “not to write a theology of gender but to correct an unbefitting practice in worship that will tarnish the church’s reputation” (514).

¹³ “Role of Women,” 35.

the Corinthians, head coverings were a sign that a woman was married and, as such, belonged to her husband. While this imagery seems initially mired in first-century context, the principle holds true: Just as with Adam and Eve, it is in their belonging to each other that husbands and wives reveal God's design for gender.

To strengthen both of his concerns, Paul reaches back to God's design for mutuality seen in creation: "In the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is born of woman. And all things are from God" (11:11–12). Paul is insistent that gender is neither a fluid concept nor a cultural construct nor merely a matter of physiology. Rather, the complementary aspects of human gender are necessary reflections of God's design for human flourishing.

"The church of Christ is healthy when both genders are actively, humbly, and thoughtfully serving and supporting each other as God designed."

William Mounce observes that Paul's inclusion of women praying and prophesying (11:5) "secures a vocal role for women in the public worship service."¹⁴ It's best to see Paul's concern being not *whether* women will take part in worship gatherings through public prayers and prophecy but *how*. Paul's principle then begins to emerge: The church of Christ is healthy when both genders are actively, humbly, and thoughtfully serving and supporting each other as God designed. The writers of "The Role of Women at The Village Church," offer the following summary: "Gender distinction and mutuality, as affirmed in this passage, should not lead to a ministry practice of domination or manipulation but a practice that nurtures mutual respect and honor between both sexes."¹⁵

Paul's hope, in summary, is fourfold:

1. that the Corinthian church will begin to see gender not as a social construct determined by the ambiguity of their immediate culture but as part of God's design
2. that the Corinthian church will affirm that when God's design for gender is faithfully and thoughtfully expressed, worship is more ordered and peaceful
3. that the Corinthian church will commit to living out their calling to mutual interdependence in their expression of gender
4. that the Corinthian church will practice and express gender in ways that are both culturally appropriate and in keeping with God's design

¹⁴ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary 46 (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2000), 118.

¹⁵ "Role of Women," 37.

1ST CORINTHIANS 14: GENDER IN WORSHIP

It's important that we see 1 Corinthians 14 as a continuation—and in some senses an extension—of Paul's thoughts in chapter 11. After encouraging the Corinthians toward an expression of worship characterized by appropriate and mutually beneficial diversity (chap. 12), implementing all things in love (chap. 13), Paul narrows his focus again, returning to considerations for orderly worship. He asks an important question: If the gospel matters most when the church "come[s] together" (14:26), what might impede its clear proclamation? He gives three answers: tongues without interpretation (14:28), overlapping speech/prophecy (14:30–31), and women who are for whatever reason seeking to disrupt (14:34–35). God is a God of order and peace, so worship ought to be characterized by order and peace.

As we move through Paul's flow of thought, verse 34 jumps out: "The women should keep silent in the churches." The obvious question follows: Does Paul *really* mean that women are supposed to be completely silent in the gathering of the local church?

This idea raises at least two problems. First, it seems like an unnecessary, even dehumanizing prohibition, casting Paul in a decidedly misogynistic light. Secondly, it contradicts Paul's earlier words about women participating in the public prayers and prophetic words (11:5). Why would Paul give direction for something he later prohibits? How should we see Paul's words here?

The answer lies in paying close attention to the immediate context, in which Paul's prohibition centers on "the women" (14:34). We have to ask: Who exactly are "the women" he is talking about? Since the preceding prohibitions (tongues without interpretation in verse 28 and overlapping speech in verses 34–35) are aimed at particular, specific problems currently within the Corinthian church, it is best to read Paul's prohibition as similarly focused. In other words, Paul is seeking to correct a specific, known problem: women in the Corinthian context who were constantly disrupting the regular teaching of God's Word in some way.

Given that perspective, we can safely conclude that Paul isn't writing to prohibit *all* women *everywhere* from speaking. Instead, the most natural reading seems to be that Paul is prohibiting *particular* women from speaking in a *particular way*—a way that is disruptive—hence his correction, "Let them ask their husbands at home" (14:35), where dialogical conversation would be more appropriate, more productive, and ultimately more helpful for women seeking to learn the teachings of Jesus. In this way, Paul's words should be seen less like a dehumanizing injunction and more like helpful enablement consistent with his promotive language in 1 Timothy to "let a woman learn" (2:11; see below).

