

REDEEMED HUMANITY

Wrestling with Scripture to Find a Blessing for the Sexes

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Introduction

My wife Sydney drives and motivates me in every aspect of my life, but I had no idea how much she would impact my very soul to know God's love. Tragically, much of the impact she has brought into my life has centered around the two of us coming together to work through the trauma she has experienced in her life, and the marginalization she still encounters, that often results simply from being a woman. She has told me about a recurring dream she has where she is forced to undergo surgery on her throat, one that ensures she can never speak again. It's a nightmare that subconsciously depicts the reality she has experienced as a woman, forcing her to reckon regularly with the fact that, from her experience, she has no true voice. What's more, those with social power and privilege have not listened to her nor do they use their status to accommodate even her most basic needs. These realities have introduced an unexpected aspect into our marriage that, by the pure grace of Jesus, has grown the depths of our love for one another as we learn how to work through her trauma together.

She seems to be having the nightmare less often these days, but recently reckoned with the same underlying truth again, but this time because of scripture. Or, perhaps not scripture itself, but an interpretation of scripture that seemed to reinforce the same experience: "you, woman, have no true voice here." Although the sermon itself was packaged with genuine and loving intent to encourage women, Sydney did not feel encouraged. In spite of the insistence that "we shouldn't focus on the 'women can't' aspect of this verse, though it's definitely there, rather we should focus on the deeper truths..." it was all we could do to not simply hear "women can't."

Sydney and I (once again) spent hours discussing the Biblical nature of complementarianism as it pertains to women's roles in the Church. We played out every best-case scenario we could think of, genuinely trying our best to make it as affirming of women as possible...but ultimately we couldn't help concluding that even in complementarianism's best possible presentation it always ends up sounding like the language of an abuser. "You can't do *this*, but trust me, it's for your good. And look at all the other things you *can* do! God set it up like this to protect you." With these alarming conclusions from our conversation in my heart, I was spurred to study the scriptures and spend real time in the so-called "complementarian proof texts" to see what a thorough exegesis would yield.

Insufficient Exegesis Surrounding Passages of Gender and the Sexes

I truly believe the best in pastors who preach these texts from a complementarian framework, knowing their intent is to obey God in their best and most humble way, which I'll speak more about later. But to me, the sermons are clearly grounded on an insufficient exegesis of the scripture. When we approach a text and leave with an interpretation that is backed by the argument "well that's just what it says so we must submit in obedience, whether we like it or not" I think we ought to be warned. The Bible "just says" a lot of things that we do not in fact submit in obedience to. Perhaps you've heard the classic atheist response to such a position: "Leviticus *just says* that you shouldn't wear clothes of two fabrics...but here you are with a cotton/polyester shirt on." Or perhaps a Christian critique that "Paul *just says* to greet one another with a holy

kiss” but we generally think that’s a bad idea. In these cases we employ simple and accepted exegetical tools to conclude that they are not universal commands for us to obey today, even though they’re preserved in scripture as imperatives.

But more gravely, what about the abundant new and old testament passages that seem to condone slavery and even give Biblical audiences proper guidelines within which to treat slaves, and slaves their masters? For a response to this I turn to Esau McCaulley’s work in “Reading While Black,” (a book that the reader should certainly read in its entirety rather than accepting this brief summary of a section from his introduction) wherein he describes his experience in college where only one exegetical approach was presented around slavery; that being that slavery is unarguably condoned by the Bible. Thus only the following responses remained, the fundamentalist approach to agree and so support slavery, or the progressive approach to dismiss the authoritativeness of scripture to at least some degree. But McCaulley had grown up hearing what he calls the “Black ecclesial position” which he rightly claims to have done better exegetical work, so concluding that the Bible does not in fact condone slavery, but boasts a God of liberation.³

The same sort of exegesis and misguided conclusions are arising still today regarding gender and roles in the Church. This is the most crucial reason to follow up on these texts. The reason we dismiss Levitical laws and Paul’s kiss imperatives is because we have rightly interpreted those to be contextual, not universal *commands*. The reason the Church boasts a theology of liberation for slaves is also because of better exegetical work that emerged surrounding the passages that slaveholders once wielded as proof texts to support their arguments.

It is of course true that we should not jump through interpretive hoops or search for ways to convince ourselves that God’s word always agrees with our presuppositions, but we also shouldn’t be simple in exegeting passages that seem to agree or not agree with us either. Such simplicity, according to McCaulley, resulted in two divided camps surrounding slavery and biblical authority, and both erring. In the case of gender roles in the Church, that same third option exists, that both egalitarian and complementarian conclusions are built upon inadequate exegetical work and are erring similarly. We know this to be true because scripture will leave us with a blessing when we wrestle, not a curse.³ A “blessing” does not mean an interpretation that makes our hearts happy and never challenges our presuppositions, but rather one that satisfies the soul; an interpretation from the Holy Spirit living within us, coming from the God of Truth, finding its focal point in Jesus, and resulting in a clear gospel proclamation.

So, because the common exegesis of the “complementarian proof texts” has continued to bring a curse upon my wife, reinforcing her marginalization, and also to me as a lover of Biblical truth; I began working through that pain. I have prayed time and time again that God would change my feelings about this issue if they are arising from my own personal discomfort toward that which God has made clear. Or, if my feelings are actually pointing me to a truth that God desires for His Church and thus arising from the Spirit, that He would enhance my feelings and lead me to do a better exegetical work on those same proof texts than my contemporaries; one that leaves us all with a blessing from God.

Subject Matter's Vitality for the Church

The matter of interpreting these scriptures correctly is vital because it directly and practically affects the functionality of the Body of Christ. For instance, we must conclude after interpreting 1 Timothy 2 that, either 1) no woman can teach a man in any setting or 2) women can teach men in at least some settings. I do not condemn complementarianists for their rigorous enforcement of the first interpretation of this text, prohibiting women from having pastoral and eldership roles in the Church. It is the only obedient response *if* indeed their interpretation of the scripture is correct, although I will argue against the validity of their interpretation with the rest of this work. But it goes to show the vitality of proper exegesis, because the Church is either 1) in danger of compromising our obedience to God and the gender roles He established for the Church or 2) marginalizing half the Church's ability to use their spiritual gifts of teaching to admonish and exhort Her. Either misstep would be catastrophic for the Church. Indeed, I feel that we are bearing witness to the catastrophic fallout of such a misinterpretation and it is yielding malpractice and sin in the Church; we see the fruit of it almost every month when another headline emerges about a male Church leader who has sexually harassed and abused women, unchecked by Her all-male leadership. And, on the other side, we see the Church's inability to be lovingly prophetic in a culture that has no clear direction regarding true human identity and how our gender and sexuality affect it.

Spiritual Conviction Yielding Immediate Results

So moved in my prayers to study deeper for myself, I poured over exegetical approaches and interpretations that hit every color of the spectrum. All of it led me to this. Not feeling fully satisfied by any one approach, but also never failing to unearth glimmers of truth from every interpretation, a new conclusion began to form in my mind. It's the same conclusion Sydney and I come to almost every time we get into an argument: our argument is based around a misinterpretation. My conclusion, which I will expound upon in the body of my thesis, is that exegetical errors have led to damaging interpretations from both the "egalitarian" and "complementarian" interpretive parties. As I walk us through a more complete exegetical work on gender and the sexes we will see that there is room for both complementarians and egalitarians to come to the table around a more satisfactory exegesis of the scripture that enlightens the two truths embedded in our souls that:

1) men and women are created equally and have equal access to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit which leads to equal distribution of Spiritual gifts to be employed for all roles in the Church; including preaching, teaching, and eldership.

2) men and women image God in ways that are unique from each other and so complement one another; such that, apart from coming together as "one flesh" (a truth that's only realized fully in Christ but has always been reflected in a sexually righteous marriage), humanity would yield an insufficient knowledge of the God of the Bible.

In this, I offer what I am calling the "redeemed humanity" viewpoint on the sexes in the Bible.

Scope of this Thesis

So that's where I'm coming from and here's where we're going. First I will give a quick sociological underpinning about today's definitions of "gender" and "sex." This is important because, when an argument arises, it often surrounds a vernacular disagreement. So I'll begin by laying out some commonly accepted definitions of these words followed by the exact definitions I'll be using for the rest of this thesis.

Next, I will exegete sections of Genesis 1, 2 and 3 as they regard gender and the sexes. This exegetical work will set the stage for properly exegeting the six New Testament passages that have been historically under scrutiny for their seemingly problematic nature.

Thirdly, I will highlight the Biblical passages that seem to infer that women and men are created and Spiritually gifted both equally and distinctly, carrying the conclusions from Genesis 1, 2 and 3 that will offer this clear Biblical viewpoint on men and women; though there are differences between the sexes and the ways in which they "image" God, these differences do not necessitate Church roles restricted exclusively for one of the sexes or the other. In fact, the same Spirit and the same portion of the Spirit has been poured out on both male and female believers, thus gender-exclusive roles in the Church would be restricting the gifts given by the Spirit. Yet, to completely negate the role that sex and gender plays in humanity also hinders the Biblical intention for the Church.

Finally, I will undertake an exegesis of the six main complementarian proof texts, leaning on the work we've done in Genesis and the other sections, to show that this redeemed humanity viewpoint is indeed the proper interpretation of scripture and makes the most sense of Paul's otherwise controversial words, ones that have historically either been picked through or ignored entirely.

Please note that this concluding section in the body will not form an attack toward individuals or believers who are humbly seeking to be obedient to the Lord. It is simply a proper exegesis of a handful of passages that have been historically misinterpreted; I don't fault anyone for misinterpreting the Bible, I'll be the first to admit that I do it all the time; of course, I feel the Spirit has led me to His proper interpretation of *these* texts, perhaps for just such a time as this.

The Body of Work

Definitional Underpinning of "Gender" and "Sex"

In our society today, there is quite a bit of confusion surrounding the terms "gender" and "sex" as it relates to sexual anatomy. For this reason, I feel it will be helpful to define what I mean when I use these terms. Having only attained a Bachelors of Arts and Sciences in the field of Sociology, I'm not claiming to be an expert on the field of gender and sexual identity in

our society, but I have learned enough to know that these definitions are not as solid as some may believe, so they will be our primary consideration before jumping into Biblical scholarship.

Let the reader know that I in no way intend to use these definitional underpinnings as a means of sidestepping or rerouting the conversation at hand, or that by claiming definitional instability I'm somehow "giving in to societal pressures." The reality is that words only ever have symbolic meaning. There is no word that has ever had one perfect definition that lasts through the ages. C.S. Lewis gives an example of this reality in his introduction to "Mere Christianity:"

The word gentleman originally meant something recognisable; one who had a coat of arms and some landed property. When you called someone "a gentleman" you were not paying him a compliment, but merely stating a fact. If you said he was not "a gentleman" you were not insulting him, but giving information. There was no contradiction in saying that John was a liar and a gentleman; any more than there now is in saying that James is a fool and an M.A. But then there came people who said—so rightly, charitably, spiritually, sensitively, so anything but usefully— "Ah, but surely the important thing about a gentleman is not the coat of arms and the land, but the behaviour? Surely he is the true gentleman who behaves as a gentleman should? Surely in that sense Edward is far more truly a gentleman than John?"...A gentleman, once it has been spiritualised and refined out of its old coarse, objective sense, means hardly more than a man whom the speaker likes. As a result, gentleman is now a useless word.⁵

The point is well met, especially in our modern culture where the word "gentlemen" would have no connection to a coat of arms apart from those like Lewis who harken us to its origin. This exemplifies the point, that every word is in fact a sociological construct. In medieval times, a "gentleman" simply owned land and wore a coat of arms; in 2021 USA we'd call that person a homeowner with an interest in cosplay.

Today, we encounter a similar predicament surrounding the terms "gender" and "sex," only we face a slightly more complicated situation because there is little common-ground on which to stand. Tomorrow, if I visited a So-Cal University classroom asking "what are your thoughts on gender?" I'd get a very different response than if I interrupted a game of Bingo at a southern retirement home pressing the same question. Indeed, the first might speak of gender fluidity and their sexual identities, whereas the latter would likely have a more direct approach.

We need not be troubled by this state of affairs regarding gender definitions. Although, the need to make such a statement points to another cultural reality; our definitions are not only in contention, but in a state of hostility. The conservative feels the progressive neighbor is pushing an agenda when speaking of their gender identity, and the progressive feels they're talking with a bigot. Both parties leave the conversation offended and decide it best to put a new fence between their homes, pretending they live in different neighborhoods. Which, metaphorically, perhaps they do. One lives in a neighborhood where the definition of "gender" means "the sexual organs one was born with," and the other in a community defining it as "the degree to which my inner-self exhibits 'maleness' and 'femaleness.'"

I've been out of the University realm too long to know if this sort of dual-community society has received sufficient research to bear conclusions, but I hypothesize that the polarity of our society, combined with the relatively new ability to form personal and online communities consisting of hand-picked individuals whose voices we can either amplify and mute at our own

discretion, is moving social structures (such as vocabulary) at a more rapid and bi-directional rate than we've ever seen. To put it plainly (and oversimplistically), the US seems to be experiencing a culture-split, forming a "progressive neighborhood" and a "conservative neighborhood." In these two neighborhoods many words, like "gender," take on meanings specific to their community and contrasting to the other's; and the pace at which those new definitions are accepted is as rapid as clicking "share this post (but only with the people in my neighborhood)".

Perhaps the reader will feel I'm belaboring the point, and maybe I am, but there is a reason. It is to explain that the following definitions of "gender" and "sex" are not universally accepted and cannot possibly be. My hope is that, regardless of the neighborhood you live in, less your proximity to the fenceline, you can suspend your hostility and accept these definitions even if only within the bounds of this thesis.

