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# Women in Church Leadership: Raising the Awareness of Women's Contributions to the Kingdom of God in the Christian Reformed Church

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

WOMEN IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP:  
RAISING THE AWARENESS OF WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE  
KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

MARY WALKER

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2019

Portland Seminary  
George Fox University  
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Mary Walker

has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on March 1, 2019  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Global Perspectives

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For Steve

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to God for calling me to study at Portland Seminary. I owe a great deal of thanks to the many people who have helped me during the program. The seminary staff, including Dr. Loren Kerns, Dr. Clifford Berger, Heather Rainey, and Mary Pandiani, have provided a wonderful place to study. Lead mentor Jason Clark has been very influential in my spiritual growth as I seek to be a better leader in an increasingly global society. I owe a huge debt of thanks to my academic advisor, Dr. Dan Liroy, for his guidance throughout my entire journey. Without his patient and godly counsel, I would not have finished this project.

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## ABSTRACT

The official position of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) is that all congregations in the CRCNA may allow women to serve in the offices of minister, elder, deacon, or commissioned pastor. The problem is that 70 percent of the congregations remain convicted complementarians and do not call women into office. The debate over the biblical, historical, theological, philosophical, and ethical arguments for allowing women into leadership positions has so far failed to convince those 70 percent who are opposed to the idea.

In the Reformed tradition, the Word is principally taught with expository preaching. Doctrine is paramount. Women's stories are not being heard in the CRCNA. This is tragic since all through history there is an enormous amount of evidence supporting women in leadership. The thesis of this paper is that as men and women discover the stories of women in the Bible and history, they will come to the realization that women should be included in all levels of ministry in the church.

This dissertation seeks to promote the status of women in the Christian Reformed Church of North America. Section One describes the background of the problem and gives definitions for the key concepts in the debate concerning women in leadership positions. Section Two outlines the history of the debate over whether or not women may be called to an office in the Christian Reformed Church. A synopsis of proposed solutions by the CRCNA and other denominations is explored. Key qualifications and arguments are outlined with an analysis and summary. Section Three offers as a hypothesis that the telling of women's stories will help prove that God's design for the

church includes the equality of men and women. Sections Four and Five describe an artifact that will promote the solution: a website for showcasing the stories of women in the Bible and history. Section Six offers a summary of this author's efforts, including the choice of artifact, personal lessons, and suggestions for further research.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	viii
<b>SECTION ONE: THE PROBLEM .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.0 Introduction .....	1
2.0 The Problem .....	2
3.0 Stories.....	4
4.0 History of the Dispute Concerning Women in Leadership .....	6
5.0 Definitions of Key Concepts .....	8
6.0 Response: Proposed Solutions.....	17
7.0 Summary and Conclusion.....	19
<b>SECTION TWO: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS.....</b>	<b>21</b>
1.0 Introduction .....	21
2.0 Background of the Current Debate .....	22
3.0 Other Proposed Solutions.....	28
4.0 Key Qualifications and Egalitarian Responses.....	32
5.0 Summary and Conclusion.....	53
<b>SECTION THREE: EQUALITY FOR WOMEN IN THE CHURCH – The     HYPOTHESIS .....</b>	<b>56</b>
1.0. Introduction .....	56

2.0. Rationale for Hypothesis .....	57
3.0. A Proposed Solution to Help End the Debate .....	65
4.0 Summary and Conclusion.....	70
<b>SECTION FOUR: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION.....</b>	<b>74</b>
1.0 Introduction: The Proposed Solution for the Need/Problem/Opportunity .....	74
2.0 What the Proposed Solution Looks Like.....	75
3.0 How This Proposed Solution Will Work .....	75
4.0 Conclusion: Why This Solution Will Work .....	76
<b>SECTION FIVE: ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION .....</b>	<b>78</b>
1.0 Introduction .....	78
2.0 Structure .....	78
3.0 Standards of Publication Particular to the Publishing of a Curriculum ..	81
4.0 Post-graduation Considerations .....	82
<b>SECTION SIX: POSTSCRIPT.....</b>	<b>83</b>
1.0 Introduction .....	83
2.0 Summary of the Development of the Artifact .....	84
3.0 Analysis of the Efficacy of the Chosen.....	84
4.0 Identification of the Specific Gains Made and Lessons Learned .....	84
5.0 Suggestions for Further Research and Potential Avenues to Pursue .....	85
6.0 Conclusion.....	87
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>88</b>

**APPENDIX A: PASTOR SURVEY ON WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ..... 98**

**APPENDIX B: SCRIPT FOR PODCAST NUMBER 001 “EVE” IN THE SERIES  
OF “EVE TO MARY” ..... 104**

**APPENDIX C: SAMPLE LESSON FROM “WOMEN IN THE BIBLE” ..... 112**

**APPENDIX D: DETAILS ON RENEWYOURTHINKING.NET WEBSITE.. 124**

## SECTION ONE

### THE PROBLEM

#### 1.0 Introduction

One hundred twenty men and women were gathered in the upper room of the house where they met for prayer since Jesus asked them to return to Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. They were all together when the day of Pentecost came. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues. An astonished multi-national crowd was amazed that each person heard speech in their own language.

The apostle Peter explained,

This is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall be in the last day,’ God says, ‘That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy’ (Acts 2:16–18).

Christ’s last instructions to the church were to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.<sup>1</sup> Over the last twenty centuries, the church has had many struggles with fulfilling Christ’s command to make disciples of the nations. There have been high points and low points throughout history as the Church has sought to fulfill the Great Commission. Roadblocks to disseminating the gospel include natural disasters, persecutions, and unwillingness or inability. Not enough attention has been paid to the fact that one major problem has been the limiting of half of Christ’s disciples in their legitimate kingdom work solely because of their gender. Nearly twenty centuries after Christ ascended to

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 28:18–20.

heaven, many denominations including the Christian Reformed Church of North America are still debating whether or not women may serve equally with men.

## 2.0 The Problem

A faulty theology of leadership impairs the integrity and outreach of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) by limiting the work of called and gifted female members. Though the official position of the CRC is for allowing women in office, seventy percent<sup>2</sup> of CRC congregations still do not call women to serve as elders or pastors. Women's potential, valuable contributions are being underutilized in spite of the clear Biblical teaching and historical witness to women's involvement in kingdom work.

There are many reasons why there is not a consensus in the CRC over the topic of women in leadership. Many CRC leaders hold a view of the Bible that restricts women from authoritative positions. Denominations that stress patriarchy rely on tradition and are not comfortable with change. Another reason that the problem is still ongoing is that most church history textbooks ignore the stories of women, engendering the idea that women are not called or capable of serving in the kingdom of God.<sup>3</sup> By ignoring women's contributions in the world, the impression is left that women had little involvement throughout the centuries in the primary work of the church. The complementarian thinking is that God may have occasionally used women when He had to, but men are the rightful leaders.

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<sup>2</sup> "Women in Ecclesiastical Office," Christian Reformed Church of North America, accessed December 29, 2017, <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/position-statements/women-ecclesiastical-office-0>.

<sup>3</sup> Ruth A. Tucker and Walter Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), 435.

Observing the stories of women in the Bible and history demonstrates that this is not true. Beginning with the creation story through the life of Christ and the testimonies of Paul, who recounted how women worked side by side with him in the ministry of the gospel, and on through twenty centuries of women's work and witness, it is revealed that God has always called and gifted women for service, even in leadership positions. As equal image bearers of God with men, women are co-laborers with men in God's work in the family, the church, and the world. The lack of teaching about women in the Bible in the Patriarchal congregations of the CRC reveals that complementarian leaders do not realize that Jesus modeled the way for men and women to serve together. They have overlooked the fact that the Holy Spirit empowered men and women to serve equally in God's kingdom. They are ignorant of the many thousands of stories of women throughout history who have preached, taught, healed, and served in Gods' kingdom.

In recent decades, the Christian Reformed Church has made some progress towards allowing some women in leadership positions. After a prolonged study of the Bible and tradition, the CRC came to the decision to allow women to be ordained. Yet, even though the CRC has settled the issue at the Synod, or governing body level, the problem remains in that 70 percent of CRC congregations do not call women into leadership positions. The history of the struggles in the Christian Reformed Church to come to a God-honoring conclusion for the place of women in the church provides an enlightening case study to be presented in Section Two. It is relevant to consider the problem of women in ministry for the Christian Reformed Church because their story is representative of the conflicts in many churches that hold to a hierarchical view of leadership, and it is an appropriate example of the debate over women in ministry.

### 3.0 The Stories Illustrating the Problem

Abuse comes in many forms: domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, human trafficking, and female infanticide, including gender specific abortion. Three in ten women have experienced rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner.<sup>4</sup> It may surprise some to find that statistics for physical abuse inside the church are the same as in the rest of society.<sup>5</sup> Abuse may also be psychological or emotional. Women may be held in bondage to unsubstantiated ideas about their fitness for kingdom work. The following stories illustrate physical, emotional, and psychological abuse present in many churches that proceed from a wrong view of gender relationships.

#### 3.1 Ruth's Story: Physical Abuse

During his violent rages, Ruth's husband would hurl biblical texts at her. His favorite verse was "Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord" (Eph. 5:22). He shouted the words at her while hitting, punching, and slamming her against doors and furniture. She felt trapped and feared for her life. Her husband was the pastor of their church and she felt ashamed to let others know what was happening. She wore long-sleeved and high-necked blouses to church and when the cover-up was not enough, she had a ready list of plausible excuses to keep up the pretense of a happy marriage.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "The National Domestic Violence Hotline," accessed January 25, 2018, <http://www.thehotline.org/resources/statistics/>.

<sup>5</sup> Anne O. Weatherholt, *Breaking the Silence: The Church Responds to Domestic Violence* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2008), 4–5, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Ruth Tucker, *Black and White Bible, Black and Blue Wife: My Story of Finding Hope After Domestic Abuse* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 14.

### 3.2 Helen's Story: Spiritual Abuse

Helen was happy to be home after her thirty years in the mission field. Serving as a single woman missionary, she had forsaken marriage and children in order to devote her life to caring for the poor in Uganda. Her duties included church planting, pastoring, and teaching new missionaries. Now she was taking a sabbatical while waiting for the Lord's guidance to her next area of service. At her home Christian Reformed Church, Helen volunteered to step in for their pastor when he went on vacation. She was turned down because she was a woman. Helen did not understand why she was allowed to preach at the mission church in Africa but not in her home church in the United States. Helen longed to use her God given gifts to serve others.

### 3.3 Sue's Story: Psychological Abuse

Sue smiled at her friends at the church potluck dinner. All of the women at her church were submissive wives and showed how spiritual they were by how well they served their husbands. They had a happy, peaceful church, but Sue dreaded going home after the fellowship. Her husband inevitably criticized her for something. He always did. Even when she felt that she did everything right, she was told she was wrong about something. Never mind if she thought she was actually right. She could not be if her husband said something different. Did not the Bible say that he was always right by virtue of his maleness? The cognitive dissonance eventually gave her bad headaches nearly every day. Her best friend, the wife of an elder, told her she just needed to pray more.

### 3.4 Summary

Untold thousands of women are suffering physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. Not only women, but also the church and society suffer when women are denied opportunities to serve. A correct understanding of God's will for women in the church is necessary for the health of the body and society. Women as well as men are stewards of the gifts that God has given them to be used in the work of the kingdom.<sup>7</sup> There is to be no distinction between Christians based on gender.<sup>8</sup> A survey of the Bible and history will demonstrate that men and women working together in mutual love and fellowship bring peace, joy, healing, and wholeness to the world.

#### **4.0 History of the Dispute Concerning Women in Leadership**

The misconception that men are naturally intellectually superior to women has been around for a long time. Because theological giants such as Origen, Tertullian, Chrysostom, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and Knox have expressed low views of women's abilities, leaders in the Christian Reformed Church have taught a doctrine of the superiority of men and have given a lesser place to women. Not everything the historical scholars have said about women is derogatory, but the general ambivalent views about the nature, capabilities, and potential of women have been accepted in many traditional churches. One example of the expression of women's inferiority comes from the reformer John Knox: "Woman in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man...Nature I say, paints (women) further to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble and foolish: and

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<sup>7</sup> I Cor 12:4-13.

<sup>8</sup> Gal. 3:28.

experience has declared them to be inconstant, variable, cruel and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment (or, leadership).”<sup>9</sup> How tragic that some still believe this today.

Another reason that nearly twenty centuries have gone by and many in the church are still debating the “woman question” is that women’s stories have been distorted or ignored.<sup>10</sup> By not giving women the credit they deserve, the lesson is taught that women are, at best, less important than men and, at worst, unable to be used of God for service in His Kingdom in positions of authority. A serious problem of discrimination exists when, in spite of the many scriptural case histories of women who were obviously approved by God, there is continued negligence of the stories of women in the Bible and history.<sup>11</sup>

Many who believe that God created a hierarchy within the genders insist that women were created to submit to their husbands in everything.<sup>12</sup> It may be convincingly demonstrated that the biblical picture of the creation of men and women is different from the views held by these scholars. Not only that, but also the men and women who hold this position would keep women in the flawed patriarchal system of the Pharisees that was overturned by Jesus. In the New Covenant all children of God are called to be humble, submitting to each other.<sup>13</sup> Whether male or female, this is how Christians imitate Jesus and become more Christ-like.

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<sup>9</sup> John Knox. *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (London: The English Scholar’s Library, 1558). Reprinted as an eBook by Project Gutenberg, January, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Tucker and Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church*, 435–441.

<sup>11</sup> Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, *Equal to Serve: Women and Men Working Together Revealing the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1991), 130.

<sup>12</sup> George W. Knight III, “Husbands and Wives as Analogues of Christ and the Church: Ephesians 5:21–33 and Colossians 3:18–19,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 170.

<sup>13</sup> Eph. 5:21.

The Dutch Reformed family of churches has a long history of putting a great amount of importance on tradition.<sup>14</sup> It is one thing to differ on the subject of women in leadership due to sincerely held Scriptural convictions; it is another to differ solely on long held church traditions. For centuries, many—but not all—believers in Reformed churches have read the stories of women in the Bible through the traditionalist lens. For centuries, because of the willingness to rest on tradition, women have only been allowed to serve in secondary positions of authority. It may be comforting to rely on traditions, but the time has come to examine those traditions in light of Scripture. It is time now for our brothers and sisters in the traditional congregations in the Christian Reformed Church to examine their beliefs and assure themselves that they are following the Scriptures and not traditions that may or may not be biblical. By looking at the stories of the many women that God has gifted and called to service, they may be convinced that their dependence on tradition has led them astray and renew their efforts to fulfilling the Great Commission using all of God’s servants, male and female.

### **5.0 Definitions of Key Concepts**

The debate on women in ministry is complicated by confusion over some of the terminology. Before proponents of one side or the other may proceed with their arguments, the definitions of the terms must be clarified. Explanations need to be made as to how and when the main terms in the discussion came about. Terms such as “egalitarian”, “complementarian”, “patriarchy”, “pastor”, “deacon”, and “social justice” can be seen as inflammatory, especially when the two sides are not defining them in the

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<sup>14</sup> “History,” Christian Reformed Church, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://www.crcna.org>.

same way. The debate on women in leadership could be more productive if both sides would agree on the use of the terms while especially taking into consideration the way they are utilized in the Bible.

### 5.1 Terms for Views of Women in Ministry

Many in fundamentalist churches today have grown up believing that God created women solely for a subordinate role to men. They were taught that women were made to be subservient helpers to men as part of the creation order.<sup>15</sup> They view a godly wife as one who maintains an orderly home, submits to her husband cheerfully, and obeys him as her spiritual head. In their patriarchal churches, women do not seek to serve in leadership positions.