"God wants His church to function for the mutual flourishing of both men and women."

God wants His church to intentionally function for the mutual flourishing of both men and women. For the Corinthians, who were dealing with at least three major disruptions in that design, Paul offers the closing words of guidance that “all things should be done decently and in order” (14:40).

Applying the Corinthian texts is difficult owing partly to the vast cultural gap between first-century Greco-Roman culture and twenty-first-century American ecclesial expression. Paul’s words and teaching seem almost hopelessly trapped in first-century imagery. Some helpful principles, however, emerge upon thoughtful reflection. In summary, we can note at least these:

1. God wants men and women to learn the gospel in a helpful worship setting.
2. To that end, God designs that the worship gathering be orderly.
3. Seeking orderly worship “requires contextual and culturally-specific application.”¹⁶
4. Seeking order in worship applies to how we express our gender.
5. When gender is expressed in an orderly way, God’s church flourishes.
6. The church should cultivate healthy gender expression as a proactive measure that prevents disorder in the worship gathering.

1ST TIMOTHY 2: PERMISSION AND LIMITATION

In approaching this much-disputed passage on gender roles in the church, we want to make three initial acknowledgements.

First, in a sense, it’s refreshing to know that the current cultural conversation about gender roles in the American church is not new. Paul is very concerned with making sure God’s design for mutual support is expressed even in the early stages of the church’s development.

Secondly, we do well to remember that Paul’s words in this section are not primarily prohibitive. He is not primarily speaking of what women *cannot* do. Rather, his words are couched in permissive language (“Let...”). The main thrust of his thinking is an exhortation to the church in Ephesus for what *should* happen. Recognizing Paul’s intention to maintain the tone of mutuality will guide us to not only a healthy theology of gender but also a proper expression of that belief.

¹⁶ Ibid., 42.

Thirdly, of the five possible ways to interpret this passage, only one compromises a high view of Scripture and must therefore be rejected. Of the other major possible interpretations, we recognize that we must hold our particular conviction firmly but gently, not disparaging those who reach a different conclusion.

Five main interpretations of this difficult passage are commonly understood:

Option 1: *Paul is only referring to his opinion, not God's.* This interpretation puts too much weight on Paul's forward use of "I," as if to read whatever follows only as his personal thoughts, not as inspired Scripture. If this were the case, Paul's words would not be binding to those outside of his initially intended audience. This view essentially says that since the limitation that follows is merely Paul's opinion, we're free to disagree.

While perhaps initially attractive to some, such an interpretation ultimately compromises a high view of the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture. Paul frequently uses the first-person pronoun when writing, which Protestant hermeneutics consistently takes as authoritative, equal to God's special revelation. Because this particular interpretation needlessly and dangerously separates Paul's opinion from God's word, it must be rejected.

Option 2: *Paul is forbidding something, but what he's forbidding is bound to first-century Ephesus and shouldn't be carried over to modern ecclesiology.* This interpretation sees culture as a progressive, forward-moving force and perhaps oversimplifies the application of the text by saying, "That was then; this is now. We've certainly progressed beyond the first century. It would be ludicrous to be bound by this!"

While there are some commands that are naturally and logically bound to the immediate New Testament context (e.g., "Greet one another with a holy kiss"), before dubbing a portion of Scripture inapplicable, we should insist that the burden of proof be very high and very obvious. Further, because Paul roots his command in the transcultural realities of creation and the fall ("For Adam was formed first, then Eve" [2:13]), the limitation he gives in verse 12 must be seen as transcultural. Put another way: The only way for a culture to be exempt from the limitation in verse 12 is for that culture to be unaffected by the realities of verses 13 and 14. And there is no such culture.

Option 3: *Paul is forbidding women from teaching any spiritual/doctrinal content to men.* Taken by some scholars, this much more restrictive view significantly and unnecessarily undercuts the abilities, giftings, and calling that women have. Further, this interpretation goes against much of the New Testament witness. (See the commentary above.) Whether overtly or in an implied way, women often held leadership positions in the local church, even participating in the theological correction of Apollos (Acts 18:26; Priscilla was clearly

teaching spiritual content to men!). Given the New Testament witness, it is very unlikely that Paul is issuing a wholesale gag order on the possibility of women teaching or imparting spiritual truth in mixed-gendered settings.