My hope is to provide two words that will be used to appease both definitions of "gender" that exist today as I see them. So, for the sake of this thesis, please accept the following definitions as I'll be using them in this paper:

Gender: an individual's internal consideration of their own "maleness" and "femaleness" with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones.²

Sex: the fundamental distinction found in humans based on the type of gametes produced by the individual and the presence of XX or XY chromosomes resulting in the *most-common* phenotypic manifestations of sex (as determined by endocrine influences, such as development of breasts and genital organs.)¹

As you likely already see, the task of defining these words is tall (and admittedly not fully within my bounds to be definitive on, though I try my best) and, as you'll notice particularly in the definition of sex, not necessarily all-inclusive. Although some may wish it to be simpler, we live in a complex world regarding not only gender, but also anatomical sex. We truly do live in a world where bodies may produce gametes, phenotypes, and organs that are not necessarily those most frequently indicated by their chromosomal makeup.^{6, 7}

I desperately wish I could write a thesis that is able to speak to every individual on a personal level, but the diversity of human gender and sex, given the above definitions, is as numerous as there are humans. However, in this thesis, I will not be addressing "gender" as defined above. Because gender is socially and culturally bound, a proper exegesis of scripture regarding gender should always begin with that as a note, making it clear that a gender role in ancient Israel or first century Rome is inherently incongruent to a 21st Century modern society. Though the Bible surely contains wisdom regarding one's gender, part of my aim in this section is to show that the Bible is speaking primarily about what we would call the sexes. This is not a cop-out, it's actually *more* helpful for the Bible reader, because one's sex is not culturally constrained. So, anything the Bible has to say about the sexes in the ancient world can and should still be applied wisely today.

That said, I will be speaking in generalities based on the above definition of sex and the sexes; what I mean is, I'll be speaking of one's genetic makeup as either a man or a woman as it is *generally* observed in humans. As we continue in this discussion, we'll come to see that

these two definitions will be helpful for us because the Bible has much to say in regard to the sexes. However, regarding gender (in a modern reader's context), it does not have much to say. I do not expect the reader to accept this position merely on my word, but will come to see it to be the reality once we get into the exegetical section of this thesis.

Again, I recognize that these categories do not encompass every person, and for that I apologize. But these definitions are not simply for our own clarity regarding this thesis, but also because a more binary way of understanding the sexes is more closely aligned with the Biblical construction and understanding of the words associated with these topics (and that's not a bad or outdated reality, we'll come to see).

I hope that, one day, some more excellent scholar than myself may pick up this thesis and be inspired to work more thoroughly on this section alone, however that would be outside the scope of this thesis.

A More Sufficient Exegesis of Genesis 1, 2 & 3 regarding the Sexes

In order to have a full comprehension of God's will for male and female in the Church we must start at the beginning, with Genesis. Perhaps this seems an odd place to start for some, however there are two reasons for beginning our work here 1) Genesis is quoted in the passages we'll be exegeting later on 2) As Dru Johnson rightly illustrates in his work "The Universal Story," the Bible is ordered similarly to that of Russian nesting dolls.⁸ Put another way, Genesis 1-11 is like the molten inner-core of the earth. From the inner core, the outer core receives its heat and gravity, from there the mantle, and finally the earth's crust is yet heated and kept in place by the inner-core working transitively upward through the other layers.

This is the way Genesis 1-11 works in the Bible, it gives heat and gravity to the rest of scripture, indeed there is no verse left untouched or unpulled toward this center. You may argue that Christ is in fact the center of scripture and you would be right. Christ is indeed the center of scripture, just as He is the cosmic-creator, gardener, snake-crusher, and righteous one found so prominently in Genesis 1-11. To put it another way, it is only with a good comprehension of these first 11 chapters that we begin to grasp the depth and magnitude of Jesus in His life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return.

In the same way, to better understand the roles that male and female play in the Church, we must know their place in creation. We must know their original relationship with the Creator, one another, with sin, and the rest of creation; thus we turn to the opening pages of the Word.

S. Joshua Swamidass' work in "the Genealogical Adam and Eve" is helpful here, not necessarily his overall conclusions which I don't have time to discuss, but the mere reality that his fresh approach to Genesis 1 & 2 made exegetical space for both "evolutionists" and "creationists" to meet on common ground and reorient their argument from "science is wrong and the Bible is right" (and vice versa) to "what is the Bible actually saying about mankind in creation?"⁵

Similarly, a fresh exegetical interpretation of Genesis 1, 2, and 3 as it regards the sexes will result in a like-manner leveling of the playing field for complementarians and egalitarians. I call this interpretation "fresh" not because it is new, but because it has been discovered anew

after centuries of assuming a different interpretation. It is indeed not “new” at all, and for this reason it is perhaps the most vital piece of this work.

The reason I consider it the most vital piece is because it is recovering the interpretation of Genesis that Paul is referring to in his letters when he harkens back to creation as a justification for his imperative statements. With this interpretation in mind, we’ll recreate the once-existing space for Paul to sound neither bigoted nor sexist while yet maintaining the authoritative nature of his inspired words.

To begin our exegetical work, please read all of Genesis 1, 2, and 3, taking special note of the following verses:

- *Genesis 1:26-30*
- *Genesis 2:16-17*
- *Genesis 2:23-25*
- *Genesis 3:1-3*
- *Genesis 3:7*
- *Genesis 3:15*

A proper reading of Genesis 1, 2 and 3 begins with an equality of humankind as observed in Genesis 1:26-30. Here, God makes mankind in His image, in the image of God He created mankind, male and female He created them. To this male and female mankind He twice commissions them to be rulers over the land. I encourage the reader to spend extra time reading Genesis 1:26-30 as it’s put together into something of a puzzle. I’d also encourage the reader to use a concordance or the original language, as an English version can trip us up a bit. Perhaps you noticed my intentionality in using the word “mankind” above, rather than the traditional translation of “man.” This is not a sleight of hand. The word *adam* is the word for human-kind and, though it can be used to describe a single man, the nature of the verses themselves make it clear that we are talking of “humanity,” not “a man.”¹¹

This nuance needs to be particularly clear in verse 27 for we must not accidentally hear “...in the image of God He created ‘a man;’ male and female He created them both” No, the “him” there is a direct object marker, meaning it is signifying the above “mankind” to be the thing created in His image. Then it goes on to reveal something about that “mankind,” namely that they are a one-thing that is itself two things: mankind is male and female.¹¹

I labor over this because I have heard it said by several pastors and teachers that Genesis 2 is doing something like “zooming in on the sixth day of creation.” Claiming that, where Genesis 1 speaks on a meta-level of the creation week, Genesis 2 then takes day 6 specifically and slows it down to show us more detail of what happened. This is a poor interpretation, be it built upon a right idea.

There are actually clues in the text itself that reveal this to be a poor interpretation. For instance, in the Genesis 1 timeline, the land is separated from the waters, trees are sprouted forth, animals are placed upon the earth, and *then* God creates mankind. But in Genesis 2, it notes explicitly “no shrub of the field was yet on the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted...” and then God forms man out of dust (before anything else). Thus it’s made apparent that Genesis 1 and 2 are doing two different things, at least as far as the order of creation is concerned. This is not a contradiction or compromise of the truth of scripture. Rather,

it's a literary tool, in which two seemingly-contradictory pictures are placed side-by-side to point to a truer reality than can be sufficiently portrayed by either one alone.¹⁰

For instance, in Genesis 1 God is portrayed as simply "speaking" creation into existence. A word from God becomes material reality. This God is clearly omnipotent, but potentially detachable from the creation He spoke into existence. In Genesis 1 alone, the reader gets no real sense that God actually cares for His creation, apart from that He calls it "good," but even that could be a "good" defined by a malevolent god for sadistic purposes. However, in Genesis 2 God is portrayed as intimately working the ground with His own "hands" and breathing His own breath into the lungs of mankind. The God of Genesis 2 is clearly working for the "good" of mankind, but perhaps not exceptionally powerful apart from this small garden of His domain. However, when we put the two chapters together, these seeming-contradictions come to life to create an unfathomable picture of an infinite God; a God who is somehow all-powerful over the entire universe and yet ever-intimately present with a single being.

This is how Genesis 1 and 2 should be read, as two parts of a single story, each doing different things by utilizing different genres, but together pointing to a third and more-true reality.

This technique now applied to the sexes specifically will yield the same results. As we've already seen in Genesis 1, God makes one humanity that is both male and female sexually. They are both commissioned to the same work, given the same authority, and blessed in the same way. This is the first description of humanity and how the sexes function together, and notably being created equal in every way.

So as we turn the page to Genesis 2, this reality will not be superseded, but will add a second picture to guide us to the ultimate truth regarding the sexes. In fact we might notice a Genesis 1-like unity here too; in Genesis 2:18-23 the main tension is that no suitable helper is found for the man until the woman is made of the same essence as the man. She is not *just* a suitable helper, but as the man says, she is "bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh." Somehow we miss the profundity of what the man is saying; 'she is one who is perfect for me because she is the *same* as me in the most literal sense possible while still being another being.'

The essential oneness of man and woman here cannot be understated. What I mean is, we must notice that the thrust of this passage is that man and woman are made of the same stuff, the same essence in other words. I use this strange term of "essence" because it is the theological term used to in retort to the heresy of Arianism, that the Son is *not* of the same essence as the Father and so is eternally subordinate. This has been condemned as heresy since the first council of Nicaea in 325. I belabor the point because a variation of this argument has been recapitulated in our time, resurrecting the idea of Jesus' subservience to the Father and applying it as theological leverage to assert a divine order intended to be mirrored by women's subservience to men. But the Bible refutes this strongly in its opening pages.¹⁸

With that in mind, let's go back to the top of the story where God creates one human, whom we're still to simply call "human" and not "man" because the Hebrew word for male-human is not given until verse 23 (the first time the word for female-human is used is, interestingly, verse 22.) He then introduces the human to all the animals around, but none is suitable as a strong-and-right helper.

I'm using the phrase "strong-and-right helper" because I think it actually speaks to the Biblical meaning of the word, though it often appears simply translated as "helper." When we hear that word in our context, we think "one who is there to support the other in their

endeavours.” But given the Biblical context of the word, being most often used to describe God (see Psalm 33:20 for instance), it’s clear our modern understanding of “helper” falls short. Woman is no servant to Adam, just as God is no servant to man...and yet. Of course there is a clear and obvious apparent contradiction in that statement because, “I did not come to be served, but to serve,” says the Lord himself. But the way in which God “helps” humans *is* both strong and right. What I mean is, God’s “help,” in the sense of the word used here, is not one that’s oriented toward the man’s ambition, but toward ultimate goodness; namely that man would be in right relationship with God. This is the same way in which Jesus comes to “serve” man, such that He would put them back into a right relationship with the Lord. This is the same way that woman is to “help” mankind.

In this moment, I think we unlock an incredible beauty of the gospel. Just as Paul calls on men in Ephesians saying, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her;” here Eve is created for the same purpose. Perhaps that is why Paul calls for wives and husbands to “submit to one another” first and foremost in that section of Ephesians 5, but let’s not get ahead of ourselves yet.

So, in Genesis 2:24-25, God’s intent for the individual man and woman is revealed; that the two sexes would compliment each other *by* coming together as one flesh. Woman is created as a strong-and-right helper to orient mankind properly to the Lord. How is she to do this? The text answers our question straight away: the man and woman achieve this together. Mankind begins as becoming two out of one flesh and then is to be reunited as one when man would “leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” This is how man and woman “complement” each other.

Just as God is three persons yet perfectly intimately One, so mankind is to be two sexes united in a relationship that is “naked and unashamed.” Just as God would have been inadequately portrayed if He were not to become incarnate in Jesus Christ, or the Spirit never given, or the Father never proclaimed by the Son; so humankind is incomplete without the two sexes living as one in an intimacy that shadows that of the Godhead.

We know this is a proper reading because it is the humans’ “nakedness” that is compromised in the chapter to come. But before we move on to chapter three, we should take a moment to sit in the tension between the portrait of the sexes given in chapters 1 and 2. This is and should always be our starting place when building a Biblical understanding of the sexes. Somehow, humanity is created as one being made up of two equal sexes, called to the same calling, given the same authority, and equally blessed, yet vitally different from one another such that it is “not good” for them to be alone. It is in their “naked and unashamedness” with each other that they become truly human, imaging God’s oneness and super-personality.

However, this is not the humanity we observe today; one that is so obviously unequal in calling, authority, and blessing, where being naked and unashamed has an entirely darker meaning. So what does the Bible have to say about how we got here?

In Genesis 3, we observe Adam and Eve failing to live up to their calling to be one-flesh. We observe them fail to walk naked and unashamed before one another. So let’s observe how that happens. In verse 3, responding to the serpent’s temptation, the woman misquotes the command the Lord gave man. She says “you shall not eat from it *or touch it*, or you will die.” This is not what the Lord said in 2:17; He says “you shall not eat, for in the day you eat from it

you will surely die.” It’s a small and subtle thing, but the woman adds an addendum that they shall not eat “or touch it.”

This is a vital note because it is the specific nuance we miss as modern readers that Paul is very clued into; the very detail he leans on in 1 Timothy 2:12-14. Understanding this pivotal moment will allow us to properly exegete Timothy later on.

What is made clear here is that Adam, who was given the command, passed it on to Eve but in such a way that she did not sufficiently grasp it. Rather than properly receiving and “submitting” to the Lord’s right command, the woman makes an authoritative decision based on a “false teaching” which had made room for deception. When the misunderstanding woman then takes the fruit and does not die, she is led to mistrust the Lord’s command and the deception is made complete, so she eats. She then gives the fruit to the man who is with her and he eats. Together, the two eat the fruit in a disobedience based on a “false teaching.” The woman, who had been insufficiently taught the Lord’s command by the man who received it, leads them both into deceived disobedience.