In the past few decades, egalitarian church leaders studied the scriptures and theology and concluded that it was within God's will to ordain women and did so. Fundamentalists saw this move toward equality for women as a danger to society. They fear that feminists would ruin the traditional patriarchal society, which they sincerely believed was the way God ordained it.<sup>16</sup>

Since the 1970s, volumes have been written debating men's and women's relationships in the home and church. One unfortunate result is that the terminology used for different views of women in leadership is problematical. Most of the terms were

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<sup>15</sup> Gen. 2:18.

<sup>16</sup> "The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood," *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, "Appendix 2: The Danvers Statement" ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 469–472.

devised fairly recently since the “woman question” has only been seriously debated for the last two generations.<sup>17</sup>

Though variations exist, there are two main views on the relationship of men and women in the church. Each group believes that it holds the biblical position and has done a careful study of the Scriptures and history to support their position. Each group also believes that the opposing group has a distorted view of scripture and an incomplete knowledge of history.

The views turn on the question of supreme authority.<sup>18</sup> “Complementarians” holds a hierarchal view of authority, even in the Trinity. They contend, “The Son stands in a relationship of eternal submission under the authority of his Father.”<sup>19</sup> This group then transfers that principle of subordinationism to male/female relationships. They also believe that the traditional view of the church is a subordinationist role for women. In this dissertation terms for this group will include “hierarchical”, “fundamentalist”, “subordinationist”, “traditional”, “patriarchal” and “complementarian”. The last term is the most controversial because “complementarianism” implies a mutual horizontal relationship, but the group that has chosen to call itself “complementarian” holds a hierarchical view that is really a vertical relationship. “Egalitarians”, with their belief in mutual submission, are actually the more complementarian of the two. However, in the

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<sup>17</sup> Ronald W. Pierce, “Contemporary Evangelicals for Gender Equality,” *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 58.

<sup>18</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Who’s Tampering With the Trinity?: An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009), 19.

<sup>19</sup> Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 71.

interests of courtesy and clarity, the term “complementarian” will be used for the first group since it has been in use for about forty years.

The second group maintains, “Eternally the Trinity is characterized by an equal authority structure in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit possess equal authority with one another and the submission or obedience of the Son and the Spirit to the Father is a temporary functional submission, for the purpose of executing a specific mission of the triune God.”<sup>20</sup> These “egalitarians” believe that men and women reflect this equivalence view of the Trinity. Terms for this group throughout the dissertation will include “egalitarian”, “equivalence”, “mutual submission”, and “biblical feminism”. The terms “liberal” and “conservative” will be used sparingly, not only because these terms are often used in a pejorative fashion, but also the terms contribute to the confusion. For example, there are many whom the hierarchalists would label as “liberal” who are actually biblically conservative.

Other terms that need clarification are “patriarchy”, “pastor”, “deacon”, and “social justice”. He who defines wins. It is tragic that many in the self-named complementarian camp have defined these terms in such a way as to end the discussion rather than to further it. Hopefully, the discussion can move forward more profitably and objectively with this clarification of terms.

## 5.2 Patriarchy

The church has been known to justify her position on issues that have been deemed to be immoral by others. In the nineteenth century, theologians in the United

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<sup>20</sup> Erickson, 19.

States maintained that since the Bible says nothing to condemn slavery as sinful, it has been and should be practiced by Christians.<sup>21</sup> In South Africa in 1948, apartheid was made into law.<sup>22</sup> The Dutch Reformed Churches went along with apartheid until it was finally prohibited by law in the 1990s. More will be said in Section Two about how the hierarchical thinking that supported apartheid has not completely disappeared.

Thankfully, in the last few decades, the previously pro-slavery and pro-apartheid churches, including Dutch Reformed Churches, have reversed their positions.

Unfortunately, patriarchal congregations have not reversed their teaching that men are more significant than women, in spite of the fact that the same arguments for opposing slavery could be used to support the emancipation of women.<sup>23</sup> In systems of apartheid and misogyny, the people belonging to the more powerful group have more prestige and social freedoms than those in the subordinated group, and the people in this powerful group typically have easier access to money, education, and health and legal services. Furthermore, history has shown that the people in the more powerful group are usually reluctant to relinquish or share their power and privilege, and they may even believe that their hierarchical rule is for the good of the people in the less powerful group.

Neither slavery nor patriarchy is God's ideal. Yet both of these systems have been condoned and perpetuated by Christians who have quoted scriptures to support their privileged position. Genuine equality and mutuality between all people, regardless of race

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<sup>21</sup> Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983), 32.

<sup>22</sup> David Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2010), 52.

<sup>23</sup> Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Women Caught in the conflict: The Culture War Between Traditionalism and Feminism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 35.

or gender is the new creation ideal.<sup>24</sup> There is no place for a caste system or a fixed hierarchy in the body of Christ.<sup>25</sup> There is no place for either favoritism or discrimination.<sup>26</sup> Jesus warned against notions of power, prestige, and primacy among his own followers. In Jesus' kingdom, the humble are exalted,<sup>27</sup> the lowly are the greatest,<sup>28</sup> and the last are first.<sup>29</sup> In other words, there is humble, mutual service.

Patriarchy, even a benevolent one, is not good for God's people because the system makes more of men and less of women.<sup>30</sup> There is no mutuality or equality between men and women when men have perpetual, unlimited authority and women have little. In complementarian churches, it is taken for granted that patriarchy is God's will. An excursion through the Bible and history is needed to demonstrate that though God seems to have permitted patriarchy at times, it was never meant to be that way from the beginning or for all eternity.

### 5.3 Pastor

The Holy Spirit gifts men and women for service in the church and the world: "The gifts that he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11). There is no delineating of gifts

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<sup>24</sup> Gal. 3:26–28.

<sup>25</sup> 2 Cor. 5:16–17.

<sup>26</sup> James 2:1ff.

<sup>27</sup> Matt. 23:12.

<sup>28</sup> Luke 22:26.

<sup>29</sup> Mark 9:34–45.

<sup>30</sup> Marg Mowczko, "Is a Benevolent Patriarchy Good for God's People?" August 8, 2013, <https://margmowczko.com/is-a-benevolent-patriarchy-good-for-gods-people/>

according to gender. This means that women are called to be pastors and teachers as well as apostles (“messengers”), prophets, and evangelists.

The Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) claims that there are no women pastors or elders in the Bible.<sup>31</sup> The CBMW makes an error here by relying on the modern definition of “elder” as an officer in the church and granting the same status to “pastors”. The term “elder” literally means “an older person,” but it has become accepted as a term used for an office in the church.

The gifts of “pastor” and “teacher” are in fact descriptions of the tasks of church leaders. There is no specific office of “pastor” in the New Testament. The term comes from the Greek word for “shepherd” and means to come along side, protect, and lead by serving with one’s life. Women were included as pastors in the New Testament.<sup>32</sup>

In the study of the relevancy of gender in leadership, one thing is clear: the one who truly leads, leads from a position of influence that has been granted to her. A humble, servant-like leader has the trust of her followers; they are happy to follow. All through history, there have been women who have enabled followers to have a richer, more fulfilling life than they would have if she had not followed her calling and stepped into a place of leadership.<sup>33</sup>

A Christ-like leader wishes only to serve. This leader has earned the respect of those who follow her because they know they can trust her to do what is right. She has

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<sup>31</sup> Paige Patterson, “The Meaning of Authority in the Local Church,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 251.

<sup>32</sup> I Tim. 5:9–10.

<sup>33</sup> Susan Hill Lindley, *You have Stept out of your Place: A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 38.

evidenced integrity in her life and has risen to her position because of her influence as a humble, unselfish person. Leadership is not solely about being the one who is in charge; leaders have the mind of Christ Who emptied Himself and took the form of a servant.<sup>34</sup> This leader, male or female, is motivated to make a better world for others.

#### 5.4 Deacon

During the first and second centuries women were prominent as leaders.<sup>35</sup> When Origen wrote about Phoebe in Paul's letter to the Romans, "he understood her to be officially ordained for the ministry of the church."<sup>36</sup> Later John Chrysostom also wrote that women should not be hindered because of their sex since in "Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female."<sup>37</sup> During the fourth century, the Apostolic Constitution still recognized female deacons,<sup>38</sup> but women began to be gradually pushed out. When the clergy began to impose itself between God and the community, it became a male-only organization. The term "deaconess" was retained to refer to women doing menial tasks, but women were stripped of the clerical office.

The Christian Reformed Church is struggling with the idea of women as deacons. Recently the CRC has begun to allow women to serve as deacons. Much of the confusion is over how to define "deacon". In the Bible the leaders of the church chose men to

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<sup>34</sup> Phil. 2:7.

<sup>35</sup> Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1993), 5.

<sup>36</sup> Mary T. Malone, *Women and Christianity, Volume I: The First Thousand Years* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 123.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Torjesen, 157.

“serve tables” to free the apostles for their evangelistic work.<sup>39</sup> Modern patriarchal churches have changed the role of deacons from “waiting on tables” to an office that may only be filled by an ordained male. As will be explained further in Section Two, many CRC congregations are trying to form a compromise by distinguishing between “deacon” and “elder”. Some congregations will allow women to serve as deacons, but not elders.

### 5.5 Social Justice

The term “social justice” often provokes a strong reaction from conservative evangelicals. A recent statement issued by Reverend John MacArthur reveals his concern that many who are involved in justice work let the world determine the social justice agenda and rationale.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, those evangelicals involved in social justice caution against reducing the gospel of Jesus Christ to certain theological categories while ignoring or minimizing the work of Jesus in helping the poor and marginalized.<sup>41</sup>

It is unfortunate that the two sides seem to separate themselves into opposing groups—one group seeks to reestablish patriarchy, led by white Protestant men who affirm that only men are to lead as pastors, elders, or bishops and preach and teach the congregation. Fundamentalists deny that political or social activism should be viewed as integral components of the gospel or the mission of the church. Egalitarians confess that the Bible emerged from a patriarchal society but does not endorse patriarchy. In fact,

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<sup>39</sup> Acts 6:1–6.

<sup>40</sup> John MacArthur, “Social Injustice and the Gospel,” *Grace to You*, August 13, 2018, <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B180813/social-injustice-and-the-gospel>.

<sup>41</sup> Bekah McNeel, “The Latest Evangelical ‘Statement’ and a History of Stumbling on Racial Justice,” *Sojourners*, September 7, 2018, <https://sojo.net/articles/latest-evangelical-statement-and-history-stumbling-racial-justice>.

Scripture depicts women in various leadership roles. Egalitarians believe that if the Church is to follow Jesus she must engage in teaching and healing the way Jesus did. The gospel message is better presented when Christians match their actions to their words in acts of mercy and compassion. It would be better if both groups could see that their affirmations are two sides to the same coin. Because complementarians articulate a narrow theological version of the gospel, they ignore the voices of their brothers and sisters who seek to faithfully follow in Christ's footsteps with a full gospel.

Complementarians and egalitarians seek to know God's will for women. Their debates are often heated and needlessly protracted. If the two sides would agree on the definitions of the terms, much obfuscation could be cleared up leading to more productive conversation. With an agreement on the definition of terms as explained above, the history of the efforts of the Christian Reformed Church to come to a position on women in ministry can now be examined.

## **6.0 Response: Proposed Solutions**

The Christian Reformed Church deliberated for over four decades to determine whether or not women may serve in church office. In 1996, women were approved as candidates for ordination. In spite of the fact that the official position of the CRC is that it is God who calls and gifts women, 70 percent of patriarchal congregations in the CRC are not calling women into office. The church limits its effectiveness when it fails to use the gifts of both men and women. Teaching about women in office must be wise and intentional. Leaders in the CRC who hold the egalitarian position should start with spending much time in prayer. Complementarians sincerely believe that their view of the

authority of men is the biblical one. Egalitarian leaders should pray for the Spirit to convince and convict as they have biblical discussions with complementarians while maintaining a humble attitude.

It is not only painful for women, but also inconsistent for complementarians to say that women are equal, but then not allow them to serve equally. It will be important to prayerfully, and gently point out the error in this kind of thinking. It is also harmful for men when they do not allow their sisters in Christ to come alongside and share in the immense amount of work.

There is a connection between patriarchy and abuse. Over the last few months many scandals have come to light in the church where church leaders have exerted their authority to engage in abusive behaviors toward women. When the church teaches that women must unilaterally and eternally submit to men, it is saying that women are less important than men, leading some men to believe that they can treat women however they want. Though the topic is unpopular, men and women should come to realize that abuse exists in all churches. While little thought is often given to spiritual warfare, this dimension should be recognized. Satan would impede the progress of the gospel any way he can.<sup>42</sup> It is important to pray that Satan would not distract men and women from serving together.

Women are meant to work with men under God in the church. Women have much to offer and they need to be heard and utilized in kingdom work. In modern patriarchal churches, women have been stripped of their opportunities as God's image bearers to serve in leadership positions. When there is an unbalanced view of the scriptures, men,

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<sup>42</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1992), 157–159.

women, and society all lose. The church would benefit greatly by restoring women to their biblical and historical roles as leaders.

## 7.0 Summary and Conclusion

Christian men and women on both sides of the issue in the Christian Reformed Church want to honor God by serving Jesus and following scriptural teachings with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. They love their neighbors and understand the power of the gospel. Yet the majority of members in patriarchal churches have chosen to follow the teachings of a handful of men who claim to hold the only biblical view of women in ministry. Because only a small minority of believers have read the entire bible,<sup>43</sup> these men easily persuade unlearned followers that society will be completely undone if women are allowed into leadership.

Comfortable, patriarchal congregations are content with their traditional beliefs in spite of the fact that the hierarchal view on women in leadership positions is misguided at best and harmful in the extreme. The stories they hear have mostly been taught only one way—male Bible and historical heroes with women being incidental to the stories. Women are included in the injunction to “dare to be a Daniel” but men are never asked to “dare to be a Mary.” The stories of men and women of God need to be revisited to get a more accurate picture including how God calls and gifts women for service. A complete, factual recounting of the stories of women in the Bible and history could go a long way toward convincing complementarians that women are equally gifted and called to serve in God’s kingdom.

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<sup>43</sup> Adelle M. Banks, “The Bible: Helpful, But Not Read Much,” survey by LifeWayResearch.com on Religion News Service, April 15, 2017, <https://religionnews.com/2017/04/25/the-bible-helpful-but-unread/>.

Recently, egalitarians have made many efforts to engage in discussions with the groups in opposition to women in leadership using biblical, historical, theological, philosophical, and ethical arguments. New books and articles are becoming available almost daily. These attempts have changed the minds of some Christians that women really are capable of serving in leadership positions.<sup>44</sup> A survey of proposed solutions will reveal that something more than intellectual argument is needed. The following discussion illustrates how the intellectual debate has progressed. An analysis will be offered at the conclusion of the exposition. The summary and observations will lead to a new proposed solution to aid in the recognition of women in service in the church. The stories of kingdom women throughout history need to be told, and they need to be accessible to people who will not hear them from the pulpits of complementarian churches. A helpful vehicle for accomplishing the purpose of exposing the stories of women to people would be a website on the Internet.

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<sup>44</sup> Alan F. Johnson, ed., *How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership: Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).