Option 4: *Paul is only forbidding certain women from teaching.* This view might be initially attractive. The thinking goes like this: “Paul has just named the problems with *some* women in the Ephesian church (v. 9). *Those* are the kinds of women that Paul prohibits teaching or exercising authority. So as long as they’re not characterized by the worldly ways of v. 9, women are permitted to teach / exercise authority.”

While possible, this interpretation is linguistically unlikely, because even beneath the initial exegetical scope, it faces a major interpretive challenge: Paul roots his flow of thought in creation and the fall—both deeply transcultural realities.

Option 5: *Paul isn’t limiting women from all teaching, just a certain kind of teaching.* God has given women teaching gifts that are to be used for His glory. Clearly, women possess the ability to correct men in areas of theology (Acts 18:26). Further, while not necessarily in view here, it doesn’t seem likely that the spiritual gift of the pastor-teacher is limited only to men. But Paul is limiting *something* here. Most likely, he is not limiting women from teaching in general, but he is reserving the task of *authoritative teaching in the specific context of the gathering of the local church* for men. (In the context of NCC and many other churches, it’s best to equate “authoritative teaching” with preaching.)

In summary, it’s best to make the following conclusions from 1 Timothy 2:12:

- Paul’s *not* limiting women from *teaching* in the church.
- He’s *not* limiting women from *leading* in church.
- He’s *not* limiting women from *imparting spiritual truth* for the growth of the church.
- He’s *not* saying that women aren’t given pastoral gifts for the benefit of the church.
- He’s *not* even saying women can’t preach in certain contexts, like a conference or gathering.
- It seems best to see Paul’s intention as setting one limitation: He reserves the task of authoritative teaching (preaching) in the context of the gathered, local church to men.
- In our immediate cultural context, because we hold the office of elder—whether vocational (i.e., pastors) or nonvocational—to include the possibility of authoritative teaching, we also reserve the office of elder for men.

1ST TIMOTHY 3: A MUTUALLY-SUPPORTED CHURCH

In 1 Timothy 3, we find Paul's instructions on qualifications for two offices within the church: first elders (overseers) and then deacons. There are similarities between the qualifications for both but also some significant differences.

In verse 2, the qualifications for elders state that they must be "the husband of one wife," which carries the sense of being a "one-woman man." In other words, elders must be men of faithfulness and integrity. No instructions are given regarding the character of their wives. Later, however, in verse 11, in the midst of qualifications for deacons, the ESV translates the instruction this way: "Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things."

This verse is often the most challenging objection to having female deacons in the church. However, much of the confusion seems to stem from a translation choice. The phrase "Their wives" can also be translated "Women likewise," which would make more sense in the flow of the chapter. The most striking detail in favor of translating the phrase "Women likewise" is the absence of a possessive pronoun in the Greek text. In short: There is no "their" there. If Paul wanted to address deacons' wives, he could've used the possessive pronoun, but he doesn't. This grammatical absence severs the relationship between the deacons addressed in verses 8–10 and those in verse 11. Therefore, it's best to see Paul's flow of thought as addressing deacons in general, pulling off in verse 11 to give a specific comment on female deacons, then resuming his flow of thought in verse 12.

Further, Tom Schreiner notes,

The word "too" (CSB) or "likewise" (ESV)—*hosautōs*—in 1 Timothy 3:11 is most naturally interpreted as continuing the list of those who serve as deacons, especially since Paul returns to male deacons in verse 12. A sudden reference to wives is of course possible, but in this chapter it seems Paul is referring to offices and conduct in church (cf. 1 Tim 3:15).¹⁷

Practically speaking, it's likely that Paul means that all deacons, regardless of gender, should be qualified according to the character traits he lists in verses 8–13. It's likely that Paul intends that special attention be given to female deacons, probably given cultural realities of the Ephesian church.