A lack of relational intimacy between the man and the woman is revealed by this apparent insufficiency while passing on the Lord’s command, resulting in sin. This is not a hermeneutical sleight of hand. In fact, this reading is made very clear in the Hebrew which uses a word play to describe the serpent as “arum”, which sounds similar to the “arom” used to describe man and woman’s nakedness only a few words prior.¹¹

Man keeps the Lord’s command from the woman in a way that is not equal, and the woman acts rashly to lead them both in deception. As a result, the two are handed over to the curse they brought upon themselves; a long-lasting relational deficiency between the sexes, a heightened lack of intimacy. This curse is pronounced upon the woman and is proportional to the failing itself, Adam and Eve’s uncooperation with each other regarding God’s commands. Such a curse, however, would be undone alongside (and at the same time as) all other curses that had resulted from the sin of Adam; that time being the death of Christ, wherein he took on the full curse of sin and died with it.

It should be noted that calling the entirety of Genesis 3:14-19 a “curse” is contentious ground. The rationale behind this argument lies in the fact that God only explicitly “curses” two times when He says “cursed are you” to the serpent and “cursed is the ground because of you.” The implication being that only those two things are cursed. This logic is often used to protect women, saying that they are not in fact a cursed sex. The idea is correct because the woman herself is indeed not cursed, however, robbing the entire section of its cursedness can lead us to a fundamental misunderstanding that has plagued our interpretation. The misunderstanding is this: if the woman was not cursed nor the woman’s relationship with the man included in the curse, we can (and have) wrongly conclude that, apart from the two explicit curses, this section is God proclaiming the way things will now exist eternally. To state it differently, it is now God’s will that women be eternally bound to subservience to men. With this framework, readers are reinforced in their understanding when reading Paul’s interpretation of Genesis, assuming he agrees with this conclusion, as it could sound that he does unless we have a proper interpretation of Genesis 1-3.

However, Dru Johnson is correct in his book “the Universal Story: Genesis 1-11” when he says “with the woman, her curse appears to entail the twisting and perversion of proper

relationships.” He is correct in saying that the woman herself is not cursed, but that the curse is a perversion of the ways she relates to her children and her husband. ⁸

Alice Matthews says it so succinctly in her book “Gender Roles and the People of God,” “Hierarchy was not God’s will for the first pair, but it was imposed when they chose to disregard his command and eat the forbidden fruit. Adam would now be subject to his source, the ground, even as Eve was now subject to her source, Adam.”¹⁹

So, stated again, the woman’s relationship to her husband and children have been accursed, however, this curse (as with all curses) is undone with Christ. This would be a bold statement to make, were it not for the explicit and numerous ways in which the scriptures lay this out for us.

Firstly, the “woman” Mary (the mother of Jesus) proclaims the following of herself in Luke 1:46-55 “...he [God] has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed...” Mary calls herself blessed of God because she is bearing the Messiah child. This is vital to our understanding, because the first curse Eve receives is that her relationship to childbearing will be full of pain. However, now we see that the woman Mary is blessed by God *through* childbearing; the curse has been undone. This indeed is what Paul has in mind when he says “but she shall be saved through the childbearing” in 1 Timothy 2:15.

We see this interpretation on prominent display in the gospel of John. In John 2, the “woman” Mary instructs Jesus to provide wine for the wedding. Notice Jesus’s initial objection is not anything along the lines of “know your place; submit to the man’s authority and do not attempt to have authority over me for that is not the proper order of things.” But rather his objection is “my time has not yet come.” Yet in spite of this sentiment, Jesus apparently submits *his* timeline regarding the revelation of his God-ness to Mary’s. Let the reader not dismiss the narrative in favor of the prose just because it seems more explicit. We’ve already concluded that the Bible, in Genesis, uses the strongest language possible by way of narrative...it’s no stretch at all, and in fact has been claimed rather boldly by NT Wright among many other scholars, that John’s gospel functions similarly to Genesis in that way.⁹

We get more validation of this interpretation when we examine Jesus’ words on the cross in John 19:26-27. Jesus looks upon his mother and says “woman.” In attempting to ensure the reader does not read a derogatory tone into Jesus’s word, we miss the clear picture message: the new Adam on the cursed tree is righting the “woman’s” relationship with the man.

Perhaps the most compelling instance of this curse reversal in the gospel of John is found in chapter 20. Pay close attention, because the details are really what make it pop:

*14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 15 He asked her, “**Woman**, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the **gardener**, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” 16 Jesus said to her, “**Mariam**.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “**Rabboni!**” (which means “Teacher”). 17 Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. **Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’**”*

Here we see it so clearly, the “Man” and the “woman” in the “garden,” where the man calls the woman her by her true name, she listens to the voice of the teacher, and obeys the command given Him from God. This new Genesis in the resurrection garden is a clear reversal and fulfilment of the first Genesis.

A final small note on Genesis 1-3 that will help us as we exegete some of the coming passages where man is called the “head” of the woman. Notice Genesis 2:10 where the one river from Eden divides to become “four heads.”¹¹ The word “head” here is used to describe the origin place for the rivers. In this same sense, Adam is the “head” of Eve; he is the origin place of the woman for she was taken out of him just as the water comes from its river-head.¹²

So as we conclude our exegesis of Genesis 1-3 as it regards the sexes, we leave primarily noting that humanity is created as “one” equally made up of two sexes that are intended to live in an intimate relationship with one another, thus complementing the other to the glory of God. However, a lack of relational intimacy results in a sin and curse that corrupts humanity’s right relationship with God and each other. But Jesus puts an end to this curse, as He does all others, through His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Hopefully the reader can see how Genesis 1-3 opens the door to a Biblical understanding of human sexuality that is both complementarian and egalitarian; though the two words may have been stripped of any real meaning in this interpretation.

It is in following with this logic that I’ve called this interpretation the “redeemed humanity view” of the sexes. The first creation began with humanity made equally and in right relationship toward God and imaging Him to creation and one another, but that rightness was ruined by the curse of sin. However, in the new creation that began when Jesus came, He destroys the curse of sin and so redeems the sexes to a new righteousness toward God and one another.

In subsequent sections, we’ll explore other biblical passages that have the sexes in view and see that the redeemed humanity viewpoint holds up to scrutiny by the rest of scripture and, we’ll come to find that this is the only interpretation that makes sense of *all* of Paul’s statements regarding the sexes in his letters. It is also the only interpretation that leaves us with a blessing for humanity, gives glory to God, and culminates in the gospel of the risen Messiah.

Reiterating the Definition of the Redeemed Humanity Outlook on the Sexes in the Bible

In a Biblical understanding, humanity is created as “one” being. Humanity is made up of two sexes that are the same in essence and designed to live together in an intimate relationship with one another, complementing the other to the glory of God. Though the fall of humankind compromised sexual equality and estranged one another from finding beauty in their complement, God’s intent has always been to make it right; and He ultimately does so in Jesus Christ.

Other Biblical Passages that Clearly Affirm a Redeemed Humanity Viewpoint

As we approach each of the following texts, readers ought to spend the time familiarizing themselves before reading my commentary on them. It should be noted that I do call this section a “commentary” rather than an exegesis, and it will function in such a way. It should also be noted that this is not an exhaustive list of all the times that human sexuality is referenced in the Bible, simply a list of passages that I find notable. It should not be assumed, however, that I’m “picking and choosing” passages that agree with my position, as the section following this one

will be focused exclusively on passages that appear antithetical. So open up your Bibles and let's see what these passages have to say about a redeemed humanity viewpoint on the sexes.

Proverbs 8

The wisdom of Proverbs opens with nine chapters of speeches before launching into large chunks of two-line proverbs. These speeches create for us an image of four contrasting and comparative characters who are calling out to capture the reader's attention. Traditionally they've gone by slightly various names, but we'll call them Lady Wisdom, Lady Folly, the Wise King, and the Royal Fool.

Proverbs 8 is a speech given by Lady Wisdom, wherein she calls out to the reader to listen to her voice rather than the voices of Lady Folly or the Royal Fool. She says it like this:

*8 All the words of my mouth are in righteousness;
There is nothing crooked or perverted in them...
10 Accept my instruction and not silver,
and knowledge rather than choice gold.*

In these ways, and many others, she is claiming that her wisdom is preferable to the Folly of perversion and the Foolishness of trusting in riches (the two primarily successful ploys of her adversarial anti-types).

She then stakes her claim to a cosmically-authoritative role:

*15 By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice.
By me princes rule, and nobles, all who judge rightly.*

Then she goes on to give us her credentials in claiming such authority:

*22 The LORD created me at the beginning of His way,
Before His works of old.
23 From eternity I was established,
from the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth...*

So if we put our observations together we get a claim like this: Lady Wisdom is the forth-going wisdom of God that is and was with God in the beginning, manifesting herself as righteousness in those who accept her instruction in faith, as opposed to the self-centered and sinful lusts of the flesh's calling.

It's not illogical or blasphemous to draw the obvious conclusion: Proverbs 8 almost sounds like a description of Jesus. Indeed it does, and this has been a prominent traditional Christian interpretation of the text for centuries.¹³ In fact, this very passage likely had an influence on the gospel-writer John's opening statements about Jesus, making room for the Church's comprehension of Jesus's personhood in the trinity.¹⁰

Whether or not Lady Wisdom is a type, or pre-incarnate description, of Jesus Christ has been debated for centuries. But one thing is clear, Proverbs describes a female figure with such authoritative and eternal language that it is, in the least, comparable to the Son.

This is important for our discussion because it is a Biblical passage that speaks of God's authority in the highest and most preeminent terms possible and regarding a female figure. One of the main arguments of traditional complementarianism is that God has given males the role of authority in the Church and Christian marriage; this being the man's primary role to bring to humanity as a complement. However, Proverbs 8 shows us that there is Biblically cosmic language depicting the sexes in an image of both complementing and equal descriptions; those of God's Word in John and Wisdom in Proverbs.

To say it differently, the way in which male and female were created to image God is a shadow of the way in which the Word and Wisdom ultimately do so in the scriptures.

Joel 2:28

The second chapter of Joel is a prophetic word to Israel about the coming "army of the north" that would bring a destructive "Day of the Lord" upon them. But this destruction is not assured, Joel invites everyone in the land to humbly and honestly repent of their ways and turn back to God. Joel then paints a picture of the sort of "Day of the Lord" that would come out of such a response, one of bounty in the land, joy and safety for its inhabitants. Then in a climactic moment Joel prophesies:

*28 It will come about after this
That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;
And your sons and your daughters will prophesy,
Your old men will have dreams,
Your young men will see visions.
29 And even on the male and female servants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.*

The prophet here is envisioning a day when the Lord executes full "judgement" upon the people; and because of their repentance, rather than pouring out the cup of wrath, he pours out His Spirit. Notice who receives the pouring out: sons and daughters, male and female servants...so, everyone residing in the blessed land.

This is perhaps a small note to carry on with us, but I think it's a prophetic description of what we've already noticed in John: that when the curse is undone, or on the righteous Day of the Lord, there is a rightness of relationship reestablished between the sexes. This is not a stretch of interpreting. Note in Acts 15, when the Church is debating the place of the gentiles, it is the outpouring of the Spirit upon them *before* they have begun to obey the law that leads the church to discern, "8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. 9 He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith."

It is the outpouring of the Spirit that is the final word and sign to the Jews that the gentiles have been accepted into the Lord's family, the Lord makes no ethnic distinction between them in regard to His Spirit or their chosenness. The prophet Joel seems to indicate that the Lord also makes no distinction based on sex between those whom He lavishly chooses to pour His Spirit upon. So, when Peter quotes this very passage in Acts 2, we see that Peter is interpreting the prophecy as being fulfilled at Pentecost, at that very moment.

This prophetic word gives more credit to the interpretation that God's pronouncement in Genesis 3 is a curse of sexual inequality and a disparity which is undone by the work of Jesus. Now we see that, at Pentecost, human relations are finally redeemed in the indiscriminate outpouring of the Spirit upon His sons and daughters.

Galatians 3:28

The next passage we'll look at is Galatians 3:28. In the opening chapters of the letter to the Galatians Paul addresses salvation about as clearly as he ever does. He first gives his own testimony and credibility to preach the gospel, then he recounts a divide in the church that called to question whether one must follow the law (specifically if one needs to be circumcised) to be saved, and after a discourse about how salvation comes not by the law but by grace through faith in Jesus, Paul springboards into a discourse about what salvation means for the believer. This is where we'll pick up:

25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Here Paul is using metaphorical language to describe what it means when a person is saved by the grace of Jesus through faith. He paints the picture of a child being raised on an estate, one who must follow the rules/law of the home. But as that child grows into an adult, he no longer has to "follow the law", because he is given the estate as his inheritance. However, this whole time the law had been directing him and forming him into the kind of man who has the principles of it written on his heart, such that he can use sound wisdom to run the estate. This is how Paul describes the Law and its relationship to faith; now that Christ has come, the Law is no longer our guardian, because Jesus is the son who inherits Abraham's "estate" of promise.