## SECTION TWO

### OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

#### 1.0 Introduction

Christ entrusted the Church with the Great Commission,<sup>45</sup> and the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost with the power to see the task through to completion.<sup>46</sup> Men and women were to serve together in the kingdom, but at times throughout the history of the Church, women have been restricted from the privilege of serving simply due to their gender.<sup>47</sup> Nearly twenty centuries after the Church began spreading the gospel, the question of whether or not women may serve with equal authority is still being debated. Many people who might otherwise be reached with the gospel proclamation of forgiveness and new life in Christ are being neglected while women are restrained from ministry.

Scores of books and articles have been written by egalitarian Christians with the purpose of presenting a correct view of biblical interpretation of God's plans for women, a more accurate view of history, a more coherent theology of gender, a more consistent philosophy, and critically needed information of the consequences when women are limited in ministry. Thanks to the modern media of television and radio in the last forty years the debate has come out into the open. In the last twenty years, with the ever-growing popularity of the Internet, men and women have more electronic resources

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<sup>45</sup> Matt. 28:18–20.

<sup>46</sup> Acts 2:1–20.

<sup>47</sup> Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 205–278.

available to them. Christians have the freedom, convenience, and ability to read about and evaluate the arguments in the debate for themselves in a non-threatening way as they turn from one website to another in search of answers.

This section begins by considering the background of the debate. The history of the discussions regarding the topic of women in ministry in the Christian Reformed Church provides an example that is reflective of the current nation-wide debate. The CRC's own particular solution will be examined. Next, an exposition of the key qualifications and egalitarian responses as proposed by churches in general in the United States is presented. An analysis and summary is made with a view to demonstrate convincingly that the preponderance of the evidence demonstrates that the egalitarian view of women in ministry is the correct one, and with a gentle invitation to the complementarians to be encouraged to change their view on the topic of women in leadership positions in the Church.

## **2.0 Background of the Current Debate**

It is helpful in understanding why the debate continues in the Christian Reformed Church over the question of women in office by examining the history of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). The Christian Reformed Church, a daughter of the DRC has inherited a rich history of theology and Christian practice. The seeds of the modern disputes over women in ministry were planted long ago.

## 2.1 History of the Dutch Reformed Church

In the sixteenth century, the Reformers were primarily engaged in reforming the Roman Catholic Church. *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide*, *Solus Christus*, and *Soli Deo Gloria*<sup>48</sup> provided answers to one central question: “How are we saved?” Calvin, Zwingli, and Luther faced persecution and hardship to raise the Bible above the pronouncements of the Magisterium. With the Bible in their own language, thousands of Christians would revive the spread of the gospel. Great theological works were produced during the Reformation including the three forms of unity for the Dutch Reformed Churches: the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the Canons of Dordt (1618–1619). These documents still form the locus of Dutch Reformed faith and practice today. The Reformers focused on their intellectual faith but did not make as many gains in the social arena. Other denominations, such as the Quakers, concentrated on the outworking of the faith and made room for women in ministry as early as the sixteenth century.<sup>49</sup>

In the middle of the 1800s some Dutch Reformed people moved to the United States and in 1857 the Christian Reformed Church was born. Many Dutch immigrants came to the United States throughout the nineteenth century. They remained committed to the Reformed creeds and confessions. At the turn of the century the Dutch struggled with changing from the Dutch to the English language; the struggle continues today with

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<sup>48</sup> Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Christ Alone, and the Glory of God Alone.

<sup>49</sup> Barbara Boone Wooten, *Destiny Denied: The Veiling of Women in the Traditional Church* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House Publishers, 2008), 177.

many Dutch insisting that the Reformed beliefs and practices can only find full expression in the Dutch language.<sup>50</sup>

The Dutch Reformed family of churches has sustained many splits during the last two centuries. In an effort to remain true to the Bible and tradition, factions in the Dutch Reformed Church have often solved their disagreements by just splitting.<sup>51</sup> There are “three factions in the CRC that we can still identify to some extent today: those who cling tenaciously to historical Calvinism, those who espouse a sort of fundamental evangelicalism, and those who follow behind the liberal, socializing, modernistic churches of North America.”<sup>52</sup> This history of dissenting voices within the church partly explains why—though the official position in the CRC for women in ministry is pro-ordination—there remains 70 percent of congregations who do not believe women should be allowed to serve in office. This observation leads to the next part of the history of the problem under consideration of women’s position in church ministry.

## 2.2 Recent Debate in the Christian Reformed Church of North America

The Christian Reformed Church of North America has made a sincere effort to find out what God has really intended for women in the Church. In the early 1970s the role of women in church leadership began to be debated at the Synod level. The first study committee that was appointed reported to Synod in 1973 that excluding women

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<sup>50</sup> “History,” Christian Reformed Church, accessed November 17, 2018, <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/history>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. One example from history, found on the Christian Reformed Church’s website, cited above, is: “After the war the CRC had a difficult time defining itself. This led to disagreements, and, in typical Reformed style, to secession.”

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

from ecclesiastical office could not be defended on biblical grounds. A second study committee came to the same conclusion in 1975. Two additional committees were appointed in 1977 and 1978 in order to help women make use of their spiritual gifts. It was recommended that women be ordained as deacons. At first, Synod agreed, providing that the work of deacons be distinguished from that of elders. In 1979 Synod deferred ratification of the change in Church Order that was needed and appointed another committee. This time the committee studied the issue of headship of men over women in marriage and its implications for the church. In 1984 the committee reaffirmed the recommendation that women be ordained as deacons. With the stipulation that the work of deacons be differentiated from that of elders, the Synod finally ratified the necessary change in the Church Order.

In 1985, Synod had second thoughts. They declared that the headship principle prohibits women from being elders and ministers, disallowed the use of adjunct elders, and appointed a committee to study the authority and function of elders and deacons. The 1987 Synod distinguished between a church's consistory (elders), diaconate (deacons), and council (both elders and deacons). They decided that deacons may not be delegated to classis meetings, and they appointed yet another committee to study the headship principle. Synod 1989 instructed some churches that were ordaining women as elders to cease doing so and declared that adjunct positions are allowable for women as long as the women were not ordained.

From 1990 to 1994 committees dealt with the headship principle, the topic of spiritual gifts, and the topic of ordination. Synod decided that women should be encouraged to use their gifts while under the supervision of elders. In 1993, local

congregations were given the option of ordaining women as elders, ministers, and evangelists (now commissioned pastors). Synod 1994 did not ratify the decision, claiming that the clear teaching of Scripture prohibits women from holding those offices. In anticipation of an affirmative ruling, it instructed the churches that ordained women as elders to release them.

The 1995 Synod recognized that there were two perspectives on the issue of women in office, both of which proceeded from sincere biblical conviction. They decided to give classes (groups of CRC churches in forty-seven different regions of North America) the option of declaring the word “male” in Church Order Article 3 inoperative or not. Those deleting the word it were free to ordain women to all offices. Synod 1995 also passed regulations that prohibited women from serving as delegates to Synod until 2000. Synod 2000 extended the church’s position of women in office for five more years. By 2007 more than half of the classes had deleted the word “male” from Church Order Article 3. At that time, Synod declared that women office bearers may serve as delegates to Synod.

In 1996, women were approved as candidates for the ministry of the Word. The debate continued over the guidelines for women and today the position is a compromise decision that “allows individual churches to ordain women as elders and classes (if they so choose) to allow their constituent congregations to ordain women as ministers of the Word as well. That decision spurred the departure of more than forty thousand members from the Christian Reformed Church.”<sup>53</sup>

According to the director of Faith Formation Ministries of the CRC, Dr. Syd Hielema, “The problem is that the CRC allows multiple positions (I am aware of at least

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<sup>53</sup> “History.”

four positions). The ‘theology’ is deliberately ambiguous, and its faultiness ... comes from allowing too much latitude. Your research question would focus on those congregations who use this latitude to deny women leadership roles.”<sup>54</sup> It seems that this compromise is more acceptable to many than a large church split as so often happened in the past. Yet it begs the questions, “What does God *truly* have to say about women in leadership positions? Is God ambiguous?”

The history of the research and conclusions of the CRC reveals the many issues that Christians deal with in determining whether or not women may serve in leadership positions. Throughout the decades that the Synod delegates examined the issues, they demonstrated that first of all they sought to find the Lord’s will. They were patient in their deliberations; a change in centuries old tradition was not taken lightly. Finally, although the official position of the Christian Reformed Church is egalitarian, the denomination is allowing each congregation to follow its conscience in the matter of women in leadership, which results in a percentage of complementarian congregations.

The biblical, historical, and theological issues that the CRC dealt with are similar for many conservative denominations. The CRC compromised; many denominations have not. The Southern Baptist Church for example, holds as a resolution that in I Timothy 2:12, Paul “excludes women from pastoral leadership.”<sup>55</sup> The complementarian congregations in the CRC also believe that the Bible excludes women from leadership positions in the Church. A look at the Bible, tradition, theology, philosophy, and ethics to

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<sup>54</sup> Syd Hielema, e-mail message to author, June 18, 2018.

<sup>55</sup> “Resolution on Ordination and the role of Women in Ministry, Kansas City, Missouri, 1984,” accessed November 14, 2018, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/1088/resolution-on-ordination-and-the-role-of-women-in-ministry>.

ascertain whether or not they actually support the belief that men must always have the rule in churches is needed to decide what God truly intends for his kingdom daughters.

### **3.0 Other Proposed Solutions**

The majority of proposals for a solution to the problem of barring women from meaningful leadership positions in the church involve using intellectual argumentation. These endeavors have not been completely successful, since there are still many complementarians who oppose the egalitarian claims of equality for women. The patriarchal congregations in the Christian Reformed Church rely on their traditions and the writings of revered complementarians to maintain their stance against women in leadership positions in the Church.

#### **3.1 The Proposed Solution of the Christian Reformed Church**

The Christian Reformed Church decided to let individual congregations choose for themselves whether or not they would allow women in office. Forty thousand members exited the denomination when the decision was made saying that they could not stay in a liberal denomination. Many more thousands chose to remain in the Christian Reformed Church of North America and take the option of following their consciences in the matter in their actual practices. Now that the CRC has decided to live with the compromise, the 30 percent who hold egalitarian convictions have done little else by way of trying to argue the 70 percent who hold complementarian positions into changing. Instead, those with an egalitarian view in the CRC have taken some steps to live out their commitment to justice for women. Perhaps actions will speak louder than words.

One relatively new area of ministry in the CRC that seeks to raise the value of women is the Safe Church ministry. A study conducted by the Christian Reformed Church in North America revealed that 28 percent of church-attending adults had been emotionally, physically, or sexually abused in the congregations. (The rate in the general population was 35 percent at the time.)<sup>56</sup> Though the study is twenty-five years old, current statistics are probably not much different. On their website,<sup>57</sup> interested persons can find materials on abuse awareness, prevention, and response. The Safe Church Ministry and the Office of Social Justice often collaborate in taking action to remedy a social injustice because of their shared perspectives of ministry. They are trying to counteract the underlying perception of women as weak and men as powerful that is part of the general malaise against women in leadership positions in the CRC.

While there has been an increase in churches taking advantage of the help offered by the Safe Church Ministry, the majority of the congregations is patriarchal and continues to observe only the bare minimum of the requirements. Domestic violence is still not preached against from many pulpits. This ministry promises to be helpful in raising the perception of the value of women, but if conservative pastors do not believe that the information is important or necessary, they will not participate. The 70 percent has chosen to ignore the problem.

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<sup>56</sup> Committee to Study Physical Emotional and Sexual Abuse, “The Agenda for Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America” (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1992), 320–321.

<sup>57</sup> [www.crcna.org/safechurch](http://www.crcna.org/safechurch)

### 3.2 Summary and Evaluation of the Christian Reformed Church as a Case Study

Throughout history, Christians have struggled with the issue of women in leadership in the church. Over the centuries various attempts have been made to include women in the tremendous task of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. At times women were just accepted without question; at other times women were accepted with restrictions. The CRC examined the issues and produced a position paper granting women full status as ministers of the word and the sacraments. Though 70 percent of the congregations will not call women as pastors, the CRC has turned to taking steps to allowing women in all areas of ministry. One example of leading by example is the Safe Church Ministry. Another includes the testimonies of the few women who have been called to serve as pastors. Reverend Eleanor Rietkerk, pastor of Mill Creek CRC for seventeen years agrees, “Arguing the issue of women in the ministry doesn’t usually result in changing anyone’s mind. What changes minds and hearts is simply doing and being who God has called us to be.”<sup>58</sup>

A thoughtful review and analysis of the intellectual issues as presented by both sides in the general church population of the United States reveals that there is enough scriptural, historical, theological, philosophical, and ethical evidence to warrant a reconsideration on the part of the complementarians of their view on the status of women. The goal is for complementarians to comprehend how their view is harmful to God’s kingdom, and humbly change their practices to include women in all levels of the work of the kingdom.

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<sup>58</sup> Eleanor Rietkerk, interview by author, Amity, Oregon, February 8, 2017.

### 3.3 Proposed Solutions from Other Evangelical Churches

Egalitarians have made many attempts to elevate the status of women's involvement in church ministry. Many denominations, such as the Evangelical Covenant Church,<sup>59</sup> have already begun ordaining and calling women as pastors in their congregations. Denominations that oppose women's ordination, such as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church,<sup>60</sup> maintain that, "only men known to be sound (in life and doctrine) should come into the pulpit." The Christian Reformed Church is somewhat different in that it allows each congregation to choose whether or not it will call a woman into pastoral leadership. For egalitarian churches, the arguments for equal opportunities for women in ministry are "preaching to the choir." The debate is settled for them. On the other hand, the patriarchal denominations may not even look at the egalitarian contentions since complementarians have already decided that egalitarians are unbiblical.<sup>61</sup> However, there must be many who are sitting on the fence wondering which side is correct. It seems that there now exists a unique opportunity to try and persuade the complementarian congregations in the CRC to accept the official position of their church, which is egalitarian. Those members who are humbly seeking God's will for women and who are open to looking at the arguments on both sides, may find the following exposition helpful.

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<sup>59</sup> "Resolutions: Women in Ministry," The Evangelical Covenant Church, 2006, accessed November 16, 2018, <https://covchurch.org/resolutions/2006-women-in-ministry/>.

<sup>60</sup> "Ministry," The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, accessed November 19, 2018, [https://www.opc.org/qa.html?question\\_id=617](https://www.opc.org/qa.html?question_id=617).

<sup>61</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity: I Corinthians 11:2–16," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 133.

## 4.0 Key Qualifications and Egalitarian Responses

In this section, a range of the many biblical, historical, theological, philosophical, and ethical claims that are disputed are presented. Many books, articles, videos, and podcasts have been produced in an effort to present the view that women are equally called and gifted by God for service even in leadership positions. The debate for complementarian churches can be articulated in large part by the arguments that have been carefully laid out by the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. Egalitarian responses in all of the key categories have been summarized in many resources available from Christians for Biblical Equality. An examination of the arguments put forth by complementarians and the responses of the egalitarians will be presented. Complementarians sincerely believe that women should be prohibited from serving as pastors and priests and that the church's traditional position century after century has been that the correct interpretation of the Bible supports the prohibition of women in office.<sup>62</sup> Egalitarians dispute this. The format for this presentation will be of the arguments of the complementarians followed by the egalitarian counterpoints. At the conclusion of the qualifications and arguments, a summary of the debate will follow with an analysis as to which position is more biblically conclusive, historically accurate, theologically coherent, philosophically consistent, and ethically just.