As Blomberg points out, we should

¹⁷ Thomas Schreiner, "Does the Bible Support Female Deacons? Yes," The Gospel Coalition, February 19, 2019, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/bible-support-female-deacons-yes/>.

note the two most obvious distinctions between the two groups of leaders: (1) Only in his instructions for elders must candidates be “able to teach” (v. 2), and (2) Only in his instructions for deacons do women appear (v. 11). It is true that the ordinary word “women” (from *gynē*) could mean the deacons’ “wives,” but why would Paul be concerned about the character of deacons’ wives and not insist on similar qualifications for overseers’ wives? But if Paul envisioned only male overseers, while wanting men and women alike to share in the diaconate ..., then the distinction makes perfect sense.¹⁸

Blomberg’s point is strengthened when we understand the deep distinction between elders/pastors/overseers and deacons. Tom Schreiner provides additional insight and allows us to safely arrive at a clear and biblically-based conclusion:

We must recognize ... that deacons occupy a different position from elders/pastors/overseers. The latter is *one* office ... in which *two* qualities are required that are not required of deacons. First, elders must have an ability to teach biblical truth and correct deviant teaching (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9). Second, they must have gifts of leadership (1 Tim. 3:4–5; 5:17; Titus 1:7). And remarkably, teaching and exercising authority over men is the very thing disallowed for women in 1 Timothy 2:12. Women therefore may serve as deacons because the diaconal office is one of serving, not leading. Deacons don’t teach and exercise authority, but rather help in the church’s ministry.¹⁹

We fully agree with Schreiner and hold that a fair reading of 1st Timothy 3, instead of being an objection to female deacons, actually offers a very strong argument in favor of female deacons in the first-century church. From here, we conclude that a vision for a mutually supportive diaconate bodes best for a healthy and interdependent church.

¹⁸ Blomberg, “Complementarian Perspective,” 169–70.

¹⁹ Schreiner, “Does the Bible Support”

4. PRINCIPLES

“EQUAL TO EACH OTHER IN WORTH”

While this truth may seem obvious and in need of no further elaboration based on the scriptural text, equality is often affirmed in position but subtly denied in practice. More than anywhere else in society, the church should affirm that men and women stand equally valued before our Creator. Therefore, especially within the church, those of the opposite sex must never be treated as objects to be used, punchlines of jokes, or impediments to our flourishing.²⁰

Men and women stand before our Lord as brothers and sisters in the family of God, equally in need of grace, equally valued, co-recipients of spiritual gifts for the edification of the body of Christ.²¹ These gifts are distributed by the Holy Spirit as the Father wills and are not limited to one gender or the other. Men, for instance, may be entrusted with spiritual gifts such as mercy or encouragement. We need to be clear: Regardless of cultural stereotypes, these gifts are not inherently “feminine” in nature. Women likewise may be entrusted with teaching, preaching, and leadership gifts, and likewise, we should not see these gifts as inherently “masculine.” God places us individually with unique gifting and abilities so that we can collectively grow in Christ and build one another up in love (Eph. 4:11–16). To devalue one another’s gifting and contribution on the basis of gender not only dehumanizes fellow believers but also spiritually impoverishes the church.

“More than anywhere else in society, the church should affirm that men and women stand equally valued before our Creator.”

²⁰ Few have expressed this better than Dorothy L. Sayers in her provocatively titled essay “The Human-not-Quite-Human”: “Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man—there never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronized; who never made arch jokes about them, never treated them either as “The women, God help us!” or “The ladies, God bless them!”; who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no axe to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unself-conscious. There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole Gospel that borrows its pungency from female perversity; nobody could possibly guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything “funny” about woman’s nature.”

²¹ “This means that there is no distinction between men and women with respect to the benefits of salvation. According to God’s grace, they share equally in the grace of regeneration, justification, sanctification, indwelling, and every other benefit purchased for us through Christ. There are no second-class citizens in the kingdom of God.” (Denny Burk, “The Roles of Men and Women,” The Gospel Coalition, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-roles-of-men-and-women/>)

“DIFFERENT FROM EACH OTHER BY DESIGN”

Based on patterns starting from Eden²² and teaching in the New Testament epistles,²³ we affirm that there is a difference in role entrusted to men with the leadership of and accountability for the family and the local church. In the home, husbands are called to a role of servant leadership that emulates the loving heart of Christ for His church, and wives are to willingly choose to place themselves under their husband’s leadership as an act of faith not in their husbands but, ultimately, in God. In the church, while we stand equal before God in dignity and value, there are some governing and teaching roles specifically restricted to qualified, godly men. These differences in role are based on God’s design for His creation and plan for redemption and are not based on differences of inherent value, intellectual ability, emotional strength, or other often referenced and incorrect reasonings.