Paul also explains that Jesus' inheriting of Abraham's promise is the believer's too, because when one is "baptized into Christ" they "put on Christ." Within his metaphor he now uses another metaphor of putting on Christ's identity like one puts on a set of brand new clothes such that their friends would exclaim "you look like a whole new you!" The believer inherits Abraham's promises to the same degree as Christ because, in their baptism of faith, their old

identity has died and they are raised to a new life and identity that is Christ. Then comes perhaps the boldest statement ever made in the ancient world:

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Since the believer's new identity is Christ, they are no longer to be seen as an "other" based on the distinctive categories that the world classifies people with. In the ancient Jewish world the most important distinction was one's Jewish heritage or lack thereof. The other two primary social categories of the day were one's status as being slave or free, and male or female. Those distinctive categories would have determined the degree to which you were eligible to participate in ancient Judeo-Roman social structures. Paul makes it clear, when you are baptized into Christ, you are now seen by God and the Church as a "Son" first and foremost. Paul says it like this:

4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

This is some of the strongest language the Bible has to offer regarding the believer's identity. The claim is clear, because of Jesus, the believer can cry to God as "Father" as much as Jesus did from the cross, because His very Spirit now lives in them. So to the same degree that Jesus inherits the world, (see Esau McCaulley's book "Sharing in the Son's Inheritance" to get a fuller picture of what that means) every believer also inherits it through Him.¹⁴

Romans 8

In my first draft I did not include what I now consider to be one of the strongest passages in argument for the redeemed humanity viewpoint on the sexes – Romans 8. But after revisiting the topic with this section in mind, I found that it offers a profound perspective, though indirectly. But it's actually the indirect nature of the argument that I find so persuasive.

Romans 8 hinges Paul's argument from the earlier chapters of the letter. I'll quickly summarize and certainly oversimplify the letter leading up to chapter eight: everyone stands condemned before God who, having wrath for evil, has justly handed us over to the natural outcome of sin's dominion over us. But God also offers freedom, forgiveness, and His Spirit through Jesus who died with our sin. Uniting in His death frees us from the dominion of darkness, uniting in His resurrection raises us into reconciled life with God. Union with Christ begins when we choose to humbly accept His mercy instead of self-justifying by our own "righteousness."

In chapter 8, Paul starts to unpack what all of that ought to mean for the believer. Beginning in verse 14, he gives some implications of having the Spirit of Christ come to dwell in us when we believe in Jesus:

14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

(A note that this is the NASB 2020 translation but I have removed the words "and daughters" because I believe it is an editorial error. The addition was intended to be inclusive but unintentionally removed the cultural context that, at the time, the heirs of the estate were sons. So saying all are "sons" is not being gender exclusive but is rather elevating everyone to the status of heir, which is consistent with the rest of the passage.)

Paul's argument here is this, all who have the Spirit are the adopted children/heirs of God with Christ. Notice that Paul says "all who are being led..." and then that they are now sons, children, and heirs. In other words, all believers inherit the kingdom of God as co-heirs with Christ because we have been adopted by God as His children.

The passage goes on:

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the eagerly awaiting creation waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

(Again the editorial addition of "and daughters" has been removed)

What does it mean that we are co-heirs with Christ? It means that we will share in His glorious rule and reign when creation is finally set free from its slavery (as we had been) and is born into the freedom of "the glory of the children of God." In other words, God's children will become what we were always meant to be according to Genesis – the images of God ruling over the earth.

In Romans 8, is there any indication that women will rule in a lesser way in God's new creation? Is there any sense that men will have special designations of leadership that women can not attain when the creation is born into this freedom? I would argue no, not at all. In fact, it seems clear that part of Paul's point is that we *all* share an equal status of "sons" and "heirs" when the kingdom of God comes in fullness to set free the creation from its groaning. Paul seems to be clearly stating that, in the new creation, both women and men will be equally considered co-heirs and co-rulers with Christ.

How does this then pertain to the topic of Church leadership and the sexes? The Church is intended to be a microcosm of new creation. (Philippians 3, 2 Corinthians 5) The Church is supposed to be a foretaste of what's to come, the Kingdom of God intersecting with the kingdoms of the world and emerging as a city on a hill – a beacon and a signpost of what's to come.²⁰

If then, in the Kingdom of God, both men and women are considered inheriting sons in whom dwell the same Spirit who advocates for us as His children, and the Church is intended to be an incarnation of that future reality here in the present, then the Church is failing its purpose when it limits the roles that women can attain.

Put another way, if we believe that the Church is created to be the present manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven, then complementarians must argue that women will continue to be submissive to men in the new heavens and new earth reality that Romans 8 refers to.

It seems clear to me that Paul's extremely strong language in these passages shows that he too sees no distinction between the sexes as far as it regards authority in the Church, the Christian home, or in the coming Kingdom. But it's also clear, based on Paul's letters, that he doesn't see human sexuality as something to be thrown out either. He regularly addresses men and women separately and in differing ways. In this way, Paul shows that he is operating within the framework Genesis lays out regarding the sexes. Or, to put it a different way, the redeemed humanity view of the sexes is really a reclamation of the Bible's consistent portrayal of humanity, even in Paul's letters.

So what do we do with the passages where Paul seems to contradict his own strong line of thought in Galatians? What about those where he seems to claim that, though both man and woman are Sons and heirs having "put on" Christ, that one has greater authority or designation for leadership than another? Perhaps a renewed exegesis of these texts is in order, now that we have laid the groundwork and can bring this redeemed category of the sexes with us as we interpret.

Introduction to Exegetical Method

In the section defining the words "gender" and "sexes" I described how difficult it can be to come to a common definition about even some very basic words. There is a lot of work that needs to be done just to have a common ground surrounding a word like "gender" in our own society, how much more work would need to be done then to correctly understand what was meant from words used in ancient or first century texts. There is a severe danger in assuming the definition behind your neighbor's use of the word "gender," and so an even sharper danger when assuming the definition of words or phrases used by a first century Roman Jew. What are we to do?

Biblical scholarship has come up with several systems of study to circumvent such misunderstandings. These systems of study and interpretation are called exegesis. The goal of exegesis is to understand what the author actually intended their words to mean when they were being first spoken or written down. Clearly this work is vital because we do not live in

ancient Jewish or first century roman contexts, so we will not have a shared understanding of their ideas, words, or phrases and thus must work to uncover what they meant at the time.

Last year my church sent me to the Charles Simeon Trust to learn a method they teach to exegete a passage as you're preparing to preach expositively. As I entered the conference incredibly skeptical, I left convinced that theirs is a helpful and needed structure for properly exegeting scripture. Although they do not put forth anything novel (indeed their approach is widely accepted though it has gone by different names) I will none-the-less give a quick overview of their approach to exegesis, which I will be adopting as I work through these passages.

This section is helpful for this thesis because, we will come to see, many of the false interpretations of these passages arise due to an insufficient method of study. So, laying out this method will also give us language to identify where and why misinterpretations occur. This has been incredibly helpful for me, because Paul's letters have so many imperatives and "you" statements, that we easily and frequently skip the exegetical process and move straight from describing what the text says to interpreting what it means for us now. Such a move is the result of insufficient exegetical work and not actually how most pastors approach any other passage of scripture, so we should not be content approaching these texts in such a way either.

The first thing to be aware of when we study a text is our frameworks. In proper study, we should allow the text to create our framework, rather than letting it inform our interpretation of the text. What I mean in this case is, regardless of where you stand on the "egalitarian vs complementarian" spectrum, we should *always* set that conviction to the side (as best we can) when studying the Word, allowing it to speak to us without being filtered through our presuppositions. The best way to start this process: pray for the Spirit to do that work in you.

After asking the Spirit to speak His Word to us, we can approach the text at its surface level. What is it saying? Are there words that aren't clear that maybe we need to do a little digging on? This is the simple first step: read and comprehend the words. It seems simple, but it's a necessary step. Often we'll have a preference regarding a Bible translation when we read, this is the moment where it is usually helpful to seek additional translations or consult another resource like a lexicon. I usually go through the passage on Biblehub.com, taking full advantage of Strong's lexicon on words that could be convoluted or otherwise not straightforward.¹¹

After feeling like we have a comprehension of the actual words, we're ready to begin the exegetical process. Our first goal is to answer the question "what did these words mean to their original audience?" This is not as easy as it may sound. As we've already concluded, words only mean what they mean in a given cultural context. Those meanings can change rapidly, especially when a translation process is involved, when significant time has passed, or when a cultural boundary has been crossed. For a better understanding of this, I'd refer you to a Bibleproject podcast episode that I found helpful: episode 250: *Genesis 1 and the Origins of the Universe - Ancient Cosmology E1*.¹⁰

In order to ascertain a text's original meaning, Charles Simeon Trust determines two vital factors to identify: 1) context 2) structure. Let me unpack each one quickly.

1) Context, which is broken up into several categories:

- Literary Context: answers the question, "what is the rest of the passage saying and how does that affect this section?" Meaning, if we're studying one chapter, or a handful of verses, we must be aware that our smaller

section is set within a larger context, so we will not be able to know the full meaning of this small section without understanding how it works in the larger one. So in this thesis, when approaching the six complementarian proof texts, we will first observe the letter as a whole in which they are found, to see how each verse fits in the entirety.

- Historical Context: answers the question, “what was going on historically that would influence this passage?” There are two sides of this question; first, what is the biblical historical background provided elsewhere in scripture? And second, is there extra-biblical historical context that would help to better understand the audience’s situation? So for this thesis, we are blessed to have the book of Acts for at least some biblically-provided historical context in which each of Paul’s letters is set; we must include this context to provide a proper exegesis. And, we must do diligence to understand the applicable aspects of 1st Century Judeo-Roman culture (as well as the particulars of each church’s location) that may influence Paul’s words.
- Biblical Context: answers the question, “where does our passage seem to be pulling from, directly quoting, or being pulled from/directly quoted elsewhere in Scripture?” The Bible quotes and refers to itself on the regular. When this happens, comparing and contrasting the related sections will give us a more comprehensive understanding of each occurrence that should then influence our interpretation of the passage being studied. For this thesis I’ve already walked through several places where this is happening, such as Genesis 1-3. To rightly understand what Paul is saying in his letters, we must have a solid understanding of where he’s pulling and quoting from.

After the three prongs of context have been identified for a passage, we carry our conclusions with us and move on to identifying the passage’s structure. Knowing the structure of a passage is a vital component of exegesis because it reveals the means by which the author directs the audience to their aim/intent for said passage. Said differently, we as modern readers must track alongside the author’s every step toward their conclusion, observing the route they took to get there. When we’ve done this, we can then synthesize their argument in the way the author intended.

This is not always easy because the Bible contains many genres of literature. Each genre has its own style of constructing an argument and even each author a unique take on the genre. We must not assume that a passage will walk logically from point A to B to C to D and finally conclude with their main message, E. This is not always the case. But after we’ve identified the actual structure of a passage, then we can walk through the argument as the author constructed it. If we do so whilst living within the context we’ve reconstructed for the passage, we should reach its correct interpretation, the message the author intended for their original audience.

This is the work of exegesis; however, a proper interpretation of a given Scripture for us today does not end there. Once we’ve identified the author’s intended message for the audience of their day, we must then identify the theology of the passage. Here we ask questions like “what

is the theology that is being taught, assumed, or setting the foundation in this section?" This takes work, but it's necessary for us to identify the theology of the passage lest we end up with a message sounding like "the Bible says this, so do it." The beauty of Scripture is that God *is* revealing Himself, so to skip this step is to make the Bible be all about us, rather than the revelation of God.

But the beauty of Christian theology is that it is tangibly known in the gospel. So we must allow the underlying, assumed, or taught theology of a passage to move us toward Christ, because it's our conviction that what Jesus said is true when he spoke to the Jewish leaders in John 5 and said, "You pore over the Scriptures because you presume that by them you possess eternal life. These are the very words that testify about Me..." So, because the true God has become incarnate in Jesus, in Him theology finds its physical manifestation and in all scripture.

Another way of saying this is, "how does this passage preach the gospel of Jesus Christ?" Because it is the Christian's conviction that all scripture points to, revolves around, and ultimately finds its gravity in Jesus, we can and must always ask of a passage "how is this illuminated by the gospel?" Or "In what way do we see Jesus glorified here?" Or, my favorite way of asking the question, "if you were running alongside the Ethiopian eunuch's chariot of Acts 8 and he was reading *this* passage, how could the Spirit use you to proclaim the truth about God as it's revealed here?" Asking and correctly answering this question of the passage you're studying is vital because it ensures that your interpretation will be centered around its actual source of weight and meaning: Jesus.

Now, to be clear, I do not mean that every passage of scripture is an allegory to Christ. What I mean is, every passage of scripture contains some element of the good news about the triune God of Love; He is always found there in His Word. So if we are interpreting scripture and cannot seem to find the good news about Jesus within it, either our imaginations are too small, or our interpretation is erring; the Spirit will always lead us to the Son in a right interpretation.

Finally, and only once we have both discerned the author's aim through context and structure and interpreted the biblical theology of the text, can we then apply the passage homiletically to ourselves. This process is rather simple, but it is where the beauty of scripture's unending fount of love and wisdom bubbles out for endless generations. The author's aim, now directed toward and through the theology that culminates in the gospel of Jesus Christ, can be interpreted in a way that applies to us. The important thing in this interpretative step is that we retain the heart of the author's original aim as we move to our own application.

If, at the end of a particular exegesis, it seems that Paul's point in writing a passage is to tell his audience they ought to "live free lives out of the abundant grace you have experienced in Christ;" that should be the main message we receive as well. But the application of that message will be different in every context. For Paul's original audience, their application of that message might be, "to extend Jesus' grace to my neighbors, I won't eat meat sacrificed to idols." For us in our context, that application wouldn't make sense. But it might make sense for us to say "to extend Jesus' grace to my neighbors, I won't pick up extra shifts at work so that I can spend evenings with them." As long as the application is congruent with Paul's aim "live freely out of abundant grace" and coming from the heart of the gospel that "it's from and for the glory of Jesus that grace has come," then it will be a challenge not to apply the aim of the passage correctly.

So, it is with this structure that I will be exegeting the “complementarian proof texts” in the coming section. For each passage we will:

1. Understand the actual words
2. Derive the author’s aim using context and structure
3. Allow the gospel to be the culmination of the passage
4. Apply the text to our context

So in every passage we will follow these steps, for the exegetical process is a safeguard for us to avoid dangerous and false teachings. In all of this, however, I want to acknowledge that it is ultimately *only* the work of the Holy Spirit that can bring about proper Biblical interpretation. So let us walk humbly before our God as we ask Him to do an awesome work in our lives, leading us to love Him more through these passages. Now would be a great time to stop reading and pray.