### 4.1 Introduction

Unless women are treated with equal honor and respect, the church's message of love and peace will seem hypocritical. By not studying about women in the Bible and

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, "Women in Ministry" in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomberg (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), 100–101.

history, church leaders miss the marvelous working of God. There has been progress since the coming of Christ. It is also enlightening to compare how poorly women are treated in other faith traditions, such as some Islamic cultures, to see that Christianity has brought positive changes in how men and women work together in the new creation.<sup>63</sup> Progress in raising the status of women in the Church has been halted because fearful, unwilling, or indolent men have succumbed to the pressure of the leaders of patriarchy to accept what complementarians say as coming from God, rather than engage with the Scriptures and history for themselves to see what God says about His female children.

#### 4.2 Qualifications and Responses to Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Philosophical Arguments

The debate over whether or not women must be eternally subordinated to men is primarily between two groups of Christians. Those calling themselves complementarians believe that the Bible establishes male authority over women. According to this view, women are to assume that male headship is biblical and to play only supportive roles to their husbands and male leaders in the Church. Egalitarians believe that leadership is based on the gifting and calling of the Holy Spirit and that God calls for all believers to submit to one another.<sup>64</sup> Egalitarians have composed arguments that refute the position of the complementarians biblically, historically, theologically, philosophically, and ethically.

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<sup>63</sup> Gal. 3:26–29 and 2 Cor. 5:14–17.

<sup>64</sup> Eph. 5:21; and Carolyn Custis James. *Half the Church: Recapturing God's Global Vision for Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011). 154-156.

The group of complementarians who form the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) have published a myriad of books and articles to support their position. In 1987 the CBMW felt the need to summarize their core beliefs concerning the status of women in response to their concern that the rise of feminism would damage society. They published the "Danvers Statement"<sup>65</sup> in 1988, where they wrote that:

The increasing promotion given to feminist egalitarianism with accompanying distortions of neglect of the glad harmony portrayed in Scripture between the loving, humble leadership of redeemed husbands and the intelligent, willing support of that leadership by redeemed wives ... leads to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large.

For over four decades, the Council has sought both in print form and on the Internet to influence hundreds of thousands of Christians to accept the idea that women must hold subordinate positions in the home and in the Church.

Egalitarian Christians recognize that though the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood portrays itself as the authority on God and His Word on gender issues, the arguments of the CBMW are not accepted by egalitarians. Organizations such as Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) formed to counter their influence. CBE and others have demonstrated that the ideal of a harmony has been shattered by domestic violence in the Church. While many husbands exercise “loving, humble leadership,” the fact is that abusers often use Scripture as ammunition for their misuse of power.<sup>66</sup> Careful biblical, historical, theological, philosophical, and ethical research reveals that it is not insubordinate women who are causing the destruction in the world, but rather the actions

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<sup>65</sup> "The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood," *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, "Appendix 2: The Danvers Statement," ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 469-472.

<sup>66</sup> James Alsdurf and Phyllis Alsdurf, *Battered Into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 17.

of sinful human beings.<sup>67</sup> Ironically, men blame women for the problems that are in society even though men have been in power while the problems have been in the making.

#### 4.2.1 Biblical Arguments

It is helpful to look at how God created humanity in the very beginning. God created humans as male and female with no hierarchy.<sup>68</sup>

Complementarians assert that the Scriptures proclaim that all people are created equal but have different roles.<sup>69</sup> However, there are no verses in the Bible wherein God says He created a hierarchy with different “roles” for men and women.

Complementarians, however, believe that they see a hierarchy in Genesis 2:18, “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.’”

As a complementarian, Dr. Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr. states, “But (Eve) was not his equal in that she was his *helper*.”<sup>70</sup> Ortlund brushes off the apparent contradiction between Genesis 1:27 (God created men and women equally in His image) and Genesis 2:18 (the “helper” woman is not equal) by calling it a “paradox.” Christians need to live

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<sup>67</sup> Elaine Storkey, *Scars Across Humanity: Understanding and Overcoming Violence Against Women* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2015), 218.

<sup>68</sup> Gen. 1:27.

<sup>69</sup> Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 131.

<sup>70</sup> Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr. “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 102.

with this paradox he says because of the “ranking within the Godhead.”<sup>71</sup> Dr. Ortlund is referring to the “Eternal Subordination of the Son to the Father” as promulgated by Bruce Ware and Wayne Grudem. We will discuss this complementarian doctrine in detail under the Theology heading.

Egalitarians reveal a different meaning of *helper* by looking at the actual Hebrew translation. The Hebrew for "suitable helper" is *ezer K'neg'Do*. *Ezer* means a "strong helper". *K'neg'Do* literally means "in front of". The term *Ezer* appears twenty-one times in the Old Testament. Sixteen times this word is used for God Himself. Eve is not a subordinate, but a strong, suitable partner.

Complementarians also point to I Timothy 2:12, I Corinthians 11:3, and Ephesians 5:22 to prove their case that subordination of women is part of the created order and part of God’s eternal plan for the relationships between men and women. It is helpful to look at these verses carefully to assess their exegesis, hermeneutics, and conclusions concerning the subordination of women.

Perhaps the flagship verse for complementarians is I Timothy 2:12, “But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” According to Douglas Moo, “1 Timothy 2:8–15 imposes two restrictions on the ministry of women: they are not to teach Christian doctrine to men and they are not to exercise authority directly over men in the church.”<sup>72</sup> This verse often serves as a conversation stopper in discussions. The verse is presented as clear biblical admonition that women cannot be in

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>72</sup> Douglas Moo, “What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 181.

authority over men. Seminary professor Dr. Robert D. Culver takes it for granted that the verse is an undeniable basis for limiting activities for women in the church and that others agree with his interpretation.<sup>73</sup>

The complementarian interpretation of this passage contradicts other passages of the Bible, including Paul's own writings.<sup>74</sup> I Timothy 2:12 is only one verse in the Bible. For example, the spiritual gift of prophecy was given to women in the Church.<sup>75</sup> Prophecy is by definition an authoritative teaching from God. Complementarians also fail to recognize Paul's own willingness to partner with women as shown in the books of Acts and Romans. It is also interesting to note that while complementarians insist on the literal interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12 (women are to be silent) they do not believe that verse 15 ("But women will be preserved through the bearing of children...") is to be taken literally. Nor do women take the admonition not to wear braided hair or gold or pearls seriously. Complementarians interpret the rest of the passage in its cultural context, but not verse 12. The complementarian interpretation does not substantiate their conclusion that women's service in the church must be restricted.

A passage that is used to explain the complementarian position of hierarchy is I Corinthians 11:3, "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ." Thomas R. Schreiner gives his interpretation as "Paul is saying that Christ is the authority over every man, man

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<sup>73</sup> Robert D. Culver, "A Traditional View: Let Your Women Keep Silence," in *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, ed. Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 36–37.

<sup>74</sup> Aida Besancon Spencer, *I Timothy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 61.

<sup>75</sup> 1 Cor. 12:10.

is the authority over woman, and God is the authority over Christ.”<sup>76</sup> He clarifies further, “But we have already seen that the clear meaning of *head* is ‘authority’ and thus a hierarchy is definitely established.”<sup>77</sup> Dr. Philip B. Payne disagrees. He claims that there are about fifteen key reasons that favor interpreting *kephale* (head) as “source” rather than “authority”.<sup>78</sup>

Egalitarians offer Galatians 3:28 as a key verse in settling the dispute in favor of women’s equality in the church. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Complementarians John Piper and Wayne Grudem disagree. They assert, “Galatians 3:28 does not abolish gender based roles established by God and redeemed by Christ.”<sup>79</sup> Grudem and Piper assert that the created order in Genesis 1:28 that men are first and women are “helpers,” is not overthrown by Galatians 3:28. They say that it is about salvation—both men and women can be saved. But their rejoinder is an obfuscation to avoid the clear meaning of “neither male nor female” in the Church. The Church has a mission to spread the gospel and both men and women join in.

Philip B. Payne gives a more biblically consistent explanation: “Galatians 3:28 demands equal status and privileges for women as for men. In Christ, these groups do not stand on different levels but as equals.”<sup>80</sup> The letter to the Galatians is a letter to a Church

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<sup>76</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 128.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>78</sup> Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 118–137.

<sup>79</sup> Piper and Grudem, 72.

and is addressing body life not salvation. No one, no matter their ethnic, economic, or gender background, is to be excluded from all of the privileges of church membership including leadership positions.

In summary, complementarians cannot prove conclusively from the Scriptures that their doctrine “equal but different” proves the eternal subordination of women. It is unfortunate that the church does not see the equality of women in ministry as a way to put more soldiers of Christ in the field of ministry. Every Christian is to put on “the full armor of God, so that [they] will be able to stand firm” and be ambassadors for Christ, “having shod [their] feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:11, 15). Men do not need to shoulder the burden alone. Churches that struggle to get volunteers for ministry could have a ready source of qualified and gifted workers if they lifted the restrictions on women.

#### **4.2.2 Historical Arguments**

Right at the heart of the hierarchical understanding of the man-woman relationship is an appeal to tradition.<sup>80</sup> Sadly, in modern conservative churches, where patriarchy is preached from the pulpit, the history of women is largely ignored. Assuming the inferiority of women, patriarchal pastors teach mainly the stories of men while neglecting most of the stories of women. One outcome of this notion that women have lesser tasks in the church, results in limiting their participation, especially in leadership positions. The hierarchicalists insist that they represent the “traditional” position on

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<sup>80</sup> Payne, 75.

<sup>81</sup> Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2002), 6.

women's subordination, and it is the egalitarians that have broken with tradition. For example, Schreiner says that the "notion that there is a subordination in function or in the economic Trinity but an equality of essence is also part of the historic heritage of evangelical theology."<sup>82</sup> Hierarchicalists for the last four decades have been trying to say that women were "created equal in essence, but given different *roles*." Hierarchicalists hope that this softer sounding version of male superiority will make women feel better. But this saying is not only unbiblical; it is also a recent invention.

The issue is clouded because people do not study the history of the Church, let alone the history of theology. However, the Church has not always said that women are *equal* to men. Far from it. A short survey will suffice to demonstrate this:

- **Early Church.** John Chrysostom: "God maintained the order of each sex by dividing the business of life into two parts, and assigned the more necessary and beneficial aspects to the man and the less important, inferior matters to the woman."<sup>83</sup>
- **Middle Ages.** Thomas Aquinas: "... Woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active power in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness [of the Image of God] in the masculine sex, while production of woman comes from defect in the active force."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Schreiner, 129.

<sup>83</sup> Ruth A. Tucker and Walter Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), 124.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Matriti: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1955), vol. 2: 416, quoted in J. Lee Grady *10 Lies the Church Tells Women* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2006), 20.

- **Reformation.** John Knox: "... If women take upon them the office which God hath assigned to men, they shall not escape the Divine malediction."<sup>85</sup>
- **A Principal Reformer for the Dutch Reformed Church.** John Calvin: "On this account, all women are born that they may acknowledge themselves as inferior in consequence to the superiority of the male sex." (Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11)<sup>86</sup>
- **Twentieth Century.** John R. Rice: "I have no doubt that millions will go to Hell because of the unscriptural practice of women preachers."<sup>87</sup>

The first half of the claim that the Church has always taught ontological equality for women is therefore not true. The question of ontology was not discussed at all either for the Trinity or for male/female relationships. It is a new practice thought up by the present complementarians to confirm what is most important to them, the subordination of women.

Another distortion of history is demonstrated in the way that women's stories have been neglected. In spite of the way that women were marginalized, especially by the institutional Church, women rose above their circumstances and founded monasteries, schools, hospitals, and mission societies.<sup>88</sup> For example, devoted wife and mother of eleven children, Elizabeth Fry was active in the reform of mental asylums, prisons, the convict ship system, nursing standards, education for women and the poor, and housing

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<sup>85</sup> John Knox, quoted in Tucker and Liefeld, 177.

<sup>86</sup> "Calvin's Commentaries, I Corinthians 11," *The Bible Hub*, accessed November 20, 2018, [https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/1\\_corinthians/11.htm](https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/1_corinthians/11.htm).

<sup>87</sup> John R. Rice, quoted in Tucker and Liefeld, 404.

<sup>88</sup> Michelle DeRusha. *50 Women Every Christian Should Know: Learning from Heroines of the Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 15–357.

for the homeless. In spite of the obstacles thrown against her by nineteenth-century male leaders, Elizabeth Fry followed Jesus by caring for the poor, the sick, and prisoners.<sup>89</sup>

The second half of the claim—that women have different “roles”—is not true either. Complementarians claim that female subordination is based on the subordination of Jesus to the Father and that “role” subordination of the Son to the Father dates back to the Nicene Creed. In actuality, the first person to speak of role subordination was George Knight III in his book, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*. Knight chose the word to obfuscate what he was really teaching: the permanent subordination of Jesus to the Father. Complementarians readily transferred the subordination of Jesus to the Father to gender roles as well.

In summary, the complementarian attempt at making a traditional case for role subordination is historically inaccurate. History does not support the recent complementarian position on the Trinity as taught by Knight, Grudem, and Ware. Complementarians have not supported their doctrine of subordination of women to men either biblically or historically.

### **4.2.3 Theological Arguments**

The complementarians are unable to theologically prove their position of eternal subordination of women to men. Every time someone raises the question about women in church leadership, complementarians throw out the “equal but separate” doctrine. That is supposed to be the end of the discussion. Many in Reformed circles embraced Knight’s new terminology on “roles” wholeheartedly. In the last forty years, several men, notably

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<sup>89</sup> Edith Deen, *Great Women of the Christian Faith* (Chappaqua, NY: Christian Herald Books, 1959), 164–171; also see Matt. 25:41–46.

Ware and Grudem, have also attempted to prove subordination of women theologically. One chief justification for their assertion of the subjugation of women is Ware's monograph, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance*.<sup>90</sup> In this work Ware asserts that the divine persons are not "co-equal" as orthodoxy asserts, but that the Godhead is "hierarchically" ordered. The details of Ware's work are too many for this short paper, but suffice it to say that he leaned heavily on verses such as I Corinthians 11:3: "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ." Ware says that this subordination is true in all eternity.<sup>91</sup> But the passage does not indicate that "head" describes an eternal state.<sup>92</sup> Men will not still be "heads" over women in Heaven.

Another problem with Ware's depiction of the Godhead is in the way that he used the illustration of the Trinity as a family with a Father and Son. Ware and Grudem forced a parallel between the Father and Son to a husband and wife.<sup>93</sup> In Ware's theology, the Trinity is compared to creaturely relationships. However, as Christians, we should be looking at the Scriptures for our understanding of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as they truly are: equal in power, majesty, and glory. It is theologically incoherent to turn the proper hermeneutical principle of exegesis into a projection of human characteristics onto God.

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<sup>90</sup> Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>92</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009), 68–69.

<sup>93</sup> One wonders if that makes the Holy Spirit the child?

In the Fall of 2016, a debate was held at the Evangelical Theological Society's annual conference. Grudem and Ware defended their complementarian positions. Drs. Millard Erickson and Kevin Giles challenged the complementarian position, demonstrating that eternal subordination of the Son to the Father contradicts the Nicene Creed, the Reformation and post-Reformation Protestant confessions, and the Evangelical Theological Society's own doctrinal statement.<sup>94</sup> Erickson and Giles clearly demonstrated several reasons why the complementarian theology of gender is incoherent. For one thing, neither Erickson nor Giles appeals to the doctrine of the Trinity to support their egalitarian position. A three-fold Trinity is not analogous to a twofold male-female relationship. Complementarian theology is an incoherent theology.