We want to strongly emphasize that the biblical vision for leadership is never about power, and the biblical vision for submission is never about loss of dignity. All across Scripture, leadership has more to do with Christ-centered character than with power, position, or authority.²⁴ The difference in design that we are speaking of does not mean that women should be made voiceless, subservient, or in any way less-than in a family or in a church context. We believe that it is God’s intention that these structures exist to promote mutual human flourishing, never to excuse or perpetuate abuse and un-health.

“The biblical vision for leadership is never about power, and the biblical vision for submission is never about loss of dignity.”

Further, as a church, we strive to resist the tendency to operate from cultural stereotypes or false oversimplifications when discussing this topic. It is disrespectful to one another as uniquely designed image-bearers—each with different histories, giftings, and abilities—to wash across this topic with broad-brush generalizations about “what women are usually like,” “how men think,” etc.

Even Paul, in the midst of his perhaps most well-known passage dealing with husbands and wives, says in Ephesians 5:32, “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” We stand with Paul in saying: *This mystery is profound*. We see this pattern in Scripture and want simply to submit ourselves to the teaching we find in the text. On some level, it is a *mystery*, and it *refers to Christ and the church*. Gender deeply pertains to us, but it is never centered on us.

²² See earlier discussion of Genesis 1–2.

²³ See Eph. 5:21–33; Col. 3:18–19; Titus 2:3–5; 1 Peter 3:1–7; Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 11:2–16; Tim. 2:11–15.

²⁴ Note the posture of Jesus in Philipians 2:1–11.

“DEPENDENT ON EACH OTHER FOR THE GOSPEL”

God has deliberately designed gender in such a way that men and women are incomplete without each other. The plan of God is beautifully carried forward through the pages of Scripture, incorporating both men and women in remarkably interdependent and vital ways:

- God first calls Abraham to follow him in faith that He would keep His promises—but as the story unfolds, it becomes evident that this plan specifically includes Sarah. There is no child of promise without Sarah. (Gen. 17:15–19)
- Moses is born to a courageous woman named Jochebed, who risks her life to protect her vulnerable son. Later, his sister Miriam would watch over him, boldly approach Pharaoh’s daughter, and make connections that would allow him to continue to grow under the care and influence of their mother. Pharaoh’s daughter herself would make the extraordinary choice to raise this child of the enemy as her own, giving him a privileged education that would equip him for the work ahead. Moses would not have been Moses without these remarkable women behind him. (Ex. 2:1–10; Acts 7:20–22)
- Esther and her cousin Mordecai were providentially placed in positions of power to intervene on behalf of God’s people. (Esther 1–9)
- Women, some named and some unnamed, traveled with Jesus and His disciples and provided for them out of their own means. (Luke 8:1–3).
- Mary Magdalene was the first to see the resurrected Christ and was sent personally by Jesus to go and tell the disciples the news that would change all of history. (John 20:11–18).
- Lydia, one of the first believers in Philippi, opened her home for Paul and his companions, enabling them to continue their ministry in that influential city. (Acts 16:13–15)
- Priscilla and her husband Aquila served together to teach and correct Apollos. (Acts 18:24–26)

In the words of Hebrews 11:32, “And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of” the stories woven throughout all of Scripture where we find women playing unique and pivotal roles of all kinds—yes, as wives and mothers, but also as leaders, prophetesses, counselors, messengers, providers, protectors, and more. God used both men and women in their unique roles and abilities, giftings and opportunities, to move the story of redemption forward. He continues to do the same today.

“God uses both men and women in their unique roles and abilities, giftings and opportunities, to move the story of redemption forward.”