Introduction to a Redeemed Exegesis of the 6 Major Complementarian Proof Texts

In this section I’ll be exegeting the 6 major “complementarian proof texts” to show that, when properly interpreted, they are indeed congruent with a redeemed humanity viewpoint of the sexes.

Please remember that this is not an attack toward individuals and believers who are humbly seeking to be obedient to the Lord but have landed in another place. It is simply an exegesis of a handful of passages that have been historically misinterpreted due to the existing gender frameworks that have overshadowed the Word, and so prevented us from seeing the right interpretation.

So even if you’re firmly grounded in one of those camps, I would encourage you to humbly set your framework aside and engage in a thought experiment with me. I’ll be the first to admit that what I expected to find before doing this work and what I actually found in doing it were not the same. I actually expected to find myself moved toward either complementarianism or egalitarianism, but in hindsight I should not have been surprised that the Lord moved me away from an interpretation that fuels the plights of human striving and toward the goodness of His grace. So with that, I’d encourage you to grab a Bible and do this work alongside me, rather than just accepting it on its own merit.

1 Timothy 2:8-15

EXEGESIS

To begin our exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:8-15, we need to back up to the top of the letter to get our Literary Context. In chapter 1 we see that Paul is writing this letter to Timothy, his “son in the faith (1:2)” to instruct certain people in the church at Ephesus on proper teachings, because they were teaching “strange” things from the law (1:3) that were leading to a mission-derailment in the church (1:6), rather than correctly interpreting the law as revealing the sinful nature of humans and pointing us to the saving grace of Jesus (1:9, 1:16); which it is the mission of the church to embody and proclaim. (1:15-16)

So in chapter 1, Paul sets Timothy up by describing the conflict going on in the Ephesian church, and in chapter 2 begins outlining the plan he has for Timothy to combat the false teachers. He begins by urging Timothy to pray for all people, specifically those in authority, so that peace may arise in Rome. (2:1-3)

This first instruction gives us a little insight into some of the Historical Context of the time in which Paul writes 1 Timothy. It is clear from the text alone (not to mention the extra-biblical sources that indicate it) that there is some dissension and conflict between the Church and the Roman authorities. It is logical that some of those who give their allegiance to King Jesus would begin to see His Kingdom as being in direct conflict with the emperor's, resulting in conflict between the subjects of each. Paul is being clear, the Church is not to intentionally stir up conflict with governing authorities, but to pray for peace that leads to quiet, tranquil, and godly lives. (2:2)

After all, Paul continues, it is Jesus' heart to save *all* people and that they would come to know the *truth* about God. This is Jesus' heart because He is the God and mediator of *all* people, not just some; that is the message of good news to be proclaimed to everyone. (2:5-7) This is clearly Paul's response to the genealogical speculations from chapter 1. If people were speculating about genealogies, it would be to the end that Jesus is only saving *some* people through *their* lineage.

So if the church in Ephesus is *not* to be speculating or creating dissension, what *are* they to do? Paul goes on and instructs the men of the church to pray, rather than angrily dispute one another. (2:8) Remember, in chapter 1 we saw that false teachers are using the Torah to speculate about nonsense things, when this happens, sharp arguments occur. So what's the solution to nonsensical and heated debates? Paul thinks it is going to the Lord in prayer. He's encouraging these men to seek the Lord for the truth when interpreting the Torah.

Paul then addresses some women in the church who have made it their end to show themselves off with high-end fashion. (2:9) This is not a speculation, we must remember that Paul is writing to an actual church body, so he's going to be addressing the things he sees in that church at that time. Now that doesn't mean there is nothing for us to apply from these texts, but right now we're simply doing the exegetical context work it takes to answer the question "what did this mean for them then?" So he responds by saying, if you want to adorn yourselves beautifully, do it with godly living, that's real beauty. (2:10)

Paul then continues addressing women in the Ephesian church by saying they should receive right instruction with "quiet submission." (2:11) Continuing the exegetical process and using the text to discern the Historical Context, we can clearly discern that some women in Ephesus were being outspokenly wrong about Christian teaching. So Paul is telling Timothy to ask these women to create a proper and undistracted learning space for themselves. We need to note that both in Jewish and Roman contexts, women were not prominently educated, as education was a culturally male-oriented pathway. So Paul is saying something like this: in the Church of Jesus, women are seen as being of equal value to men (Galatians 3) and thus will be equally educated; so it is good that you are now learning about the Law and the Messiah, but right now you don't have the systemic educational background required to properly interpret. So don't jump to conclusions and start trying to be teachers in the Church when you don't really know what you're talking about yet. (2:12)

We know this is the right interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11-12 for two reasons:

1) the word Paul uses in verse 12 for “I do not allow (or permit)” is never used in a permanent sense in the Greek Lexicon.¹⁵ In other words, he is not saying “I never allow...” But instead a more helpful translation would be, “in the moment of my writing I do not allow...” Indeed, we must remember that “in the moment of my writing” is precisely the moment he is writing for. He likely did not know that his letters would be canonized into scripture for generations to read, and that’s not bad, but it is precisely the reason we must properly exegete his letters.

This better understanding of Paul’s impermanent direction perfectly fits the context of the Ephesian church, and indeed any church of the 1st century world where women are first being handed an unparalleled equality of status and access to education. It would be wise for Paul to ban women from teaching for a time, until they’ve submitted to accept the fullness of right teaching and can thus lead properly. The same wisdom is used later on in 1 Timothy 3 when he warns that overseers must not be new converts (“lest they become conceited and fall into condemnation incurred by the devil” another way of saying “lest, in their arrogance, they be deceived to false teaching.”)

Paul differentiates women in general and new converts because they are separate issues. Paul, when he was a new convert, was able to transfer his Torah education to see Jesus clearly, but it took at least three years to fully process the messianic Lordship of Jesus, as he notes in Galatians 1. But he had been trained up in Torah and Greek education since childhood, so, though there was a growth period, he had only to reorient his Jewish categories of messiahship to Jesus’ revelation of them. This would be the reorienting process that all new converts would have to go through, however, for women of the 1st century there would be a much greater period of education required for them to be at a place to teach and lead.

So we can see the intention is not “I will never permit women to teach or exercise authority over a man” but “right now, I do not permit it.” I could also note that Paul does say “I do not” not “God does not,” another reason to support an impermanent translation.

2) the reference to Adam and Eve, when set within the interpretation of Genesis we covered earlier, makes the most sense within the context of a temporary ban. Whenever I’ve pressed a complementarian about verses 14-15, a certain amount of “honest troubling” enters the conversation. Perhaps I’m fortunate, but I’ve never heard a pastor confidently and happily admit that women are more prone to deceit than men or that they’ll be “saved through childbearing,” which one must logically argue if the reference is to support a permanent ban of women in teaching/authority roles. No, they’re not ready to admit that women are more prone to deceit because they know from experience that it is not true. Nor are they ready to proclaim “women are saved through childbearing” because they know the great harm that such a narrative has caused for women in the church and aren’t ready to perpetuate it. So what does Paul mean, why bring up Genesis here? This brings us to our Biblical Context.

As we’ve already covered, Paul is living in a tradition that has noted Eve’s error when reciting God’s command to the serpent. So Paul is recounting the story; Adam came first and was the first to receive the command from God, Eve then received it secondarily and second-hand in that it was passed from Adam to her. Eve clearly did not *know* the command as sufficiently as she should have, thus falling into deceit when it was challenged. She then sinned against God and gave the fruit to Adam who was with her; her lack of knowledge led not only to her sin but the sin of another, and so sin multiplied. From this we can see the extreme danger in

one with insufficient knowledge wielding authority to teach; it leads to cascading sin. This danger is precisely why Paul uses such strong language to prevent it.

So for verse 14, Paul is helping ensure that the church in Ephesus does not fall into the same error as Eve, but rather that the women in the church would receive the teaching with “entire submissiveness,” not partial understanding that leads to misguided interpretation. Paul is not advocating for a permanent submission of women to men, but a temporary one and only to the extent that it regards proper teaching. This kind of submission would mirror the intended obedience of Adam to correctly pass on God’s command and Eve’s submission to fully receive God’s Word to her given through the man.

So we must continue in our line of thought when interpreting verse 15. In doing so, I see two possible interpretations:

1) It is not “women” that will be saved through childbearing, but Paul is talking about the “woman” threadline that we covered in Genesis and John. That the “woman” Eve will be saved when she faithfully waits for the “woman” Mary who bears the child, Jesus, that breaks her curse. So Paul is encouraging women to have the same faith as Eve that their ultimate redemption will come because God is faithful, just as he’s proved in Christ.

2) Paul now moves from talking about Eve to using her as an analogy for women at Ephesus. So what will rescue “women” from the same fate as Eve? In Paul’s context, he contends that, for a time, women should redirect their aspirations for leadership to the place where they already have it; focusing on raising their children in faith, love, and holiness. Again I must stress that, because this is *not* permanent, Paul is not saying “a woman’s worth is only found in raising children.” What he’s saying is “your aspirations to lead are good, but you’re not ready to lead in the church’s teaching yet. But you know who you are ready to lead? Your family.” We know that it is not Paul’s intention to constrain women to being the “homemaker wife” because we see him commend many women for leading the Church in other places, like Phoebe in Romans 16.

Interpreting this section with a redeemed humanity view is validated as correct because it alone makes the transition into chapter 3 more sensible. “Women are not yet ready to take the mantle of leadership in the church at Ephesus, they need more time to be trained up properly; their time will come like God promised, so they should wait faithfully as Eve did. But if they do aspire to leadership, they can do so even today by leading their family first and foremost. Now, if a man aspires to leadership that’s a good thing, but even if they have been trained up in the faith, there are other leadership parameters as well...”

So now that we have the context set for a right interpretation, the structure of the passage reveals itself. It is a two part structure that leads logically into chapter 3. The first part is addressing the men of Ephesus in 2:1-8, encouraging them to pray for peace for all people rather than causing dissension and conflict for them. The second is addressing the women of Ephesus in 2:9-15, encouraging them to live godly lives, be good and humble learners, and to lead their families in the faith.

AUTHOR’S AIM BASED ON EXEGESIS

So then, Paul’s message to “them then” is this: men, pray and be peaceable; Jesus’s Kingdom is one of peace and saving grace for *all* people. Women, rather than using your status

of equality in Christ for your own adornment and ambition, walk humbly before the church and focus on leading where you already are, but in godliness.

THEOLOGY AND GOSPEL PREACHING

The beauty of a right interpretation of scripture is that it always directs the focus to the good news about Jesus Christ. Here, we see that truth shine vibrantly because the passage has been properly exegeted. This is a litmus test for right interpretation: if it doesn't exalt and shine the light on Jesus, it's a poor interpretation of the text. Here, when examining the author's aim, we see two beautiful truths of the gospel glowing:

- 1) Paul's first point is an application of the Gospel as revealed in Luke 2:14, namely that Jesus's Kingdom is here and it brings peace and salvation for *all* people
- 2) Paul's second point is an example application of his understanding of how Jesus's incarnation moves us to live, which he iterates wonderfully in Philipians 2:5-7; that Jesus uses His authority not for selfish ambition, but for humble and truly-loving servanthood. As His body then, and being clothed with Christ, we also live in such a way.

That is how you preach the gospel of Jesus from 1 Timothy 2, and when you do, it bears implications that are so much more profound than "men should pray" and "women should be godly homemakers," because it is rooted in and directed toward the truths of the gospel.

HOMILETICS AND SERMON OUTLINE

I'm not going to spend a ton of time here, because this is where the local pastor's work really must take over. No single application is the "right" one for every church, that's why we have local pastors and encourage them to do the exegetical work for themselves; they can see how the gospel shines through this passage and into their own church's context. But if I were preaching this text, I would follow the structure that has been established and preach a two-point sermon to this effect:

- 1) I would first iterate Paul's aim for the men of the Ephesian church to pray for peace, then explain that this application blossoms out of the gospel of Jesus Christ by turning to Luke 2, where I would preach the gospel that Jesus's Kingdom is here and it is for the salvation of the world. Then I would move to encourage my congregation to give their allegiance to Jesus and, for those who have done so, to lay down the arms they wield for culture-warring and take up praying for the peace and saving grace of Jesus to come to our community.
- 2) Secondly, I would iterate Paul's aim for the women of the Ephesian church, then direct us to the truth that his second application is also rooted in the gospel of Jesus by turning to Philipians 2 and preaching the good news of the humble glory of Jesus' incarnation. I would close by encouraging my congregation that we, as the Church, do have great authority to use because of our adoption as sons, but we must only use that authority like Jesus did: to humbly love and serve others, directing them to the glory of God.

In this sermon outline we see the incredibly practical and beautiful gospel of Jesus at work in the Church, because it's a sermon built on a proper exegesis of the text which, when applied, shines the light on Jesus and brings a blessing to everyone, a curse to none.

1 Corinthians 14:34-36

EXEGESIS

To begin our study of this next passage, I'll give a quick overview of the historical context into which 1 Corinthians is set. This is Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth. Corinth was a wealthy, religiously-eclectic port city in ancient Rome. Paul helped establish this church, which we can read about in Acts 18, and stayed there for a year and a half to support its early life. After moving on to other cities and churches, Paul got some reports about certain things that were not going well in the Corinthian church. This letter is Paul's response to those problems. I'll once again note that all of this historical context can be found within the Bible itself.