Many complementarian errors were pointed out during the debate, but the most serious one is the breach with the historic doctrine of the Nicene Creed. This doctrine has been held as orthodox since AD 381. A thorough analysis of the Nicene Creed is too lengthy for this paper. One point of departure from orthodoxy for Ware is over the term "eternal generation". Ware says, that the "doctrine is highly speculative and not grounded in biblical teaching."<sup>95</sup> The vast majority of Christians acknowledges the Nicene Creed as biblical and orthodox. It is surprising that it took nearly forty years before someone could point out the incoherence in Ware's theology. Along with biblical inconclusiveness and historical inaccuracy, the complementarian theology is less than coherent.

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<sup>94</sup> Kevin Giles, "The Nicene and Reformed Doctrine of the Trinity," *Priscilla Papers* 31, no. 3 (Summer 2017): 3–14.

<sup>95</sup> Ware, 162.

#### 4.2.4 Philosophical Arguments

Philosophical inquiry includes getting answers to questions in four areas: epistemology (knowledge), ontology or metaphysics (being), teleology (purpose) and ethics (values and practice). To have a balanced worldview, all four aspects of philosophy should be consistent with each other. If one part of a worldview system is not in balance with the others, the philosophy is inconsistent.

God created in an orderly fashion. He also made human beings in His image. Most Christians agree that part of the image of God is to be able to think and reflect in an orderly manner. There should be a unity between ontology and ethics in order to have a consistent worldview. When the complementarians say that women “are equal in being (ontology) but different in roles (ethics)”, they are essentially inconsistent in their philosophy. This is important because complementarians have said that a woman’s subordination is both *necessary* and *permanent*.<sup>96</sup> If woman’s role status is essential, then it must be part of her nature (being). Gnostic errors in the past have tried to separate the physical from the spiritual, but orthodox Christians recognize the essential oneness in our being. Christians have traditionally understood that humans are holistic beings. The Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is/are One. A human is also one complete being. Women are complete in every way as equal children of God.

In summary the complementarian position on the normative subordination of women is not only biblically inconclusive, historically inaccurate, and theologically incoherent, it is also philosophically inconsistent.

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<sup>96</sup> Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, “‘Equal in Being, Unequal in Role’: Exploring the Logic of Woman’s Subordination,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill, and Gordon D. Fee (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 301–305.

### 4.3 Qualifications and Responses to Ethical, Psychological, and Ecclesiological Arguments

As pointed out earlier, theology and ethics must be connected in a consistent worldview. In the debate between egalitarians and complementarians, the topic of abuse is often seen as a secondary issue. However, for those women who live with domestic violence, it is a central issue; they live with a logical conclusion of women's submission to sinful men. A theology emphasizing the authority of men has existed for centuries, but in the last few decades, with the emergence of Christians who champion egalitarianism, the abuse of women has become unacceptable. Complementarians responded by blaming egalitarians for the abuse rather than looking at their own theology.

#### 4.3.1 Ethical Arguments

*Desiring God* is an international web ministry with over twelve thousand free resources and is accessed by over 3.5 million users per month.<sup>97</sup> Dr. John Piper serves as the lead teacher for this ministry. His mission is to help Christians find lives of deep, satisfying joy by embracing Christian Hedonism. The leading resources are “Ask Pastor John” (primarily podcasts), and articles such as in “Look at the Book,” and “Solid Joys.” Dr. Piper has written thousands of articles. In this paper, the concern is about what he has to say regarding women in ministry. As a complementarian, Piper has been consistent in his view that only men may be in leadership positions in the church.

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<sup>97</sup> John Piper, “Desiring God,” accessed April 3, 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org>.

In a *Desiring God* podcast entitled “Sex-Abuse Allegations and the Egalitarian Myth,” Piper lays the blame on egalitarians for the abuse of women and girls because they have neglected God-created gender differences.<sup>98</sup> He says that it is egalitarians’ fault that men have forgotten the “special care” men owe women. He asserts that only male leadership can cause humanity to flourish and protect women from abuse. For Piper it is “maleness” that qualifies men for leadership and care for women. But what about sinful men? Piper says that women may have to endure some abuse anyway.

Piper goes on to clarify that women should submit to Jesus first, but Jesus says she should submit to her husband, therefore she must submit to her husband’s abuse in order to obey Jesus. If the husband is abusing her, what is her response? She should try and sweetly convince her husband to change his mind. Otherwise, she must endure the abuse for a season: “If it’s not requiring her to sin but simply hurting her, then I think she endures verbal abuse for a season, and she endures perhaps being smacked one night, and then she seeks help from the church.”<sup>99</sup>

Piper later clarified that abusive husbands are breaking God’s law and should be reported to civil authorities. This is commendable, but does not stop the problem. It is too late for the woman who must live with the fear and the pain. It is not enough to blame egalitarians for the problem rather than face the problem of a faulty theology. Piper has forgotten that men are sinners and not all men are the loving, gentle providers for their families that they should be.

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<sup>98</sup> John Piper, “Sex-Abuse Allegations and the Egalitarian Myth,” March 16, 2018 <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/sex-abuse-allegations-and-the-egalitarian-myth>.

<sup>99</sup> John Piper, “Does a Woman Submit to Abuse?,” September 1, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OkUPc2NLRM>.

In the Bible, human flourishing has nothing to do with gender roles and everything to do with spiritual rebirth in Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is Christ in you as lived out through the fruit of the Spirit<sup>100</sup> that results in holy living. By emphasizing gender over the true gospel of rebirth in Christ, the complementarians make a grave error. Maleness is not a morality or a character quality. By emphasizing maleness as the primary qualification for leadership, the complementarians have continued to place females at risk by putting biology ahead of godly character. It can allow sinful, abusive men to have authority whether or not they have demonstrated spiritual maturity. The same patterns of abuse against women are as evident in the Church as in society, even if they go unnoticed.<sup>101</sup> Of course not all men who believe in female subordination are perpetrators, but their rationale does exacerbate the problem.

#### **4.3.2 Psychological Arguments**

Complementarian theology promotes a power differential between men and women, and it fosters physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse. After being repeatedly abused by her husband, Sally went to stay with her sister for two weeks. While she was gone, her husband went to the elders of their church and had her excommunicated. Aside from the obvious disregard of Christ's instructions for the process of discipline given in Matthew 18, this church thinks that male hierarchy is more important than the safety and lives of women. Churches allow men to treat women this way in part because of the influence of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood that has led many to

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<sup>100</sup> Col. 1:21–27, Gal. 5:16–25.

<sup>101</sup> Storkey, 206.

accept the position of male rule. Well-respected leaders such as John Piper have assured both men and women that women must submit.

Another reason that men maintain that women must submit is that, as presented in the illustration of the Christian Reformed Church, they are following what they believe is the traditional position. A popular writer, Dr. C. S. Lewis promoted a hierarchical and essentialist view of gender in his early works. Following Thomas Aquinas and other philosophers, Lewis believed that “masculinity and femininity are deep spiritual ‘essences’ ....to which we are called by both God and nature to conform in order to ensure our welfare as persons and society.”<sup>102</sup> C. S. Lewis was a traditionalist. He lived in the post-Victorian age. He was also a college professor at Oxford University at a time when women were not granted degrees for their work. During a space of thirty years, Lewis gradually changed his thoughts on gender after his marriage to Joy Davidman and his friendship with Dorothy L. Sayers. By the time he wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1949–1956), Lewis was treating the characters in his stories as equals.<sup>103</sup> Dr. Lewis had learned first-hand that women could equal men intellectually.

What changed Lewis’s philosophy? C. S. Lewis came to realize that “Christian responsibility is dispersed horizontally in terms of appropriate talents, rather than vertically downward through a hierarchy based on class, gender, or religious status.”<sup>104</sup> An egalitarian might say that, “C. S. Lewis came closer to the view of mutuality of service based on gifts, rather than on the hierarchy of the complementarians.” When

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<sup>102</sup> Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, *A Sword Between the Sexes: C. S. Lewis and the Gender Debates* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), 36.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

complementarians meet women, even in the form of stories, they too could be humble enough to admit that women are gifted by God to serve mutually with them in the Church.

#### **4.3.3 Ecclesiological Arguments**

A more consistently biblical theology will show that all Christians have equal inheritance rights in the kingdom and all may serve equally in the church where “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). The Holy Spirit gives gifts irrespective of gender. If it were important to restrict women to certain roles, the Scriptures would have made this plain. Instead, we not only see no mention of gender in the distribution of gifts by the Holy Spirit, but biblical case histories reveal that women were serving in the early church in all capacities. Because of this freedom for everyone to fulfill their calling in the early church the gospel moved forward quickly. When gifts are matched to service, not gender, the local body can function more effectively. Women and men together form the whole body of Christ where all members need and care for each other. If anything, “those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor” (I Cor. 12:23). The ultimate authority with which to preach or speak the word of God comes from God Himself. The Bible is the source of authoritative preaching. Anyone, man or woman, who faithfully proclaims the word exercises authority as God’s representative.

Not allowing women to freely proclaim the word puts the church in the position of telling God to whom He may give authority and to whom He may not. One

complementarian, Dr. W. Robert Godfrey, chairman of Ligonier Ministries and a signer of the Danvers Statement, said at the 2017 Reformation Tour in Germany, the “The message validates the office.”<sup>105</sup> Godfrey stated that the purity of the message is most important and that the message, the gospel, validates the messenger. If this is true, then there is another flaw in the complementarians’ theology that states that women may not preach. If the message is what matters, then why do they still insist that it is gender that matters? When half of the potential speakers of the word are denied the use of their gifts in preaching, the church is weakened. Women are meant to work with God and men in the church. Women have much to offer and need to be heard. In modern patriarchal churches, they have been stripped of their opportunities as God’s image bearers to serve in leadership positions. When there is an unbalanced view of the scriptures, men, women, and society all lose.

The church would benefit greatly by restoring women to their biblical and historical roles as leaders. Pastors could begin by speaking about women from the pulpit and through the use of Christian education materials. If a Bible curriculum containing women’s stories could be provided, it would be a starting place for those complementarians who are not comfortable with addressing the topic of women in the pulpit.

#### 4.4 Analysis and Summary

The consequences of holding the view that women were created solely to serve men are very disturbing. Yes, many godly men are leading their families well, but “ideas

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<sup>105</sup> W. Robert Godfrey (speech, Reformation Study Tour and Cruise, August 5, 2017).

have consequences” and the latent ideas of women’s inferiority have led to much abuse. The consequences of a subordinate view of women, that they are somehow “equal but different,”—with “different” meaning lower status in roles have led to physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse. A renewed effort at reading the Bible impartially, studying history accurately, discussing theology openly, examining philosophical predispositions honestly, and understanding the ethical consequences to keeping women in subordinate positions would be welcome to a church full of hurting people.

Egalitarians have studied God’s Word in an effort to find his will for women in ministry. They have discovered that gender is not a limiting factor for women in leadership. On the other end of the spectrum of beliefs concerning women in ministry are those who have made up their minds that the Bible firmly denies authority to women to hold office. However, there remains the vast majority in the middle of the debate. These believers are looking at both sides wondering who is right. To the extent that they have open minds and hearts and a sincere desire to know what God wants from his children, the probability is great that they will come to the knowledge that God uses all his children irrespective of gender. For those who have always accepted the traditional view that women are incapable of leadership positions, stories of women in the Bible and history demonstrating their accomplishments in the lives of many thousands may be helpful in convincing them that women are indeed more than equipped for the task of the work of the kingdom, even in leadership positions.

There are serious consequences in the church when women are prohibited from leadership in ministry. God created men and women to be equal partners in kingdom

work.<sup>106</sup> When men insist that women are not capable or called to lead, they insult the Father Who placed many women in leadership positions such as Deborah,<sup>107</sup> Huldah,<sup>108</sup> and Priscilla.<sup>109</sup> When women are denied opportunities to serve, the implication is that the Holy Spirit has made a mistake when a gifted woman comes forward to fulfill her calling. The Lord Jesus Himself demonstrated His love and respect for women during His life on earth. He trusted women followers to fulfill the task of the church beginning with Mary of Magdala who was privileged to be the first to share the news of the resurrection.<sup>110</sup>

The body suffers when gifted and willing members are not allowed to serve simply due to their gender. Patriarchal teaching leaves women open to abusive relationships. When a hierarchical position is stressed in the church, men suffer too. Cast into stereotypical roles, men needlessly limit themselves from available spiritual, emotional, and ministerial help. Society suffers as well. Christians have been called to be salt and light to the world.<sup>111</sup> The church's message of peace and love through Christ is lost when freedom is denied to women. The church cannot preach about justice without giving justice to its most vulnerable members. The world needs to hear a gospel of love, justice, and freedom. Though some churches have begun to call women into leadership

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<sup>106</sup> Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, *Equal to Serve: Women and Men Working Together Revealing the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 213.

<sup>107</sup> Judges 4 and 5.

<sup>108</sup> 2 Chron. 34:22.

<sup>109</sup> Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19.

<sup>110</sup> John 20:18.

<sup>111</sup> Matt. 5:13.

positions, many patriarchal churches are denying women opportunities to serve as they have been called and gifted by God.

### **5.0 Summary and Conclusion**

To many contemporary evangelicals, the Trinity is a hierarchy with the Father at the top. The Father commands and the Son obeys. This patriarchal image of God is then used to demonstrate how male/female relationships are supposed to work. Husbands/Elders command, wives/women obey. History has been distorted to substantiate their claim that women were created to be subordinate to men. Male hierarchy is the most important factor, as shown by how it dominates their thinking. The complementarian congregations in the Christian Reformed Church, like many other conservative denominations have rested on their tradition in not granting equal status to women in the Church.

The outcome of the arguments of the egalitarian and complementarian position presented above demonstrates conclusively that women should be allowed to use their gifts in any position for which they are called and qualified. The egalitarian arguments show effectively where the complementarians have gone off track. Egalitarian women who serve have a tremendous responsibility as their lives become the witness to the truth that God does call women.

Christians who want to know more about the subject of women in ministry have a wealth of information at their fingertips. The summary of a few common arguments as presented may be helpful for those who seek to know God's will for women in ministry but do not already have a settled position on the question of women in leadership in the

church. These are Christians who are looking at groups on opposite ends of the spectrum on the topic of women in leadership in the church and wondering who is right—those who support qualified and called women into leadership offices in the church or those who maintain that the Word of God precludes women from leadership positions in the church. Resolved complementarians may ignore the egalitarians, but the Christians on the fence who are sincerely seeking the biblical, historical, theological, philosophical, and ethical truth will find that the arguments are more convincing for the egalitarian position.

In spite of the profundity of egalitarian material, complementarian resources reveal that many conservatives still believe that women are unqualified biblically or incapable intellectually or emotionally of leadership positions in the church. This begs the question, “How can complementarians be persuaded to be more open to views that are not their own?” Is there a possible way to winsomely convince them that God does indeed call and gift women for service in His kingdom? Illustrations of women’s calling and gifting to serve through their stories will aid in the restoration of their place in the work in God’s kingdom. C. S. Lewis found from his own experience that women have the ability to serve alongside men. The stories of other amazing women might prove helpful in convincing others that God does call and gift women for service in his kingdom, even in leadership positions. For those Christians attending complementarian churches that are afraid of preaching or teaching about women, a website with the stories of women will prove a useful remedy to the problem of the neglect of women. Christians can look up the information in the privacy of their own homes.