Our mutual dependence upon one another figures most importantly as we seek to reflect the image of God and His design for the church. Rightfully stewarded, each other's giftings are blessings for the church. We choose to see Christians who are healthy in the application of their gifting, regardless of their gender, as assets to the church, not as threats to others' position or authority. We must call one another to mutual humility, checking our egos at the door. We must call one another toward genuine thoughtfulness, resisting easy cultural stereotypes. We should seek mutual spiritual development as a necessary part of God's design.

As brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, we must recognize that we are equal in worth, different from one another and yet dependent on each other to fulfill the mission God has entrusted to us. We need one another. We are gifts to one another. The watching world needs to see a church recognizable by our genuine love for one another that looks far different from stereotypes, objectification, power struggles, belittling jokes, and marginalization. The reputation of Jesus is on the line. Jesus' words ring true: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). May it be said so of us.

5. PRACTICES

We want to be as up front as possible in articulating how you can expect NCC to apply the above-mentioned principles. As we've tried to communicate, the conversation about gender roles in ministry is complicated and requires Christians to be thoughtful and generous. Further, we recognize that different churches, different denominations, and different traditions vest different levels of authority in roles (pastors, staff, elders, deacons, etc.). What follows is a brief explanation for how we've chosen to apply gender expectations in the specific cultural context of NCC.

STAFFING

We affirm that God calls men and women to lead in the local church. Further, we believe that men and women are equally welcomed to hold staff positions in the local church. It is incumbent upon all staff members, regardless of gender, to steward their gifts appropriately and courageously as they seek to fulfill their calling.

Because NCC holds the title *pastor* very closely with the expectation and responsibilities of regularly preaching in the context of a Sunday morning worship gathering, we prefer to reserve the title *pastor* for men only. However, this is not meant to imply that women do not have pastoral spiritual gifting (teaching, shepherding, leadership, etc.). Further, the term *pastor* does not necessarily imply hierarchy between staff members. For example, while the lead pastor functions as the organization's authority as per the NCC Constitution, it's also very possible that a staff member with the title *pastor* might report to a ministry director.

To be clear: We recognize and affirm that women can have pastoral gifting, function, and roles. However, at NCC, due to cultural expectations, we choose to reserve the title of *pastor* for those tasked with filling a preaching role. In this way, we hope to uphold our belief in mutual gifting alongside distinct responsibilities.

BOARDS

NCC has three boards, each with different responsibilities: elders, deacons, and missions.²⁵ Because NCC holds the office of *elder* in close proximity with the possibility of authoritative teaching in a mixed-gendered context (i.e. preaching), we choose to reserve the role of elder for men.²⁶

We want to underscore that because God's Word reserves that role for men, those who serve as elders must be especially attentive to the needs of women at NCC, being diligent to avoid any blind spots they may have toward women's pastoral care. As they shepherd, they are to be listeners, learners, *then* leaders.

Since there is ample scriptural precedent for women being described with the term *deacon*, we encourage women to serve as members of NCC's deacon board, exercising their gifts in any creative capacity to which a deacon might be called.²⁷ Both male and female deacons should serve according to their gifting and not necessarily be limited to fulfilling cultural stereotypes or norms.

The missions board is also a mixed-gendered board where men and women are encouraged to serve and lead according to their gifts and passions.

GROUPS

Group Life at NCC is made of different environments where Christian doctrine is taught and discussed and where rich conversations are welcomed. While the exact form of Group Life might shift depending on ministry initiatives and emphases (e.g., Sunday morning groups, Community Groups, Bible studies, etc.), groups will likely always be a strong feature of the ministry of NCC.

Because we believe men and women are equally gifted in the functional elements of Group Life (hosting, teaching, facilitating conversation, etc.), we welcome men and women to serve as Group Life leaders in all areas, with the exception of gender-specific studies. (For example, we expect that men will lead men-only groups and that women will lead women-only groups. The exception might be when someone is invited as a guest to a group for a specific purpose). We welcome and pursue men and women to lead Sunday

²⁵ For a fuller description of these boards, please refer to the NCC Constitution.

²⁶ See above commentary on 1 Timothy 2:12.

²⁷ Schreiner, "Does the Bible Support"

morning study groups, Community Groups, or other mixed-gendered groups including topics involving biblical exposition, doctrine, and theology.