We can now move to a quick synopsis of the whole letter, which will provide us the literary context we need to understand our passage. Paul divides his letter in a very straightforward way, with each section addressing one of the problems he heard about in the reports. His structure in each section is the same, and goes like this 1) an acknowledgement of the reported problem 2) pointing the church to a truth about the gospel of Jesus 3) explaining how that gospel truth can be applied to resolve the problem. Here's a quick summary of each problem and how/where he addresses them:

Chapters 1-4 are addressing some divisions occurring within the church because the people were only listening to the teachers/speakers they prefer. Paul's response is that the community of the church is to be united around Jesus, not divided over favored personalities.

Chapters 5-7 is about the sexual immorality going on in the church and the fact that some people were excusing it on the basis of God's endless grace. But Paul reminds them that Jesus paid the price for sin, so they should not take lightly the weight of that which he bore upon his shoulders for them. Paul then goes on to remind them that their bodies will be resurrected with Christ. So if their bodies will be raised up, in light of their eternal value, they should treat them with respect and integrity today.

Chapters 8-10 are about a dispute the church was having regarding whether or not they can/should eat meat that has been sacrificed in temples to other gods. Paul directs them to be as publicly clear as possible in their allegiance to Jesus; so if there's anything (like eating food sacrificed to idols) might confuse their neighbor about where they give their allegiance, they should avoid doing it. Their actions should always be moved by Christ's love for God and for others.

Chapters 11-14 (where our passage occurs) is about the weekly worship gathering. Their gatherings were getting chaotic and disorganized because people were speaking and prophesying over one another without any semblance of order. But Paul says that the Church should function not chaotically, but in harmony like a human body; each member performing its function for the building up of the Church. What's more, every aspect of the weekly gathering should be compelled by the love of God and others, rather than getting one's own time in the spotlight or having some highly-spiritual experience.

Chapter 15 is about the reality of the resurrection. Some people in the church were trivializing the resurrection and saying it is not a vital part of the gospel. Paul, however, says that the resurrection is indeed an indispensable part of the gospel and tells the church that they must hold on to its literal truth. For Paul, it is the thing that gives the church their hope, their worldview, and the strength they need to live in the ways Paul has called them to in the previous sections.

The last chapter closes the letter with some thoughts on the collection of money that Paul is taking up for the church in Jerusalem, some details on his imminent plans, and a personal greeting from the people with him.¹⁰

Now that we have a literary context into which this passage is set, we can note that there is one main piece of Biblical context we will need for verse 34, in which Paul makes mention of the “Law.” The interesting thing about this reference is that Paul does not mention what specific part of the law to which he is referring. This leads some, such as NT Wright in his podcast “Ask NT Wright Anything,” to believe that Paul is once again referring to the order revealed in the Law of Genesis 2.¹⁶ This understanding makes a lot of sense, because he has referred to the same passage in other letters and it seems to be his main argument for why women should be “subject” or “submissive” in the context of the worship gathering at his time of writing. With that said, we will once again be utilizing the work we’ve already done regarding Genesis 2 and Paul’s interpretation of it as our Biblical context.

One final piece of historical context that NT Wright brings up in that same podcast is that it is quite possible, probable even, that women in the first century were not only uneducated as regards Torah and philosophy, but also lacking in Koine Greek which the worship gatherings may have been conducted in. So the women would not have been able to understand the teaching until they got home to ask their Koine Greek speaking husbands.¹⁶ This knowledge will help us make sense of what Paul says in verse 35.

With the context now in hand for our passage, we’ll examine the structure of the text. It is clear that this section of Paul’s argument does not begin at verse 34, but in verse 26. When we begin there, we see that Paul is hinging off of the previous section to continue to give instruction regarding the worship gathering and how it should be conducted. Previously, he was addressing some members of the body who were speaking in tongues, but to no sort of edification for the church body.

So Paul opens the next section, starting in verse 26, saying ‘here are some guidelines to maintain order during worship gatherings, and to ensure that the body is always being edified during worship, rather than confused by the chaos.’ He then lays out some guidelines in verses 27-32 that can be summed up as ‘so whatever gift you bring to the gathering, it should only be used for the building up of, and kept in check by, the other members of the body. Tongues must have interpreters, prophecies must be subject to other prophets, and everyone who wishes to speak should take their own turn.’

Why should the gathering function according to these principles? Verse 33 answers, because God brings peace and not disorder.

Paul then continues stressing order in the worship gathering with a note about the womens’ behavior in verses 34-36. His instruction here follows this line of thought:

- Women should remain silent in the gathering

- Instead of speaking, they should subject themselves to the teaching being given
 - Which is what the Law said (in Genesis 2)
- (But since they may not be able to understand the teaching at the gathering) if a woman *does* want to learn, she should do so by asking her husband to teach her about it at home
 - For it would be shameful for her to speak in the church (without having learned properly first)
 - (This is what Genesis 2 taught us, remember?) Did the word of God go forth from you? Or did it come from you?

Once again this logical flow only makes sense if we bring along a right interpretation of Genesis 2 with us. Paul says that the women in those 1st century churches should stay silent in the gatherings and subject themselves to the teaching being given, because of the Law. What does the law say? He concludes in 36 by restating; the law says it is shameful for a woman to speak without having submitted to proper teaching. Once again, Paul is trying to protect the Church from shame and error that results from women hastily wielding their new-found equality. To make his point, he once again references Genesis and reminds them that the Lord's teaching did not come forth from woman or be given to her, but to the man. So when the woman then did not submit to the full teaching that the man passed on to her, she was deceived. So, just as in 1 Timothy, Paul instructs the women at that time to learn in a space that allows them to fully receive the teaching they need before attempting to speak in the gathering and so bring shame to the Church by teaching out of a deception caused by their educational lack.

But, again, that space is not the worship gathering at this time; remember that women then may not all be able to understand the teaching because of their insufficient education as it regards Koine Greek. So, what should they do? Verse 35 is Paul's answer, "wait til you get home and ask your husband to teach you what was being taught." Notice that Paul doesn't simply say "ask your husband to teach you" but "ask your husband *at home*." This is a key piece to understanding why Paul says what he says here, because this section is about keeping order in the gathering. Paul *wants* women to be able to learn and be taught, but knows that their educational deficit would create an environment where no one is actually edified because there are so many clarifying questions being asked. So Paul's solution is to maximize time in the gathering by having the women stay quiet while they're there, but also creating a space for them to learn at home where they will not be disrupting the order of worship.

After addressing the clear problems women face in the 1st century church gathering, Paul warns the Corinthians in verse 37-38 to heed all these guidelines about orderly worship because they are from the Lord.

He then closes by restating his purpose for this section in 39-40 by saying 'so it's good to prophecy and speak in tongues, but do it all in a way that is proper and orderly.'

Before moving on, I want to again use this section to show the importance of grounding Biblical interpretation in proper and sufficient exegetical work. Without doing this work, this passage becomes impossible to use for the good of the church or to point to the glory of Jesus. Once again, I am so thankful that I've never heard a pastor insist on a literal interpretation of this entire passage or prevent women from speaking at all on Sunday mornings, but unfortunately I

know that it does happen. Yet, I have heard pastors refer to this passage when backing their complementarian views, but walking back some on the “women should be silent” portion. This is part of the problem I’ve noticed with complementarian interpretation; it tends to point to *some* scripture as if it is absolutely clear regarding God’s intent for women in the Church, but then is forced to acknowledge that either 1) Paul doesn’t *totally* mean what he says or 2) even though he does mean it, we just don’t really apply it those parts in our context. Proper exegesis removes the tension, not as an “easy way out” but rather as the intended way forward.

AUTHOR’S AIM BASED ON EXEGESIS

Having now sufficiently exegeted the passage, Paul’s aim is doubly clear. He gives us his purpose statement in verses 39-40 and the “why” in verse 33: when you gather, use your Spiritual gifts for the edification of the Church in a way that is orderly, because our God is the God of peace and order, so your church gatherings should model that.

THEOLOGY AND GOSPEL PREACHING

One great thing about this passage is that verse 33 explicitly lays out at least part of the theology that motivates Paul’s words in this section. Paul believes that the God he serves is a God of peace and not disorder. Since Paul already seems to be referencing Genesis in verse 34, I think it’s fair to say that Genesis would also be a good place to turn regarding God’s nature as one who brings order and peace. The Spirit that worked peace into creation works now within the Church/believers who are new creations, moving us to live by His order and His peace.

Of course, the full revelation of God’s order and peace is found in Jesus. It is only because of Jesus that the world may truly know order and peace; because He has defeated sin and Satan, the sower of discord, and conquered death, peace’s truest adversary.

Turning one chapter over to 15:20-28 reveals a deeper look into the theology of Jesus’ resurrection to which Paul points as the reason for his instructions here for the Corinthian church. It is this understanding of the resurrection that moves Paul’s application in every section of the letter, and so should be the center point from which we preach the gospel in 1 Corinthians and the root from which its applications grow out.

HOMILETICS AND SERMON OUTLINE

So with all of this work done, we can finally move to a quick sermon outline and application section that I would structure something along these lines:

- 1) I would begin with verse 26, making Paul’s point that the church gathering in Corinth was becoming about individuals doing things just for their own religiosity. But, continuing into verses 27-32, that it’s intended to be a place where everyone brings their gifts before the Lord and toward one another, to build up the Church. Turning back to 1 Corinthians 12 would be helpful to make this point as Paul sees it, ensuring that it points toward Jesus’ glory as he lays it out there. I would then reiterate that our weekly gatherings are still for the building up of the church to the glory of Jesus; so if our hearts aren’t there, we need

to humbly repent and then ask the congregation to consider “what do I bring to build up the church and glorify God? How am I gifted for such a purpose?”

- 2) I would then ask the question, “why is this the way the church ought to function? What is the heart behind it?” and show Paul’s belief that it’s because of the gospel. I would then follow his lead and preach the gospel of Jesus’ resurrection, starting in verse 33 and turning to 15:20-28 (and maybe Genesis if I have the time to show how Jesus is the fulfillment of the plan set out from the beginning). I would then move toward a theological application that God desires His Church to be one that lives out of the peace He has won and given to us, giving Him glory by submitting ourselves to His rule and reign.
- 3) I would use that last part about “giving him glory by submitting ourselves to Him” to transition into verses 34-38 and carefully walk through it, explaining the “why” behind Paul’s words in the first two verses, by pulling in the context we’ve already discussed, to point out that he is not permanently banning women from participating in worship but warning those in Corinth of the danger and shame that comes with jumping up to teach without first being humble and patient enough to be taught the full truth of Jesus from those who have already received and are teaching it properly. For, as we saw in 15:20-28, Jesus does not take the Kingdom for His own, but gives it over to the glory of the Father; and so should we in the Church. I would then conclude this section by giving the same warning as Paul does in 37-38. (this could be its own point worthy of more attention, if the pastor felt they have a greater need to address it with their congregation).
- 4) I would finally conclude with 39-40, showing that Paul does not want to have his previous point discourage the Corinthians from using their gifts, but that he simply wants them to approach their gatherings with humility and to employ their gifts for the good of the body, to God’s glory. In this, I would encourage my congregation that they too have been gifted by the Spirit and serve Jesus (perhaps referencing 1 Corinthians 12); so, like Paul says, eagerly pursue those good things while examining your own heart and walking humbly alongside the brothers and sisters in the same way.

Once again we can see that this section, when properly exegeted and interpreted, is incredibly practical for the Church and can open up very specific conversations around what is meant to occur when we gather together. It sets up helpful frameworks for the Church to work within that keep us healthy by ensuring we are using our gifts for the good of others and being grounded in the truth of the gospel, all while encouraging us that we are gifted by the Spirit to build up one another and give glory to God.

Ephesians 5:21-33

Before jumping into this passage, I do want to make a quick note about its nature. I wasn’t sure if I wanted to include this passage in my thesis, because it may actually fall outside of its scope. If you’ll recall, the aim of this study is really geared toward men and women’s roles *in the Church*. This section of Ephesians however, actually has no bearing on Church leadership, but is 100% aimed at life in the home. Nonetheless, I’ve decided to include it in this

thesis, because I think it is relevant to the overarching conversation regarding the sexes in Christian life; and it is a passage that complementarians point to in support of their argument.

EXEGESIS

The letter from Paul to the Ephesians deserves as much literary context time that a pastor can give to their congregation during each sermon. It is artfully crafted and, because of Paul's deliberate combination of poetry and prose, must be sufficiently cared for when working through it exegetically. So, we will attempt to do precisely that.

Chapter 1's main thrust is a poem proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ who fulfills the Father's promised plan to bring all things into unity under His name. Paul says that God is now reaping the first-fruits of this reality through the Holy Spirit's work of uniting Jew and gentile alike to be "one" in the family of God. And the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead now lives in the body of believers.

Chapters 2 and 3 unpack this good news for gentiles specifically by showing how it is by God's grace that they have been saved from their death and exile away from God and are now raised to resurrection life that, in Jesus, brings a new way of living and a new family to belong to. So, Paul writes about experiencing all of this first hand, giving glory to God for such an honor, and praying that the Ephesian church would see the honor they now have to know God's love for them.

So chapters 1-3 together create this amazing picture of Paul's theology and comprehension of the gospel as it is affecting the unity of the Church. Chapters 4-6 are then the applications he sees that will blossom out of such a resurrection life and worldview. In these chapters then, we see Paul doing homiletics for the Ephesian church! We should pay close attention to how he does this and allow it to form our approach as well.

Paul begins by building on the "unity" aspect of the gospel stated in chapter one, which he emphasized by pointing out the Church's place as a new family that's composed of both Jew and gentile. Paul concludes that the Church is to be "one". But the beauty of this is that the unity of Abraham's family is not through appropriation or cultural replacement, but something more like infusion. Said differently, the Church is to be a family where everyone brings their unique diversity *with* them, and is so specially able to contribute; but no distinction of value should occur based on the individual's gifts. They are all to be "one" in Christ.