## **SECTION THREE**

### **EQUALITY FOR WOMEN IN THE CHURCH – THE HYPOTHESIS**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

In spite of the fact that countless books and articles have been written in support of women in ministry at all levels in the church, many Christians today still do not believe that women are qualified or capable of holding positions of authority in the church. Egalitarian organizations are reaching thousands of lay people with many new books and articles being published almost daily. Complementarians have remained very persuasive in spite of the recent crises in the patriarchal camp involving abuse and sexual misconduct. In the last few years, organizations on both sides of the issue have begun to reach more people via the Internet.

The goal of this paper is to convince Christians who are searching for the truth that women should be allowed to participate in all levels of ministry so that the whole body of Christ will be more effective in bringing the gospel message of love, peace, reconciliation, and justice to the world as all of God's children participate in the Great Commission. While other solutions have been proposed, there remains another opportunity to persuade complementarians that women may serve equally with men. In this age of biblical and historical illiteracy, one solution to the problem of the poor treatment of women in the Church may be remedied through the raising of awareness of women's contributions through the telling of stories. Further, that information could be multiplied greatly through the use of the Internet. A website dedicated to promoting the truth about how God has called and gifted women for work in his kingdom would be a

valuable resource to anyone who is searching for God’s will concerning leadership in the Church.

## 2.0 Rationale for Hypothesis

Tradition, comfort with the current cultural expectations for women, and often times unwillingness on the part of male leaders to share their power and authority, combine to keep women out of office in the Church.<sup>112</sup> Only a small percentage of Christians study at Bible colleges or seminaries with the result that most evangelicals are on unfamiliar and often confusing ground when they approach the topic of women in ministry. Sincere Christians are wondering about how much—if any—authority women should exercise in the Church.

The challenges are great and both sides believe that the stakes are high. The complementarians, holding a restrictive view of women in office, claim that they have the true biblical answers. They believe that women who aim for leadership positions are responsible for all of the problems in society.<sup>113</sup> Egalitarians have responded with a full-orbed biblical worldview that substantiates their conviction that women are called and gifted to serve in any leadership position for which a woman is qualified. Egalitarians see the anguish and pain of abuse and domestic violence in the church as an outcome of a low view of women.<sup>114</sup> The debate is still ongoing because many issues are still

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<sup>112</sup> Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 65–128.

<sup>113</sup> John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), xi.

<sup>114</sup> Patricia Warford, “Facing Nabal: Working with Men Who Abuse,” *Priscilla Papers* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 11–13.

unresolved. Inexperience, ignorance, incomprehension of the larger picture, and fear<sup>115</sup> aid the complementarians as they disseminate their doctrine of the subordination of women. Both groups have been able to advance their views to many more thousands of inquiring believers via the Internet.

Another approach to solving the problem may be very helpful. Storytelling has been used for centuries to engage listeners. True stories will provide an easy way to assimilate information about the facts of God's calling and gifting for service of his female children throughout history. True stories will mitigate the false claims of the complementarians while encouraging women to bravely seek to fulfill their God-given calling to serve.

## 2.1 Why the CRCNA is Still Debating the Problem

Many in the Christian Reformed Church of North America follow the complementarian position of women in ministry. After thoughtfully considering the previous debate, it is difficult to ascertain the reasons why so many Christians still believe that women were created to be permanently subordinate to men. In the debate about women in recent years, those advocating women's permanent subordination have frequently said that those arguing for equality as the biblical norm are playing loose with the Bible, specifically by reading back into the Bible their modern cultural presuppositions about women. After reviewing the flaws in complementarian theology, the reverse seems to be true, but uneducated lay Christians are not prepared to refute the false claims of the complementarians.

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<sup>115</sup> Carolyn Custis James, *Half the Church: Recapturing God's Global Vision for Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 170.

One glaring weakness in complementarian methodology is the lack of attention to ethical outcomes for their position that restricts women in their lives of service for God.<sup>116</sup> The ethical issues are very important especially now that hardly a month goes by without a new story of a church leader caught in a scandal. For some complementarians, social justice issues are equated with liberalism and so they do not seem willing to deal with these ethical issues.

Sincere complementarian pastors in the CRC that follow their honest convictions about women in leadership positions in the church have shown resistance to egalitarian arguments about ethics. This dissertation may not succeed in convincing committed complementarians to change their minds, but the goal is to provide an analysis of the ongoing debate to help those Christians who are making the effort to weigh the arguments of both sides in order to find out what God really says. The egalitarians are making great gains in providing them with intellectual arguments, but one thing may be even more convincing. The true stories of women in the Bible and history will clearly demonstrate that women are called and capable to serve in all aspects of church leadership.

## 2.2 Biblical: The Bible is a Story Book, Not a List of Doctrines

The complementarian position is still popular in the Christian Reformed Church today because its proponents are able to persuade people that their position is the biblical and traditional doctrine of women in ministry. Complementarians have unabashedly

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<sup>116</sup> Elizabeth Gerhardt, *The Cross and Gendercide: A Theological Response to Global Violence Against Women and Girls* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 17.

stated that their position is what God says.<sup>117</sup> However, complementarians do not always state their assumptions before interpreting the Bible according to their own theology.<sup>118</sup> Unwary Christians are led to believe that a group named the *Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* must have God's word on the question of leadership in the Church, in spite of the fact that the complementarians' interpretation of Scripture fits their preconceived idea of hierarchy. Complementarian theologians are therefore able to persuade many who do not have the tools to question their faulty exegesis. With only 11 percent of evangelical Christians having read the Bible in its entirety even one time, there is tremendous ignorance about what God's Word says about women in ministry.<sup>119</sup> Since so few lay people have read the entire Bible, it is easy for complementarians to teach their interpretation of Scripture as the only interpretation. Complementarians are able to influence so many because the people are not studying like Bereans, "examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Another reason that complementarians are successful with their goal of limiting women in ministry is that there is an assumption that while women can learn from the stories of men in the Bible, men have little if anything to learn from the women's stories in the Bible. Curriculums on the characters in the Bible begin at an early age, even in preschool, with stories of the male giants of the faith: Abraham, Moses, David, and Daniel. Little boys and girls need to learn all of the stories of God's children in the Bible,

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<sup>117</sup> Robert D. Culver, "A Traditional View: Let Your Women Keep Silence," *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, ed. Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 25-49.

<sup>118</sup> Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 2.

<sup>119</sup> Adelle M. Banks, "The Bible: Helpful, But Not Read Much," LifeWayResearch.com, April 15, 2017, <https://religionnews.com/2017/04/25/the-bible-helpful-but-unread/>.

male and female. A new curriculum for the CRC focusing on the stories of women is needed to fill in the gap.

### 2.3 Historical: Tradition is Very Important in the CRCNA

Another way in which complementarians assure their followers that they have the true doctrine of leadership in the Church is based on the ignorance of history that prevails in the church, especially church history. For most of the last twenty centuries, the church wrestled with the question of slavery before coming to the agreement that slavery is anti-Christian. The Dutch introduced slavery to South Africa in 1652 and the Dutch Reformed Church promoted apartheid as Biblical through the twentieth century.<sup>120</sup> Thankfully, in 1982 the CRC declared apartheid a heresy and suspended membership for churches still practicing discrimination.<sup>121</sup> The traditionalism of the Dutch Reformed family of churches is prevalent in their history and includes not only marginalization of other races but also women. The same hierarchical thinking that promotes “whites” also promotes “males”.<sup>122</sup> It has taken time to change the thinking about slavery. It is time to change the thinking about male dominance.

Courses in church history or the history of Christian theology that are taught in most seminaries do not include writings about or by women.<sup>123</sup> The impression given is

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<sup>120</sup> David Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2010), 11–15.

<sup>121</sup> “History of the Belhar Confession,” Christian Reformed Church in North America, accessed November 19, 2018, <https://www.crcna.org/search/google/apartheid>.

<sup>122</sup> Rev. Michelle Boonzaaier, interview by author, Amity, Oregon, October 4, 2017.

<sup>123</sup> Amy Oden, *In Her Words: Women’s Writings in the History of Christian Thought* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 11.

that women did very little worth recording. Traditionalism or “We’ve always done it that way” creates limits in people’s thinking. It is challenging for many to move out of their comfort zone—especially in conservative CRC churches. The testimonies of popular Christians, such as C. S. Lewis, who have promoted masculine superiority in their writings, have helped to keep many comfortable in their hierarchical positions. Few Christians know that C. S. Lewis changed his mind after observing the qualities of gifted women. Stories of the many Christian women who made a difference in thousands of lives could present God’s truth in a more convincing way.

#### 2.4 Theological: Reformed Theology Has Ignored Women

Theology is important. Men and women in the Christian Reformed Church who are untrained in theology have accepted the argument that there is a hierarchy in the Trinity and therefore should be a hierarchy of men over women in the church.<sup>124</sup> This hierarchical argument was shown to be faulty Section Two, but many complementarians still look to the *Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* as their authoritative source for theology.

In a survey on women in ministry given to pastors in the Christian Reformed Church of North America, one typical response to the question “Why do you think women’s stories are neglected in many churches?” was that in the CRCNA preaching should be expository.<sup>125</sup> Ministers, they say, must preach through the Scriptures explaining the main theological points. One wonders however, if they intend to cover the

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<sup>124</sup> Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 131.

<sup>125</sup> Mary Walker, “Teaching About Women in the Bible Survey,” Survey Monkey (Fall 2017). See Appendix A for a summary of the responses.

whole Bible how they get past the hundreds of references and stories of women in the Bible? That there are more men in the Bible than women is without a doubt, but there is a huge difference between focusing exclusively on the men in the Scriptures because “men are the main characters and women are the background characters”<sup>126</sup> and not telling any stories of women at all except for Mary at Christmastime.

The emphasis on theology in the Reformed churches seems to preclude the use of narrating stories in their preaching. Emphasizing the expository preaching of doctrines in the Bible over narrative makes for missed opportunities—opportunities to reach Christians who would enjoy and learn from the many stories that God has put in his word. Theology can be presented in stories.<sup>127</sup> The narrative of Mary of Magdala<sup>128</sup> reveals the whole of the gospel story including the Savior's love, compassion, forgiving spirit, and granting of new life. Storytelling as a means to teach the people has been in the Bible from the beginning.<sup>129</sup> Pastors in the CRC might keep their congregations more interested by including stories in their sermons.

### 2.5 Philosophical: Women Are Still Seen as Not Capable

Philosophy seems like a daunting subject to most lay Christians. Yet, every person has underlying presuppositions and an underlying worldview of some kind

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid. This was another common response in the survey.

<sup>127</sup> Marion Ann Taylor and Heather E. Weir, *Women in the Story of Jesus: The Gospels Through the Eyes of Nineteenth-Century Female Biblical Interpreters* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), 212–214.

<sup>128</sup> Luke 8:1–3; John 19:25; 20:1–18.

<sup>129</sup> Deut. 11:18–19.

whether they can articulate them or not.<sup>130</sup> Christians usually agree that the God is a Trinity, that Christ is our Savior, and that the Bible is God’s word to mankind. These are basic presuppositions for traditional Christians. How does the notion of God as Creator fit in with a philosophy of life?

God’s creation of mankind and the formation of man and wife give a picture of the intended life for men and women on earth. Originally, men and women would serve side-by-side in the garden. Both were given an equal measure of the image of God including wisdom and intellectual capacity. Together they were to procreate and fill the earth. They were both given the authority to rule over everything on earth together. Complementarian men and women in the CRC somehow miss the contradiction in “equal in essence, different in roles.” If a woman is unequivocally and eternally forbidden to do what a man does, she is not equal to him.

## 2.6 Ethical: Complementarians in the CRC Are Uncomfortable Talking About It

While the official leaders in the CRC are addressing the problems of justice, the very topic makes the conservative congregations uncomfortable. Some hide from things like abuse and human trafficking rather than deal with it.<sup>131</sup> Conservative churches have not been consistent in giving their congregations a comprehensive version of the bigger picture in the world. Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and many others just keep women subservient to men as a matter of course. Should Christianity look different? The Christians who follow the hierarchical thinking of the Council on Biblical Manhood and

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<sup>130</sup> Kevin Giles, *The Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 76.

<sup>131</sup> The author gave a presentation on “Human Trafficking” for her conservative CRC congregation in the fall of 2016. Only six people showed up.

Womanhood do not look different. Christians should not be surprised to find out that abuse is just as rife in churches as elsewhere.

One of the reasons given for the lack of involvement of Christians in social justice is that a single person or congregation cannot solve all the problems of the world; there are too many. A very real problem also exists in that when huge statistics are used, such as millions of girls being trafficked, the humanness of the problem is lost in the numbers. Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn recognized the problem of apathy that exists and turned their research of thousands of trafficked girls and women into a Pulitzer Prize book, using story as a method to encourage people to begin to do something about the global problem of abuse against women.<sup>132</sup> It is possible that the individual stories of women may go further to winning the hearts and minds of complementarians than the dry, dusty details of doctrine.

### **3.0 A Proposed Solution to Help End the Debate**

Perhaps not all methods have been tried as effectively as possible by the egalitarians to convince believers that the Bible teaches mutuality in leadership. A different methodology may be found to be convincing enough for those who hold the complementarian viewpoint to rethink their position. The following proposal is offered as one solution to the problem of why, in spite of all of the many efforts on the part of egalitarians, there are still so many Christians who willingly follow the complementarians. This practice has been used throughout all of history and is found in every culture. The power of *story* will be considered as one solution that may serve to

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<sup>132</sup> Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

help turn the tide toward the transformation of the Church from one that often puts too much emphasis on gender issues to one that is concerned with all human issues. The stories of women in the Bible and history could close a gap in the debate on women in ministry.

The significance of this research is to answer the question, “Why is there still a low view of women in the church?” The previous analysis exposes the fact that there are many reasons. The solution that is being offered here is not a new solution to the problem, but rather a new tool that can be used to enhance the arguments of those who seek to raise women to the place that God has for them in the work of his kingdom. Storytelling is as old as the world. A curriculum designed to tell the overlooked narratives of women in the Bible is necessary to fill in the gaps in Bible knowledge for lay people. The stories are needed to encourage women. The stories are needed to convince complementarians that women have been called throughout the Bible and history to serve in the kingdom in leadership roles. Further, taking advantage of modern technology and putting the stories on the Internet will reach the many people who do not get to hear about women in their complementarian churches.

### 3.1 Educating Through Story

One piece that is lacking in much of the debate about a woman’s place in the church is an emphasis on women’s stories. Stories are necessary to demonstrate that God does call and gift women for service, even in leadership positions. When the truth about how God employs his daughters in kingdom work is spread, there will be a lessening of doubts on the part of skeptical Christians. Those who truly want to know God’s eternal

plan for women will be able to rejoice. Men and women working together will aid in the task to the Church given by Jesus. With all believers working side by side, each using their gifts and calling, the work will seem lighter and be more efficacious.

Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of communication. From first to last, the Bible is a book of stories.<sup>133</sup> Stories are not just for entertainment; good stories aid in theological understanding. Stories have important value because they can engage the reader, develop feelings of fellowship and community, and provide pleasure, all while instructing the listener. Stories can be used to explain concepts that are not as clear in academic expositions. Authors use stories with great effect to enhance their research.<sup>134</sup> Listeners engage with the characters in stories, comparing their lives with the lives of the individuals who are presented. This aids in their retention of the concepts.

Throughout the ages, storytelling has been one of the most formative elements in culture. Jesus the Teacher was unquestionably the world's greatest storyteller.<sup>135</sup> About one half of Jesus' words recorded by Luke are in the form of stories or parables. Moses,<sup>136</sup> Deborah,<sup>137</sup> Hannah,<sup>138</sup> and Mary<sup>139</sup> were great storytellers. Their stories told of God's greatness in his dealings with his people. The stories were concrete, appealing

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<sup>133</sup> Christine Dillon, *Telling the Gospel Through Story: Evangelism That Keeps Hearers Wanting More* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 34.