PULPIT / PREACHING

While important and indispensable to the health of a local church, preaching is only one aspect of a Sunday morning gathering at NCC. Further, preaching is only one aspect of pastoral ministry—and usually its most narrow.

In keeping with Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2, we choose to reserve the task of preaching in the gathered Sunday morning worship setting for men. However, in restricting that function, we recognize an increased responsibility to thoughtfully represent women in our worship gatherings through other means (hosting the worship gathering, reading Scripture, performing baptisms, serving Communion, etc.) and other contexts when needed (on-stage interviews, video conversations, training environments, etc.). Further, we want to recognize that it is incumbent upon church leaders to encourage, support, pursue, and champion women who are gifted in preaching and teaching by connecting them to meaningful opportunities within the life of NCC so they can fearlessly and faithfully steward their gifts as part of their calling. In the case of guest speakers for special events, determination will be made with the input of ministry staff at the decision of the lead pastor.

TRAINING ENVIRONMENTS

We affirm that both men and women are equally gifted in all areas of leadership. Looking outside of our traditional evangelical forms of theological instruction (preaching), there is ample scriptural reference for women providing theological instruction to men. As NCC continues to grow toward godliness, we seek to offer opportunities for women and men to mutually lead according to their gifting. We welcome both women and men to lead in leadership development contexts, training for ministry efforts, staff development, missions teams, etc.

6. APPENDICES

PREACHING AND TEACHING

Because we believe that both men and women can be given teaching and preaching gifts but reserve the task of preaching in the local gathering for men, we want to be helpful in clearly communicating how we understand the distinctions between teaching and preaching. A caution: Christians who eagerly engage in unhelpful controversy over these matters run the risk of embodying Jesus' warning to the Pharisees, who neglect "the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness" (Matt. 23:23).²⁸

1. The Form

Teaching is often *dialogical* (a back and forth exchange).

Preaching is most often *monological* (one to many).

2. The Mode

Teaching seeks to *explain* biblical truth.

Preaching builds on explanation to *proclaim* biblical truth.

3. The Setting

Teaching can take place in *smaller settings* within a church.

Preaching occurs when the *entire* church is gathered.

4. The Tone

Teaching tends to have a *measured*, even tone.

Preaching often carries a heightened sense of *urgency*.

5. The Posture

Teaching may seem *helpful*, or service-oriented.

Preaching is often more *authoritative* in posture.

6. The Goal

Teaching is concerned with *explication and information*.

Preaching drives toward *exhortation* and an *invitation to respond*.

²⁸ See also Prov. 26:17; 1 Peter 4:15; 1 Thess. 4:11; 2 Thess. 3:11

SAFETY AND ABUSE

We strongly oppose any view of Biblical leadership or complementarianism that leads to oppressive, abusive, coercive, intimidating, and controlling behaviors towards men or women.

Sadly, domestic violence and abusive leadership are often justified under the guise of exercising Biblical authority, but this is a gross perversion of Biblical teaching. Violence, abuse, or threatening behaviors are the exact opposite of how God instructs His people to exercise authority and the sacrificial, servant-leadership that Jesus has modeled for us (Eph. 5:25-30, 6:4, 1 Pet. 3:7, Matt. 20:25-28, Phil. 2:3-4).

Christian Counselor, Darby A. Strickland, when describing the tactics an oppressive spouse might use, writes: “An oppressor may limit personal freedoms of, induce fear in, exploit, terrorize, humiliate, withhold resources from, isolate, threaten, demand obedience from, or physically harm a spouse.”²⁹

NCC is committed to loving both the victim and the perpetrator of abuse, but always in a way that first and foremost seeks to protect the vulnerable from actual or potential harm. We will seek to ensure that those who have experienced abuse can find safety and informed help, which could include notifying legal authorities and/or seeking safe shelter.

Anyone in the church who feels they may be a victim of abuse is encouraged to speak with a member of the church staff or to directly notify the appropriate legal authorities.

²⁹ Darby A. Strickland, *Domestic Abuse: Recognize, Respond, Rescue* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), 3.