So after unpacking the Church's "oneness" Paul explains what it should look like practically. The reality is, no society has ever lived with this sort of sociological value-system. What's more, because the Church is to function as a community within a larger "secular" society, the Ephesians will have to be "one" in a way that is prophetically counter-cultural but not rebelliously so. This is a difficult line to walk, so Paul spends the rest of his letter giving help and guidance on what it looks like for the Ephesians to live in such a sub-community that considers one another to be equal all while embodying Christ's humility. For Jesus, though having equality with God, used His authority for the building up of others rather than Himself.

So that's the buildup to our passage, and we should keep that with us as we seek to understand and correctly interpret 5:21-33. But another very important piece to interpreting this section is to ensure that we do not detach it from the rest of the argument. What I mean is, Ephesians 6:1-9 is clearly a continuation of Paul's argument that he began in chapter 5. We've

been done a great disservice by well-meaning biblical organizers who put a chapter break in the middle of this argument, because it makes it seem as though we ought to stop at the end of chapter 5 and consider the implications of such a section apart from what follows. However, when we continue Paul's argument into chapter 6, it becomes clear that he is using a rhetorical strategy where he bounces back and forth between addressing a party with little-to-no social influence and then to those who would have been culturally considered their superiors. Paul addresses wives and then their husbands, children and then their fathers, slaves and then their masters.

This observation leads us straight into historical background, because there is a social hierarchy implied here that Paul is speaking directly into. 1st Century Roman society was patriarchal; the father held the authority (was "the head" as Paul puts it) in his household. One PBS article says this "Defined by the men in their lives, women in ancient Rome were valued mainly as wives and mothers. Although some were allowed more freedom than others, there was always a limit, even for the daughter of an emperor. Not much information exists about Roman women in the first century. Women were not allowed to be active in politics, so nobody wrote about them. Neither were they taught how to write, so they could not tell their own stories."¹⁷

So, women in 1st century Rome had essentially no political influence and, since Rome staked its identity on political life, therefore considered to have very little social value at all. The same was true for children and slaves at the time. When we recognize this, we'll notice a pattern in Paul's letters of specifically addressing these three marginalized populations. This is intentional and thus vital for correct interpretation of Paul's thought in those sections. But along with socio-historical context, there is one historical event recorded in the Bible that is also valuable to include.

Acts 19 tells a story about a wild riot that took place in Ephesus. Paul was preaching the gospel in the city and hundreds of people were turning from sorcerous practices to faith in Jesus. As a result, the craftsmen of Ephesus who specialized in crafting house-hold and temple idols were losing a lot of business. So one of those businessmen rallied the other tradesmen to stir up the town and make a public statement that Jesus is no match for their god, Artemis. After stirring up a crowd, the whole town was spun into an uproar with an hours-long chanting session to exalt Artemis and perhaps drown out the gospel of Jesus.

This story is an important piece of background because it shows that there is some imminent hostility toward Christians in Ephesus. They were seen as a group that was 1) directly opposed to the chief god of the city and 2) economy ruiners. In 1st century Rome, any group associated with those two identifying factors would have been considered a band of treasonous rebels. So that will be an important piece of historical context to understand the atmosphere Paul is writing into when he writes to the Ephesian church; it underpins the way he speaks to them and the directions he gives for public church assembly and practice.

Finally, one piece of Biblical context, that is most plainly stated in Paul's letter to the Galatians, is again vital for our understanding. As Paul says in chapter 3, he sees everyone who believes in Jesus as someone whose old identity (the one that society would give them) is gone and their new identity is that as a "son of God," because they are baptized into and now "clothed" with Christ. So Paul has this idea that, in the church, there is no social hierarchy because we all share in Christ's identity. With this statement he is making a direct attempt at

shattering the social structure that the early church lives in, but here in the letter to the Ephesians he speaks practically. Paul recognizes that, in the context we've already seen in Ephesus, there could be some very unwise results of a church that publicly practices (and outwardly wields) "oneness" and disregards the social hierarchy that they live in.

The Ephesian church has already been given the distinction of treasonous rebels, now they could be in danger of bringing an even greater violent reaction upon themselves, if they were to publicly defy the social order as well. So, what should the church do? Paul gives some guidance in this section, which we will now see has a clear structure that must too be noted.

Verse 21 stands apart as a sort of transition and thesis hermeneutic for the whole following section 'submit to *one another* in the fear of Christ.' What does that mean exactly? Well, Paul will spell it out practically: verses 22-33 address the Ephesian wives and husbands, with the first 3 verses directly addressing the wives and the following 9 verses directly addressing the husbands. Notice that he *starts* by addressing the wives who, in the cultural context, would have had no political influence but spends only a small section aimed toward them, simply asking them to submit to their husbands. But the bulk of this first section is addressing how men ought to use their inherent cultural power in the relationship; they should give up their privileged lives in love for their wives, like Christ does for the Church.

Verse 32 is perhaps the most important piece of the whole section as Paul lays out his true intention - a Christian marriage should give us a glimpse into the love and sacrifice that Jesus has for the Church. How so? When we combine the cultural context with the context of the passage, it becomes clear. It would take every bit of sacrificial love, a Christlike amount, for a husband to raise up his wife to the level of an equal in every respect. This is the level of equality that God had designed in Genesis 1. So to get over all the cultural and systemic barriers, to sacrifice image, time, and effort, to love a wife so selflessly that she would be brought up to equality in the Church and before the world...it would look like a shadowy picture of what Jesus had to do to raise a Church out of a world of dead sinners and give them equality with the Son of Heaven. And this is precisely what Paul sees that Jesus has done for us, he only just said so in Ephesians 2:6-7.

Paul continues his argument into chapter 6, where verses 1-4 address children and their parents. Verse 1 asks that children submit to (obey) their parents, then he gives a little incentive that any child would cling to in verses 2-3. Verse 4 then addresses fathers and directs their attitudes toward their children; moving them away from wielding their household power authoritatively in the home, and directing them instead to the fear of the Lord.

Finally, Paul uses the same logic to address slaves and masters. 6:5-8 ask slaves to submit (be obedient) to their masters sincerely, because ultimately they serve God. Then, he addresses masters with the same exact theology; saying 'don't wield your authority over them, as if you don't both ultimately serve the same God.'

AUTHOR'S AIM BASED ON EXEGESIS

So with this structure and context before us, it becomes much clearer what Paul is doing. Paul is helping the church navigate the dual-reality that they live in. On the one hand, they do

live in a social context where there is a hierarchy of power/headship that must be carefully navigated, given the hostility that's already aimed at the Ephesian church. But on the other hand, all believers are one in Christ so there is no power to wield in the church when they place their identities in Him. So how should they all act? Well, those without socio-political power shouldn't be social anarchists. They should live peaceably in public and not attempt to undermine their Roman context and bring further hostility upon the church. On the other hand, those with socio-political power/cultural roles of headship ought to live prophetically in their society, in such a way that they publicly treat their political "subjects" as their equals. Why? Because they *are* equals in the Lord, and that is how Jesus loves the Church. So the socially privileged in the Church should serve each other in love at the expense of their status.

THEOLOGY AND GOSPEL PREACHING

Ultimately, Paul believes that Jesus has all the power, because all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him...but with that, Paul sees something incredible and formative; it's what Jesus does with his power and status as God. He laid it all down to save the weak. We are all actually powerless until Jesus saves us. But Jesus also gives us the adoption as sons by which we *all* cry Abba, Father. Meaning, when we're adopted into His family, we all put on the identity of Christ; so, in the Church, there ought to be no political hierarchy.

Once again, when we have the exegesis correct, this section transforms before our eyes from something that can sound marginalizing or, at best simply "instructive," to a section that is filled with practical theology and finds its "yes" in the good news about Jesus. Preaching the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus becomes so accessible now: God is so loving, that He gave up his royal throne on high to not only dwell among us, but to *serve* us and ultimately give up his life entirely so that we might be with Him in a loving and intimate relationship. Through His resurrection, He has raised us to new life in Him; one that calls God "Father" and those in the church "brother."

HOMILETICS AND SERMON OUTLINE

So for the homiletics of this sermon, I would begin off of the back of the context, theology, and gospel and then address the same two parties as Paul but in umbrella categories: those with socio-economic/political power in my context, and those without.

I would begin, like Paul, addressing those without socio-economic/political power in my context and let them know that their marginalized social identity is not what defines them in the eyes of God. Jesus came to save them and to give them a new identity as a child of God. Be careful though that you don't get puffed up with pride because of that. Lashing out at your culture because of your marginalization is a good way to get shut down. Instead, diligently love those around you even when they do wield their authority over you. Remember, ultimately they have to answer to a God who gave up all of His power and still reigns victorious over the authorities of darkness, so put your hope in Him. And remember, you're not doing this alone, you have the Church family!

And as for those that do have privilege and status in my context: live like Jesus! Your identity is found in Him as well, not your privilege. So, live prophetically in the world and go out

of your way to serve those who are marginalized, even at the expense of your own comforts and status. And remember, you will account to the Lord for what you do with the social status you have, so be humbled and know that when you *do* love those around you in the love of Christ, it is to His glory.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

EXEGESIS

There was some amount of strategy in placing this passage directly following our previous one because it builds on some of the context that was given beforehand; namely the historical context regarding womens' status in 1st Century Rome and Paul's instructions for them and other socially unprivileged people not to publically wield their freedom in Christ to intentionally defy cultural norms, so stirring up hostility toward the church.

With that bit of congruent historical context, there is some linguistic incongruence here that *contrasts* with the previous section. In Ephesians, Paul uses the word "head" in its most standard contemporary sense to mean "at the top authoritatively," then encourages those who do have such cultural headship to lay down their authority like Christ for the Church. However, it's clear that Paul is turning the linguistic diamond on the word "head" in 1 Corinthians to bring in an additional meaning that we saw earlier in Genesis 2, that being "source." This isn't linguistic gymnastics, it's actually made quite clear by simple observation from the passage itself; verse 8 says "for man does not *originate* from woman..." and then 12 "For as the woman *originated* from the man, so also the man has his *birth* through the woman; and all things *originate* from God." So in verse 3 he uses the word "head" to engage his readers with its common definition, then in those later verses specifies the extended metaphor that he intends the word to carry alongside it in this passage.

Additionally, there's some clear cultural context to address in this section. Paul simply states as a known fact that it is "disgraceful" for a man to pray with his head covered (or perhaps "with long hair," the Greek is a bit vague), and conversely "disgraceful" for a woman to pray with her head uncovered, and also a disgrace for a woman to have a shaved head. These plain cultural disgraces have no significance in my culture, so I am missing some needed context. Luckily, that cultural context is rather plain, in that Paul states it. In his context, it was disgraceful for men to pray or prophesy with a covered head and similarly disgraceful for a woman to do so without a head covering.

In this passage, Paul again uses Genesis 1 and 2 as reference for his arguments, so those will be important to hold fast as biblical context for this section.

Literarily, this passage arises toward the beginning of a longer section (chapters 11-14) that is overall addressing how the Corinthian church ought to conduct their gatherings. Paul has been addressing several topics in the letter that were clearly being debated by the Corinthian church, thus requiring this guidance from Paul. In previous chapters, the letter addresses divisions in the church, Christian sexual life, how Christians should handle cultural practices regarding food, and then these disputes around how to conduct the gathering. In every section, he's moving his argument forward to its ultimate source of weight: the resurrection of Jesus (which he unpacks in chapter 15).¹⁰ Paul's final argument is this; it is with hearts transformed by

the resurrection of Jesus that the Church ought to conduct themselves. This letter is how Paul sees that theological statement working out practically for the Corinthians.

Such literary context is vital for proper exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Each section of Paul's letter is addressing an issue that the Corinthians can't agree on, or are at least divided on how to approach them. This element of underlying disagreement is vital, because it shows us *why* Paul brings up the issue in this section (whether or not people should cover their heads while they pray). Paul doesn't address it just because it's something he's been thinking about, it's because it's something that the Corinthian church is divided on. This is actually really interesting. If it was such a clear cultural-given that men pray with heads uncovered and women with heads covered, or otherwise be disgraced, why does Paul need to address it in this letter? Clearly, it's because some people in the Corinthian church *aren't* following the cultural norm, their counter-cultural practice is being criticized, and in response to the criticism they're being "contentious" (see verse 16).

This is critical to understand, because it shows that Paul is really aiming at the same thing here that he's been addressing throughout the letter: unity in the Church. More specifically, 'how should the church stay unified while navigating a society that doesn't live in the life of the resurrection? Where is the line between publicly living out the resurrection and being cultural rebels?'

We know this is the direction from which Paul is addressing the issue when we notice that Paul is building off of 1 Corinthians 10:31-33 to launch into this section. There, Paul is essentially saying 'do everything to the Glory of God, but don't offend Jews or Greeks or the Church with your practices. Look at me, I don't do just whatever benefits me, I'm always considering others' presuppositions and bending to them so that I don't offend them in hopes that they'll be more friendly to the gospel. So imitate me in such a mindset, for instance...'

So, again, Paul is making it really clear that what he's about to say regarding prayer and prophecy practices is *not* about being theologically or ecclesially perfect, but actually about going out of our way to be as welcoming and inoffensive toward everyone as possible without compromising the gospel.

Finally, the structure of this passage will also help guide our exegesis. Verse 1 connects us to what was just seen in chapter 10. Verse 2 is a little note of encouragement toward those who aren't being divisive but are practicing self-sacrifice and bending to cultural norms whenever able. Then in verse 3 he gives a bit of the theology that's driving his argument (that will be unpacked in the 'theology' section). Verses 4-7 name the cultural practice that Paul is arguing does not contradict the theology of God and so shouldn't be hostilely opposed. Verses 8-12 then enforce the theology stated in verse 3. Verses 13-15 make a simple appeal to the way that things tend to naturally occur regarding hair style, but ultimately turns the decision making power over to the local church. Finally, verse 16 restates what this whole section is really about; 'whatever decisions you do make, don't be divisive about it.'