<sup>134</sup> MaryKate Morse, *Making Room for Leadership: Power, Space and Influence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 19.

<sup>135</sup> J.M. Price, *Jesus the Teacher* (Nashville, TN: The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1946), 101.

<sup>136</sup> Deut. 32.

<sup>137</sup> Judg. 5.

<sup>138</sup> I Sam. 2.

<sup>139</sup> Luke 1.

to the imagination, interesting, and effective. People were meant to share, discuss, and learn from stories.

People have always enjoyed telling stories and listening to them. People think, say, and do in narrative. Every day every person's life is full of stories to tell. Why do theologians think that people are more interested in their theology than the stories in the Bible? What will people remember more—even with three alliterated points—the theology of giving to the poor or the story of the woman who gave her two small coins?<sup>140</sup>

### 3.2 Transformation with Story

The power of story should not be underestimated. God's people have always been telling stories. In the early church, the story of Jesus was the main form of evangelism. With the story of his life came the beliefs that people would hold about what it means to live a Christian life. In conservative Reformed churches, stories have been exchanged for expositional preaching that seeks to impart theology. Theology does not change lives. People come to faith when they believe the story of Christ's atoning work and apply it to their lives. People relate to stories, not exegesis. While the average lay Christian may feel daunted by theological books and journals, many will find creative stories of women more accessible, uncomplicated, and easy to learn from than the highly scholastic books and articles. Lives can be transformed when people identify with the Bible character they are trying to emulate.

When information is new to people, stories are much more effective for imparting

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<sup>140</sup> Mark 12:43.

learning.<sup>141</sup> For those learners who want to dig deeper, theology, historical studies, and philosophy are available. In today's world, where so few Christians have read the entire Bible, it is more effective to teach beginners the stories. The truth of the stories has the power to change minds. It is tragic that many in the CRC and other churches are denying themselves the opportunities for learning and growth through neglecting God's stories. Most congregations are made up of all age groups from young child to older adult. All of these people are at different stages in their spiritual maturity. When the Bible is preached in a more narrative fashion, including the use of stories, more members of the congregation will understand the depth of the preaching in a way that they can understand.

Preachers, especially in Reformed churches where doctrine is stressed, may still teach in a way that enables the hearers to grasp the message. In narrative preaching, the content may include the conventional exegesis, quotes from theologians, critical analysis, propositions, arguments, syllogisms, and applications to life in a way that is similar to hearing a story.<sup>142</sup> Pastors in the CRC that concentrate on dogma may still be able to impart doctrine in an even more effective way if they would occasionally use narrative preaching. Preaching does not have to be completely either exposition or narrative; both have a place in the teaching ministry for God's people. Stories can be used in the service of the message or be the message itself as seen in the parables of Jesus. Narrative as Jesus used it has an advantage over exegetical preaching; listeners have a frame of reference in

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<sup>141</sup> Kendall Haven, *Story Proof: The Science Behind the Startling Power of Story* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2007), 8, 91.

<sup>142</sup> Mike Graves and David J. Schlafer, eds., *What's the Shape of Narrative Preaching?* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008), 28.

which “life, relationships, Jesus, church, and history are set.”<sup>143</sup> The gospel is illustrated by the story of the penitent woman as it reveals love, forgiveness, and salvation through faith in Christ alone.<sup>144</sup>

#### **4.0 Summary and Conclusion**

This paper began with a statement of the problem: Women’s valuable contributions are being underutilized in spite of the clear biblical teaching and historical witness to God’s call and gifting of women for service even in leadership positions in the Church. The history of the debate about women in ministry in the Christian Reformed Church of North America provides a case study highlighting the problems that churches face as they seek to follow what they believe are God’s instructions for his daughters. Egalitarians have responded with biblical, historical, theological, philosophical, and ethical arguments that demonstrate that the complementarians do not have God’s complete picture of life for his kingdom daughters.

In an effort to reach more people, organizations have distributed thousands of books and articles and put their literature on the Internet. Many thousands of enquirers can access both sides of the debate easily. Complementarian arguments were demonstrated to be insufficient to prove their point that women should be in subordination to men in the Church. The egalitarian claims provided strong support for women in all levels of ministry. Though the preponderance of the evidence for women in leadership positions demonstrates that the egalitarian beliefs are correct, many

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<sup>143</sup> Fred B. Craddock, “Story, Narrative, and Metanarrative,” in Graves and Schlafer, 95.

<sup>144</sup> Luke 7:36–50.

complementarians remain unconvinced. One reason is the lack of story as a method to persuade Christians to a more biblical view of equality of women was not as prominent as it could be.

A rationale was presented for a proposal to raise the bar for women in the church. Complementarians have been successful in convincing many adherents that they have the truth. They have been successful in convincing adherents with their own questionable interpretation of the Bible because the majority of Christians have not read the entire Bible and do not have the educational tools to question them. Few Christians have studied history, theology, or philosophy, which prevents them from realizing that the complementarians' arguments are faulty. On ethics, the complementarians are falling behind the egalitarians due to the many scandals in the church, and because conservatives ignore the ethical problems believing that social justice is for liberals. Complementarian leaders have been exposed as abusive and so it is in their interest to avoid the topic. Women's stories in the area of ethics would not be helpful to men in conservative churches who want to hide or ignore abuse.

On the other hand, stories would be really helpful to the egalitarians. Stories demonstrate that God has called and gifted many of his daughters throughout history to preach, teach, heal, provide sustenance, compassion, and love to others in the world. No one can deny the truth of the stories or their results. Only prejudiced men will continue to ignore or deny what women have accomplished. When all of the evidence has been presented and some complementarians still refuse to accept women as equal partners in the work of the Church, only prayer remains. In the meantime, the weight of the evidence

is convincing more and more people who are searching for the answers that complementarianism is failing.<sup>145</sup>

Half of the so great cloud of witnesses is comprised of women. When Christ came, He began a new creation. This has social implications for the life of the Church. In Christ there is no male/female division. Paul affirms mutuality of authority and leadership in Church and home. Peter affirms that men and women are “joint heirs of the grace of life” (I Pet. 3:7, 11). The body of Christ would be able to further the Great Commission task if she took steps to overturn the destructive theology that leaves women at the mercy of abusive men.

The apostle Paul was the greatest defender of women in ministry. The church would benefit if our complementarian brothers and sisters will read more than just their favorite three verses and see that all of Scripture unambiguously teaches the equality of men and women. Neglecting the stories through of the use of exclusively expository preaching leaves congregants without the human element. Complementarians miss an opportunity to rejoice with half of God’s children when they neglect the stories of women in the Bible and history. On the other hand, egalitarians are teaching the upcoming generation what freedom in Christ means: freedom from hierarchical role-playing; freedom to be loved and valued as daughters of the creator; and freedom to walk away from abuse.

While the efforts of the egalitarians to educate Christians to the truth of God’s call to leadership positions in the kingdom for women have been vast and steady, there remains an area where they could improve their effectiveness. The plethora of books, articles, and web-based information has helped to raise awareness of the issues for

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<sup>145</sup> Giles, *Rise and Fall*, 67.

women. These have centered on intellectual arguments, especially in refuting the complementarians. An alternative, appealing approach would be welcome. The stories of women in the Bible and history are exciting and encouraging. Relating the true stories of women in God's kingdom would go a long way to convincing the skeptics that not only does God call and gift women for service, but also that women are indeed capable of serving in leadership positions. Putting the stories on the Internet will reach many thousands, including and especially those who do not hear about women in church.

It would be wonderful if more pastors preached about women from the pulpit. This is not likely to happen in complementarian CRC congregations. Perhaps some could be persuaded to allow the stories in Sunday school or in Bible studies that could be a start in the effort to demonstrate how God has employed his female children in ministry. The Holy Spirit is powerful at changing hearts and minds. For people who have never heard the stories of women from the pulpit, learning about women in the Bible may help to open their eyes. In Sections Four and Five, the proposed artifact, a web site that will feature curricula about women's stories both written and electronic, will be given a rationale and a description. The curricula will have an even greater impact if it can be accessed on the Internet. Most people have computers now, and they can find stories on websites even if they do not get to hear them in church. In Section Six, an analysis of what could be gained by this solution will be presented. Topics for further research will be considered.

## SECTION FOUR

### ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

#### **1.0 Introduction: The Proposed Solution for the Need/Problem/Opportunity**

John Bernard Taylor, former Lord High Almoner to H.M. The Queen Elizabeth II and President of the Bible Society in Britain underwent a change in his views on women in ministry. Rev. Taylor was raised as a traditionalist and lived through the many changes in the Church of England. While the ordination of women was being debated, he listened to the arguments and gradually came to realize

how beneficial the ministry of women had all along been to the life of the church. I had fond memories of those dear “lady workers” in my curacy parish, both of them much more effective than us callow and often clumsy curates. I had experienced many godly women who came back from the mission field, often where few men had ventured to go and they spoke so movingly of what God was doing through their work and witness. Who was I to stand in their way if God was truly calling them? There was little doubt in my mind that God had equipped them. Why then should they not be able to respond to God and offer for Christian ministry just as I had done?<sup>146</sup>

Like C. S. Lewis, Rev. Taylor could no longer deny that leaders were called to be in a partnership with women in ministry. If the complementarian congregations of the CRC would listen to the true stories of faithful women, they too might be convinced to stop denying women the opportunities to serve equally with men in ministry. In complementarian congregations, men do not get to witness first-hand how capable and intelligent women are. In these congregations where pastors do not teach about women,

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<sup>146</sup> John Bernard Taylor, “A View from the Church of England: An Evangelical Bishop Tells His Story,” in *How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership: Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals*, ed. Alan F. Johnson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 249.

the stories about called, gifted, and qualified women, past and present, must be made available in other forms.

## **2.0 What the Proposed Solution Looks Like**

A website featuring essays, book reviews, podcasts, videos, and curricula on women in the Bible and history could be a helpful solution to the problem of the absence of stories about women in the complementarian churches. Essays will include those of the author as well as guest essays by other well-known authors. A “Reviews” section will include reviews of books, articles, and movies on the subject of women in ministry. A web-based curriculum would be helpful and easily accessible to many churches. Over time the lessons will be converted to podcasts. The Internet has been a wonderful resource especially in our “Twitter, Tweet, Instagram” society where people are looking for quick answers. The strength of the websites is their ability to reach so many people. The link to the website now under construction is <http://www.renewyourthinking.net/wordpress/>.

## **3.0 How This Proposed Solution Will Work**

It has been demonstrated that teaching stories is a powerful means of educating people. Where the technical and sometimes dry sermons are easily forgotten or misunderstood, stories remain with listeners, imparting valuable lessons for life. Men and women will begin to discover that there is far more evidence supporting women in leadership than they have been taught. With the newfound freedom to employ all gifted believers in the work of the Church without regard to gender, the gospel will go forward

to many more people. Women will rejoice as they are able to use their gifts. Men's tasks previously born alone will be alleviated as their sisters in Christ join in the work. Unchurched people in the community may consider anew joining themselves to God's people when justice is sought and taught for all. A website can reach any of these audiences with the amazing stories of women in the Bible and history.

#### **4.0 Conclusion: Why This Solution Will Work**

For generations, complementarian leaders have been ignoring or avoiding the stories of women. Biblical, historical, theological, philosophical, and ethical arguments have failed to demonstrate convincingly to committed complementarians that women are not only capable, but also given authority by God to minister equally with men as he calls them into service. Men who hold a biblical conviction based on their interpretation of the Bible may dispute anyone who disagrees with them. Those especially who believe that I Timothy 2:12<sup>147</sup> settles all of the disputed questions with no need to any further debate feel that they have all the proof they need that women are not called or capable of positions of leadership in the Church. The only reason left to deny women places of authority in the Church is willful refusal to look at the facts.

Where intellectual argumentation may produce a stalemate, the interesting, true stories of women may be read or listened to. For those in complementarian churches who are sincerely looking for answers to the questions about women in ministry, when the stories of women like Miriam,<sup>148</sup> Deborah,<sup>149</sup> and Huldah<sup>150</sup> are told factually without

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<sup>147</sup> “But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.”

<sup>148</sup> Num. 12:15.

downgrading their leadership roles to “unofficial” ministry,<sup>151</sup> the truth that God has always called and gifted women for service in his kingdom—even in leadership roles—will become obvious. A curriculum that begins with the stories of women in the Bible will be appropriate for those in the Christian Reformed Church. To reach skeptical complementarians, the Scriptures must be the first source of information about women in God’s kingdom. God’s Word has undeniable authority for complementarians and egalitarians alike. While biblical exegesis, history, theology, philosophy, and ethics may be ordered according to each one’s presuppositions, the genuine Bible stories of women may not be changed and still remain true to God’s Word. The artifact that is proposed consists of a website that will contain the curriculum beginning with the stories of women in the Bible.

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<sup>149</sup> Judg. 4 and 5.

<sup>150</sup> 2 Kings 22:13–14.

<sup>151</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 210–211.

## SECTION FIVE

### ARTIFACT SPECIFICATIONS

#### 1.0 Introduction

A website that features curricula, essays, quotes, book reviews, links to egalitarian websites, podcasts, and videos about women and their stories in God’s kingdom is offered as a solution to the problem of limiting women in ministry. This website is under construction. In order to attract men and women to the website, many topics on Christian living will be covered. The goal is to encourage Christians to renew their thinking in all areas including gender.

#### 2.0 Structure

The website, “Renew Your Thinking,”<sup>152</sup> will be structured as a learning environment. Researchers will be able to access information from various topics: women’s stories from the Bible and history, theology, sociology, and ethics. There will be book, article, and movie reviews and links to other websites. Links to YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and SoundCloud will be added over time.<sup>153</sup>

#### 2.1 Goals

As people read, listen to, or view the material on the website, they will be able to engage with the biblical narrative and learn the truth about how God actually calls and

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<sup>152</sup> <http://www.renewyourthinking.net>

<sup>153</sup> See Appendix D for more details on the website.

equips women for all levels of service, including leadership. Those who denied that women ever worked alongside men equally in the kingdom will have the weight of the testimony of the Scriptures and history to enable them to change their assumptions. Those who are genuinely seeking truth about a woman's place in God's kingdom work will see that many women have received God's calling and gifting in their lives. The goal is stated clearly in the introductory statement to the podcasts: "In a world filled with many different viewpoints and opinions, these podcasts will examine issues, current events, historical events, and cultural movements all in the light of God's Word. Our goal is to help you as you seek to love and serve God with your whole heart, soul, AND MIND."<sup>154</sup>

## 2.2 Audience

The materials on the website are designed to enrich the understanding of women's kingdom work throughout history and will be of interest to anyone who desires to know more about what the Bible has to say about women. For the purposes of this dissertation, the audience that the website will focus on will be those who are pondering the question of whether or not women may serve in leadership positions in the Church. The Bible-based lessons are of paramount importance since Christians respect and honor God's Word as authoritative. Egalitarians will still glean new information. Complementarians may or may not even listen to the stories depending on how gender biased they are regarding women's stories. For their sakes, the information will be presented in the context of the Scriptures in order to gently call them to consider what God has said about women in ministry. The addition of the author's husband as a male contributor may also assuage the concerns of those who still believe that women may not teach men.

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<sup>154</sup> Mary Walker, "From Eve to Mary." See Appendix B for a sample script.