MARRIAGE AND SINGLENES

Our understanding of marriage and singleness is a natural outworking of our understanding of gender. Historically, religious communities have had different—and at times extreme—views of marriage or singleness: In the first century, Rabbi Elezaar said, “Any man who has no wife is not a proper man.” The Talmud went further to say, “The man who is not married by twenty is living in sin.”³⁰ Conversely, many religious communities—especially ascetic ones—prized singleness as a holier call than marriage.

In recent days, especially in evangelical contexts, there seems to be a rallying cry around “family values,” driven by a need to protect “the nuclear family” as a core formative aspect of human identity. Sadly, this emphasis expresses itself in church programming that often emphasizes families to the exclusion of those who are single. In our consideration of gender in the local church, we recognize that there is an often unconscious, and at times harmful, cultural bias in favor of those who are married. As New Testament Christians, we endeavor to understand marriage and singleness in light of the gospel. To that end, we want to emphasize the following:

Belonging: Jesus redefines “brother” and “sister” in theological rather than familial terms (Mark 3:31–35). As a fundamental aspect of His ministry, Jesus set about to create a new family, expanding beyond bloodlines to include anyone who trusts in Christ, regardless of their marital status. We will work to set a vision for NCC that nurtures typical familial structures while also seeing one another as family.

Dignity: We reject the idea that singleness is a problem to be solved. Rather, we choose to see both marriage and singleness as honorable callings to uphold. Further, no person is excluded from or disqualified for any form of ministry service because of their singleness. We want NCC to be a place of refuge and encouragement for anyone seeking to grow in Christ.

Hope: Earthly marriage matters, but it doesn’t last forever (Mark 12:25). The church should seek to form anyone into the character of Christ in light of their eternal calling, regardless of their marital status. We therefore hope to primarily emphasize personal spiritual formation, seeing marriage, family, and singleness as temporary, individual callings and extensions of that formation.

Satisfaction: Whether married or single, everyone’s primary need is to be satisfied in the gospel. Marriage and singleness afford different opportunities to learn that satisfaction. As Sam Allberry notes, “If marriage shows us the shape of the gospel, *singleness shows us its sufficiency*.”³¹ To that end, we want NCC to be a place

³⁰ Quoted in Vaughan Roberts, “4 Things God Says to Singles,” The Gospel Coalition, September 2, 2014, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/four-things-god-says-singles>.

³¹ Sam Allberry, *7 Myths About Singleness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), back matter.

where anyone is encouraged to seek their satisfaction in Christ, regardless of marital status. For those who are single, we encourage them to live their singleness well. For those married, we encourage them to live their marriages well. Whether someone is married or single, we want NCC to be family connected by and satisfied by Christ alone.

7. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Three Female Ghosts that Haunt the Church (blog post)

Jen Wilkin names and describes unstated-but-often-felt undercurrents for female leaders in church contexts. She calls out tendencies to see and treat women as “usurpers,” “temptresses,” and “children.” Helpfully, Wilkin also casts a vision for the church to be “an un-haunted place.”

The Role of Women at Village Church (white paper)

The Village Church does a fantastic job thoroughly researching the texts at play in this conversation as well as explaining how that research impacts their practice. If you’d like the condensed version (3 pages, 5-min read) click [here](#). The Village Church also hosted a 20-min conversation ([available here](#)) between Matt Chandler and Jen Wilkin.

Does the Old Testament Dehumanize Women? (video)

(Start at 44:30) In this lecture / Q&A, OT scholar Dr. Sandy Richter helpfully handles difficult texts in the Law. But what is most applicable to this particular paper is the Q&A regarding complementarianism and egalitarianism.

Does the Bible Support Women Deacons? Yes. (blog post)

Hosted at The Gospel Coalition, this concise article by New Testament scholar Thomas R. Schreiner gives some thoughtful evidence (biblically, historically, and theologically) in support of women serving as deacons.

Can Women Serve as Deacons in the Church? (blog post)

Brian Fuller traces Paul’s flow of thought in 1st Timothy 3 and how the text gives evidence for female deacons. Helpfully, he also explains why some Christians might hesitate to see it.

What Did Paul Mean by “I Do Not Permit a Woman to Teach?” (video)

This 6-minute conversation between pastor Tim Keller and New Testament scholar D.A. Carson thoughtfully articulates how we can approach one of the New Testament’s toughest passages with wisdom, generosity, and kindness.