AUTHOR'S AIM BASED ON EXEGESIS

With all that in mind then, Paul's point is this: we know that man and woman are made of the same essence and all by God, just like Jesus is of the same essence as God (see the following section to better understand the theology at work here). So, even though there is this

cultural practice of head covering that *seems* to contradict that, it really doesn't. In fact, it highlights the distinguished position that the woman is given in Genesis 2 as God's saving grace for man. So don't make this a divisive issue. Ultimately, Corinthians, you can decide what is proper with this one, but always consider the unity of the Church first and foremost.

THEOLOGY AND GOSPEL PREACHING

As previously alluded to, the theology in verse 3 works in tandem with the way Paul frames it in verses 11-12. Rather than showing an order of *subservience*, Paul is actually pulling on the Genesis 2 creation story (and probably a sort of John 1 understanding of reading Christ back into the creation account) to show the essential *unity* of male and female, just like there is an essential unity between God the Father and Jesus. It's actually highlighting the fact that the woman was brought forth from the man not as one *under* authority, but as one that complements the man in such a way that it makes possible for the two to come together as one and such a uniting even more glorious.

Verses 9-10 work to help us understand. As Paul puts it, 'the woman was created for the man's sake, *therefore* she should have a sign of *authority* on her head.' Clearly the "sake" of man here isn't to be seen as a position of lesser status, but actually an exalted one. The woman was the gift of God to *save* humanity, the gift that was also taken from the man himself; she was made from the same essence, thus she is essentially the same. It's starting to become clear that this understanding actually moves us rapidly toward the gospel of Jesus, highlighting the unification of His deity and incarnation.

Just as the woman was made from the man himself, so Jesus is eternally originating from God in the same essence as God. Just as the creation of the woman out of the man brings humanity to its fuller glory, so the glory of God is fully revealed in the incarnation of Jesus. What is more, Jesus now invites us to share in His communion with the Father because of His resurrection and the work of the Spirit in us when we give our lives to Him. Jesus gives us the adoption as sons by which our spirits cry "Abba, Father" to our God. And as a note, we are all adopted as "*sons*" because the cultural understanding of the role of a son is that they would receive the inheritance. So it's not that women aren't adopted, but that all who are adopted as children of God enjoy the status of a son.

So now it makes sense why these questions about church practice had become so divisive. The early church was operating under a theology that elevated women's status significantly in comparison to their surrounding culture. So the church was grappling with a question that might have sounded like this, 'so we believe men and women are interdependent, all originate from God (and so are equal in His eyes), and that all who give their lives to Jesus enjoy an adoption into sonship. So why do (we 1st Century Christian) men and women practice prayer and prophecy with different dress codes?' Now, with that question fully understood, we can see how Paul's answer regarding head coverings is homiletical, and not universally instructive.

HOMILETICS AND SERMON OUTLINE

After spending time drawing out the theology of how men and women reflect the essential oneness of the triune God and moving to the Gospel of Jesus's incarnation as God's glory made manifest to us in whom we receive the adoption as sons, I would then move to Paul's homiletical section and guide the church to think critically about their identity in Christ and about its effect on one's public and ecclesial practices.

Paul is clearly thinking critically about the places where the surrounding culture intersects with his Christ-centered theology. He sees salvation in Christ as something that radically changes our identity, but doesn't mean we ought to abandon all cultural practices. In fact, Paul clearly believes that we should *maintain* any element of our culture that, after careful consideration, does not threaten the message of the gospel. There is wisdom in this, because Paul is recognizing that, if the church were to totally disengage and look wildly different from the culture around it, people on the outside looking in would see them as radicals or social anarchists. That's not a good look for the gospel and not what Jesus intends or modeled in the incarnation.

In Paul's day, it would have been a disgrace to Jews and Greeks for women at the time to pray with heads covered or men with heads uncovered (10:32). Being a public disgrace in the eyes of your neighbors is a massive barrier to the spread of the gospel. People don't generally listen to someone if they have a predetermined disdain for them. So Paul encourages them to follow his example in an attempt to "please all men in all things...that they may be saved." Of course, it takes careful consideration and judgement to determine where a person should draw the line to ensure they're not actually compromising the integrity of the gospel by giving in wholeheartedly to the culture around them. This is why Paul leaves it to the local church to consider and judge for themselves.

So, in line with that thinking, I would encourage my congregation to "judge for yourselves" and ask, what are the ways that I can engage in my community's culture without compromising the identity I have in Christ? And on the other hand, what cultural practices *do* seem to compromise the gospel that I ought to put a stop to in my life? I would encourage them to deeply consider the gospel and how it does indeed radically reorient our identities to Christ, but that Jesus is an incarnational God that moves us to live similarly. So the church should move forward together in wisdom; not detaching from the culture, but placing our identity in Christ. And in all of this we must not make a non-gospel-essential matter divisive for our church community, but instead aim to accommodate for everyone as far as possible.

Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3

I'm throwing these final two passages of scripture together because they work similarly. Both are pointed to by complementarians as a reason that the role of "elder" in the church ought to be reserved strictly for men. The primary reason for such an interpretation is the gendered language Paul employs in these sections, saying things like 'an elder must be "faithful to *his* wife, a *man* whose children believe...' "*he* must not be a recent convert..." and so on.

EXEGESIS

Having worked through all the other passages, I think it becomes rapidly clear what is going on here; Paul is once again addressing actual people in an actual context. As we've already seen, Paul has temporarily put on the brakes for women leaders in the churches he oversees, not because of their gender, but because of the cultural challenges women must first overcome to be considered ready and qualified. To recap, women in 1st Century Rome/Judaism would not have had access to Biblical education nor greco-roman philosophical schooling, thus women were scarcely given leadership roles in any sector of their day.

So for Paul, though he clearly sees women as equally gifted by the Spirit and has no sort of gendered-based barrier for them to engage in any aspect of Church life, he would not yet be addressing women as overseers in his letters, because there would not be any to address.

We know that this is correct based on the nature of his arguments in these sections. You notice that, in neither passage does Paul make any gender-based theological argument whatsoever. Paul doesn't turn to Genesis or make any claim that a man is more fitted for leadership in the Church. So what *does* he argue?

In both passages Paul is making a case for the *character* of a Church leader. We know this is the case because in both sections he illustrates two kinds of people; one whose character is fitted for leadership in the church versus the kind of characteristics that ought to disqualify someone from leadership.

We again know that this is correct because of the logical turning phrases/words employed. For instance, Titus 1:6-9 describes the character of a godly leader. Then verse 10 hinges with the word "for" and goes on to describe the context surrounding the Cretan church that would require such an upright character for the elders: the surrounding culture is full of people who would lead the Church astray because of their lack of character.

The same is true in 1 Timothy only with a different structure. Titus is set up as two pictures drawn out in large chunks and set next to one another. 1 Timothy is giving the "why" after almost every character quality; 'a leader must manage his home well, why? Because if one can't manage their home, how can they be trusted to manage the church?' 'They must not be a recent convert, why? Because they might otherwise become conceited.'

AUTHOR'S AIM BASED ON EXEGESIS

In both passages, Paul is clearly focused on the character of leaders, not their gender. So his aim is to guide Timothy and Titus in appointing leaders who are full of godly character and contrast the ungodly characteristics of the culture around them in such a way that Christ would be seen as good and worthy of praise, because of the Church's upstanding reputation.

THEOLOGY AND GOSPEL PREACHING

We don't have to look far to find the theology that motivates Paul in these instructions. In Titus he opens the letter like this, "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time..." and closes the chapter of 1 Timothy 3 like this "know how people ought to conduct themselves in

God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great:

He appeared in the flesh,
was vindicated by the Spirit,
was seen by angels,
was preached among the nations,
was believed on in the world,
was taken up in glory."

So in both cases the godliness of Church leaders is driven by the truth, by faith, and a hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ; a gospel that was promised by God from the beginning of time and takes residence in the heart of the believer by the Spirit, producing godliness.

So for Paul, having one's hope set on the truth (that being the gospel which he penned so poetically at the end of 1 Timothy 3) and resting in the promise of eternal life leads to a spring of godliness in the believer. This is a critical theological posture. It is often believed that the gospel is what "saves" a person and then that person moves away from the gospel and into a life of behavior correction. For Paul, that is not the case. For Paul, the truth of the gospel and the hope it produces by the power of the Spirit is what saves *and* sanctifies.

And it makes sense, if our hope is truly set on the resurrection of Jesus, our lives will be oriented from ones defined by our mortal strivings and instead aimed toward the eternal glory of Jesus. Apart from a hope in the truth of the gospel, immorality is the only result because there is no sense of eternal consequence, eternal glory, or eternity of the soul of our neighbors. So we mistreat, we take moral shortcuts, we live for mundane pleasures. But with eyes set on the glory of Jesus we're humbled by holiness into reverent obedience, driven by the Spirit to work in building His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, and pleased to see our Father's name made famous.

HOMILETICS

Such an interpretation is *vital* for the Church elder and pastor. The instruction that practically comes out of such a theology is this: never stop preaching the gospel. Do you want to see the salvific work of Christ in your church? Preach the gospel. Do you want to see your church spring up with an abundance of godliness? Preach the gospel.

You don't just need Jesus to save you from the wages of sin, you need Him in every day, and in every breath, to raise you up into His eternal life. Or as Jesus said it himself, "now this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and to know Jesus Christ, the one you sent." John 17:3.

So what's the application? It's back to the basics. Turn back to the gospel in humble prayer, turn back to scripture and ask the Spirit to spring up hope and knowledge of the truth; that you might know the Father's love for you and so live to His glory

Do you wish to be a leader in the Church? That's good, but it takes a godly person, and godliness is produced in those who love and long for Jesus alone.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the argument between “complementarianism” and “egalitarianism” is built on a foundation that is based on insufficient exegesis. Both viewpoints are actually found to be part-truths pointing us to this greater Biblically-based viewpoint:

“Women and men are designed to bear God’s image uniquely from and to each other; in that way they are made to be ‘complementary’ such that they only truly bear God’s image when they come together as ‘one flesh.’ Humanity is inherently designed by God in a way that they could not image Him apart from one another or in a context in which sex is sidelined. However, that is precisely what happened in “the fall” of Genesis 3.

“So praise be to God that He did not leave us in a cursed state of sexual dysfunctionality and its resulting inequality but that He dealt with the curse of sin Himself through Jesus’ incarnation, His life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

“Now, because the sexual oneness of humanity has been redeemed through Jesus, the Church should not recognize the merit of any spiritual gift or Church role to have its basis in one’s sex. Therein lies no difference in Spiritual gifting nor is there any universally scriptural instruction to distinguish gifts and roles based on a person’s sex. Both sexes are created and gifted equally, and equally clothed with Christ in an ‘egalitarian’ way.”

This is the redeemed humanity viewpoint on the sexes in the Bible.

We also notice some consistent themes that undergird Paul’s thoughts in each of these sections. Ironically, every section is embedded in the theology of a freedom in Christ that results in equal standing for all people in the Church regardless of social standing, ethnic background, or a person’s sex. But practicing such a theology results in inevitable culture-clashes, because such an equality for all people is nonexistent in the societal structures at large. So in these sections of scripture, Paul is helping the church navigate the culture-clashes that are arising in their communities.

In some places, like 1 Timothy, Paul seems to direct the church to be counter-cultural such that their holiness will direct peoples’ attention toward Jesus. There he would ask the women not to dress ornately (like those in Ephesian culture do), thus helping the Church not to feed into the underlying belief that a woman’s worth comes from her physical appearance. But in other places, like 1 Corinthians 11, Paul seems to direct the church to be culturally appropriate and stick with the cultural customs they live in to avoid offending people and bringing public disgrace upon themselves. There too, he would actually advise the women to have long hair because it is like an adornment for them as the “glory of man;” a public display of the glorious status they received in Genesis 2 that has now been redeemed in Christ.

So clearly when taking a broad look, a more-thorough exegetical work of these passages uncovers a very different interpretation than a surface level reading would suggest. In fact, every single passage *highlights* women’s equality in the Lord, while giving wise counsel when it comes to engaging in the extra-church culture of the day.

This narrative framework and exegetical response is immensely beneficial for the modern pastor because it moves them from preaching a message that is theologically lacking, impossible to sufficiently and practically apply, and exegetically unstable, to a gospel-centered theology of freedom and identity found in Christ that encourages a local community to truly

wrestle with what it means to love their neighbor and point to Jesus in a way that is theologically provocative but not socially anarchal.

In all, I hope that this thesis opens the door for the Spirit of God to do a mighty work in the Church; to begin repairing broken relationships, healing traumas, and find redemption for the sexes as we all grow together in Christ's likeness. I hope that the heart behind this study will inspire more lay-people and pastors alike to dig deep exegetically where there are tensions and curses being brought to bear upon the Church, that we might find the hidden blessing of God's truth for us.

One final note, my aim in this thesis has been to see what the Bible says about the sexes when complementarian-sounding passages are sufficiently exegeted but there are other arguments surrounding this topic that I have not addressed because they lie outside of my scope. One such argument would be "complementarianism is the traditional and historical interpretation of these passages." Though my thesis does not address such topics, I am surrounded and inspired by many who have set out to bless the Church in such ways. For a rebuttal to the above and a historical look at the historical development of complementarianism in the church, I suggest Beth Allison Barr's "The Making of Biblical Womanhood."¹⁸ So if the reader still has arguments or questions left unanswered, I encourage them to dive into the sources in the Bibliography section below. With that, I also extend a massive thank you to all those who contributed to this work both directly and secondarily.

May the peace and blessing of the Lord be with you.

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