### 2.3 Scope and Content

The initial material that will be posted to the website will be stories about women in the Bible and history. Later the two curricula that have already been written: “Women in the Bible: Stories from the Old and New Testament” and “From Eve to Mary” will be posted. A podcast series for “From Eve to Mary” is underway and the first story should be available by mid-January, 2019.

### 2.4 Beta Tests

The curriculum entitled “Women in the Bible: Stories from the Old and New Testament” has been professionally edited.<sup>155</sup> A search is underway for a church to beta-test this curriculum. Dr. Mimi Haddad of Christians for Biblical Equality met with the author via Facetime and discussed ways CBE can help promote the project. As a beta-test, “From Eve to Mary” was taught at the author’s church in a Fall 2017 Sunday school class. Podcast scripts of the curriculum “From Eve to Mary” have been completed and are being edited. For feedback, the website itself will contain ways for users to respond to the information, providing a way for the website administrator to measure effectiveness.

### 2.5 Budget

The cost of building the web page is under four hundred dollars. The author has recording equipment available and has already begun making podcasts of the stories. Future costs will be encountered when published by a company. The author has access to

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<sup>155</sup> Mary Walker, “Women in the Bible: Stories from the Old and New Testament.” See Appendix C for a sample story.

a video production company and anticipates reasonable costs for making the videos. The ongoing maintenance of the website will be entirely made up of the voluntary efforts of the author and her husband.

### **3.0 Standards of Publication Particular to the Publishing of a Curriculum**

There are different approaches to obtaining and following the protocols for various publishers depending on the medium: print, electronic, or hybrid. Publishers make their standards available and offer professional editing services. A helpful example is outlined by Westbow Press in their pamphlet, “Step-By-Step Guide” with information ranging from the submission of a manuscript, evaluations, editorial services, designs, proof rounds, quality assurance, marketing, and post production services. The Coffee Break Ministry in the Christian Reformed Church provides curricula for thousands of women worldwide. Coffee Break materials are strongly Bible-based and would be a good match for the author’s curricula. Contact has been made with the director and the author is awaiting an answer.

The website was designed to gather six metrics to track effectiveness: number of visitors/month; bounce rate; average time on the page; “click through rate”; conversion rate; and goals. The author has examined a number of Christian websites and noted the methods they use to reach their audiences. The author’s site will contain all of these avenues for assessing ongoing effectiveness.

#### 4.0 Post-graduation Considerations

There are thousands of stories of amazing women in history. If complementarian pastors refuse to tell the stories in church, individuals can go on the Internet and search for stories and come across the author's website and YouTube page and learn for themselves. The author will begin promoting the website and YouTube page by contacting other egalitarian websites and asking them to publish articles about her website or links to her website.

The curriculum entitled "Women in the Bible: Stories from the Old and New Testament" would lend itself well to video. The author's son owns Allied Video Productions of Salem, OR and he has agreed to help. If the materials prove successful, production of women's stories will continue with women in history for many years to come.

The website <http://www.renewyourthinking.net> will be expanded to cover more topics about Christian life. The author and her husband are planning on using the website as part of their ongoing ministry to the Church for many years to come. Husband and wife teams have precedence in the Scriptures with Priscilla and Aquila and Junia and Andronicus.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Acts 18:2-3; 18, 26; Rom. 16:3-4, 7.

## **SECTION SIX**

### **POSTSCRIPT**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

Helen, the single woman missionary mentioned above, could not wait to tell the good news. Her CRC congregation decided to open up the office of deacon to women. She had humbly presented the story of Phoebe to her consistory after going through the “Women in the Bible: Stories from the Old and New Testament” study. The evidence for women in leadership was clearly, undeniably biblical. Her congregation is not ready to allow women into the office of elder, but ordination for women as deacons is a start in the right direction.

#### **2.0 Summary of the Development of the Artifact**

The written statement provides the biblical, theological, historical, philosophical, and ethical foundation for calling complementarian congregations in the Christian Reformed church of North America to change their assumptions about women in leadership positions. The artifact—a website containing women’s stories—can provide another avenue for convincing complementarians that God does indeed call and gift women for work in the Church even in leadership positions. Where dry, dusty academic arguments may fail to convince, the exciting and engaging stories of God’s chosen daughters may prove more persuasive.

### **3.0 Analysis of the Efficacy of the Chosen Artifact**

As noted above, hundreds of books and thousands of articles have been produced on the topic of women in ministry. For many reasons there remain many unconvinced complementarians. An alternate method, the telling of stories, may prove more efficacious. The author looked around and did not find a curriculum like the one she was proposing. The time is right to fill in this gap. The time is also opportune for web-based instructional materials. People ages three to ninety-three have personal devices and computers and can find the exciting stories about women in God's kingdom easily on the Internet.

### **4.0 Identification of the Specific Gains Made and Lessons Learned**

When I started the Doctor of Ministry, "Leadership in Global Perspectives" course at Portland Seminary, I was unsure about the direction of my work. I knew that women were hurting and I wanted to make a change that would result in more respect and honor for them. After five years of study, I came to the conclusion that God does want women to serve as leaders. The stories of women in the Bible are exciting and profound. Surely, when the complementarians at my local Christian Reformed Church heard the stories, they would see the evidence right from the Scriptures and stop refusing women a place at the table.

In the fall of 2017, I had the opportunity to teach some lessons in Sunday school. I put together a curriculum on "Eve to Mary" that gave pre-eminence to the Scriptures and to the centrality of Christ and the glory of God for his sovereignty in history. I put my egalitarian convictions aside and told the stories of the women in the context of the men's

stories. I hoped to assure my complementarian brothers and sisters that I only wanted a chance to tell the stories. I got permission from the pastor and the elders to teach, so long as my husband—my head covering—remained in the room. I willingly submitted to all they asked me in order to assure them that I was not a “feminist”.

First of all, the class met in the Sunday school supply closet, with barely room for one small table. Three people showed up. One commented that she did not like it when I read from the Bible and stopped coming to class. The other two stopped coming after a month. Walking out of the “classroom” alone into the fellowship hall where dozens of people were gathered was humiliating. I knew that everyone knew that no one was coming to the class (except my “head covering”). No words can express my thanks to Steve for walking out with his head up beside me. “Anyway,” he said, “you can always use the practice teaching.”

After thinking it over and praying about it, I still believe that God is calling me to this ministry. I realized that I love my brothers and sisters, and that I am really hurting because they do not seem to understand what they are missing. I learned that those who are committed to the idea of women’s subordination may not be easily persuaded to a different view. I can only pray for them. The Holy Spirit will have to do the heavy lifting here. I can only try to be faithful to the task he has given me.

### **5.0 Suggestions for Further Research and Potential Avenues to Pursue**

The author is excited about continuing to study and learn more about the topic of women in ministry. Due to the lack of space, other important facets of the conversation

were not explored. Following are a few topics that are being researched and will show up on the author's website in the coming months.

### 5.1 Men's Stories

Men's stories need to be honestly retold. Instead of lionizing Abraham and David, their human side needs to come out. Sarah is given a hard time for laughing when she overheard the promise of her son, but Abraham laughed too.<sup>157</sup> Bathsheba is castigated as a temptress, but David sent two men to force her to come to him and lay with him.<sup>158</sup> Full stories will show another aspect of the equality of men and women; both are capable of sinning and repenting and receiving salvation.

### 5.2 Institutionalization

While studying the history of women in office, it became apparent that women had places of authority in the early Church. Study about the phenomenon of "institutionalization" might reveal how and why women lost their place in the leadership of the Church.

### 5.3 Why People Accept False Doctrine

The author does not have a degree in psychology and remains curious as to why people will hang on to faulty doctrine in the face of many facts to the contrary. In The topic of "spiritual warfare" was only briefly mentioned due to limitations of space.

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<sup>157</sup> Gen. 17:17.

<sup>158</sup> 2 Sam. 11:4.

Ignorance, willful sin, and pressure from the world are some of reasons people reject the truth.

#### 5.4 Gender vs. Human Traits

One aspect of the discussion that could use some enlightenment is the study of gender traits verses human traits. Dorothy Sayers put it well, “Indeed, it is my experience that both men and women are fundamentally human.”<sup>159</sup> Yes, there are differences between men and women, but rate of intelligence is not one of them, as C. S. Lewis found out. People are human first, and gender is only one characteristic.

### 6.0 Conclusion

The pursuit of the Doctor of Ministry degree is a step in God’s larger plan for my life. The coursework has contributed to my ability to speak and write clearly. The disappointment of my one teaching opportunity taught me a lesson, but also enabled me to see where the Lord is leading me. The writing of the dissertation and the production of the artifact have become steppingstones on the way to a larger teaching ministry in partnership with my husband. Perhaps God closed one door, but opened another. I look forward to building a website focused on helping people to think through difficult issues. I am happy to have a way to tell those wonderful stories of God's amazing daughters!

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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<sup>159</sup> Dorothy L. Sayers, *Are Women Human? Astute and Witty Essays on the Role of Women in Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1971), 49.

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## APPENDIX A

## PASTOR SURVEY ON WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

During the month of October, 2017 a survey was conducted on the subject of women in church leadership in the Christian Reformed Church of North America. The appropriate IRB approval was sought and granted. The head of the CRC education committee provided Mary Walker, the researcher, with a list of the email addresses of 1,234 pastors. Informed consent letters and invitations to participate in the survey were sent out. The survey was handled by Survey Monkey, and opened on October 9, 2017. Pastors were informed that the survey would be closed on October 23, 2017. Two hundred and forty-five leaders, mostly pastors took part. Here is a summary of the survey. A summary of possible conclusions follows at the end.

## “Teaching About Women in the Bible” Survey

**Q1. What is your position of leadership in the Church?**

Answered 245 responses,

Pastor	96.73%	237
Elder	0.82%	2
Deacon	0.41%	1
Christian Education Superintendent	2.04%	5

**Q2. How many women in the Bible have you preached/taught on in the last year?**

Answered 245 responses,

none	8.16%	20
1-2	41.22%	101
3-5	35.10%	86
6 or more	15.51%	38

**Q3.** Why do you think women’s stories are neglected in many churches? Please check all that apply:

Not enough time to cover the stories.  
 Haven't studied the information.  
 There isn't a Biblical, Reformed curriculum available.  
 The topic is too controversial.  
 Too much attention to women will lead to unbiblical egalitarianism.  
 Other (please specify)

**186 replies** showed up in the comment box. Some respondents made several comments. The responses fit into seven broad categories:

- “Not sure” or “Haven’t thought about it.” (25 respondents)
- They try to include women’s stories. (30 respondents)
- It is because CRC pastors teach “expositorily.” (43 respondents)
- Men are the main characters or women are background characters. (47 respondents)
- It is not in the CRC tradition. (16 respondents)
- Preachers are biased or that since men are the pastors they focus on men’s stories. (34 respondents)
- It was poor hermeneutics, with one commenting that it was neglect of the Bible. (11 respondents)

**Q4.** Would you use a curriculum that teaches about women in the Bible?

245 responses:

Yes	85.71%	210
No	14.29%	35

**Q5.** Women in our church may serve in the following positions. Please check all that apply:

Preaching Pastor	57.55%	141
Elder	62.86%	154
Deacon	79.59%	195
Counselor	82.04%	201
Sunday School Superintendent	93.47%	229
Adult Sunday School Teacher	91.02%	223
High School Sunday School Teacher	91.43%	224
Young People's Sunday School Teacher	94.69%	232
Youth Group Leader	94.29%	231
Other (please specify)	32.24%	79

**79 Respondents** put notes in the response box. The comments fit into four broad categories:

- “Any role” or “any role that she is called and gifted in.” (30 respondents)
- Anything but an ordained position or anything but elder, preacher, or deacon. (23 respondents)
- Various non-elder, pastor, or deacon roles such as nursery, kitchen, care provider. (23 respondents)
- “Missionary” (2 respondents) and church planters. (1 respondent)

### Summary

I received a lot of emails from men who refused to take the survey. A typical one is: “I began the survey, but I could not, in good conscience, finish and submit the survey.” I was grateful that some pastors took the time to send me emails. However, the negative responses such as the one quoted above made me suspect that actual participation in the survey was probably skewed to the more egalitarian side in the CRC.

I will not therefore be able to draw general conclusions about how many pastors teach about women in the CRC from my results.

Questions 3 and 5 contained response boxes. I was gratified that 186 of the 245 respondents took the time to share their thoughts on telling stories about women in the Bible. I suspect that the responses were skewed toward those who were enthusiastic about what I was doing. When 30 out of 79 responded that they believed women may participate in any level of leadership my suspicions were furthered that many more egalitarians than conservatives took the survey!

It was so wonderful to receive emails from pastors encouraging me to work on the curriculum. Typical of the more than fifty emails from respondents:

- *A Female Pastor*: “I am so excited about your project! This is such important work and I look forward to eventually using the materials you produce. Could you send me the answer key with scripture references, please? Thanks so much!”
- *A Female Pastor*: “Best wishes on the survey and the curriculum project! When it’s done I’d love to see it and perhaps adapt it for our congregation!”

*A Male Pastor*: “Wow! Thanks for the opportunity Mary. I felt convicted about just how ignorant I am about female characters in Scripture. They say that history is written by those who won the wars, or that history is the story of dead white males... I’m a person who tries to be immersed in Scripture so that I can both hear it and share it. And yet... while the gospel should compel me to pay attention to the stories on the margins, I’ve subconsciously or otherwise taken in so much about the (male) “heroes” of Scripture and missed a lot. Anyway, thanks again, this is for me a call to pay attention to what I might not always pay attention to!”

The overwhelming affirmative response (85.7%) to question 4 (“Would you use a curriculum that teaches about women in the Bible?”) confirms that my desire to produce a curriculum about women in the Bible and history will be helpful to the CRC.

## APPENDIX B

## SCRIPT FOR PODCAST NUMBER 001 “EVE” IN THE SERIES “EVE TO MARY”

**Pre-roll:**

Hello and welcome to Episode 1 of the “Renew Your Thinking” podcast.

**Catch phrase or mission statement:**

In a world filled with many different viewpoints and opinions, these podcasts will examine issues, current events, historical events, and cultural movements all in the light of God’s Word. *Our* goal is to help *you* as you seek to love and serve God with your whole heart, soul, AND MIND.

**Intro to series:**

In this first series of stories, we will study some significant historical figures. In the next nine podcasts, we will talk about women in the Old Testament, specifically the women who were the ancestors of the Lord Jesus Christ.

These women played an important role in God’s plan of Redemption.

Of course there was a long line of women who came before Jesus in his family tree, but we’ll focus on the stories of the women who are named in the Bible starting with Eve, then Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, and we will finish the series with Jesus’s mother, Mary.

We’ll always read the stories directly from the Scriptures to avoid confusion and misinformation.

I’ll read from the New International Version of the Bible for those who are following along.

Okay, let’s start at the beginning. The first female ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ was of course, Eve. So we begin our series where God begins His recorded stories, in Genesis chapter one.

### **Intro to Episode 001:**

What would it have been like to have perfect, unbroken fellowship with God untainted with sin? Only Adam and Eve knew that privilege. We have fellowship with God, thanks to our salvation in Christ, but it is not perfect like Eve's was in the garden. How tragic that Adam and Eve lost that blessing, not only for themselves but also for the whole human race, each and every one of us, down through history. Mercifully, God promised the restoration of intimate fellowship with Him by sending His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The picture of creation in Genesis chapters one and two is a compelling account of God's creative activity. The creation story is the beginning point for everything that follows in the trajectory of the grand story of God's love for his people throughout the Bible.

God refers to His creation and to Himself as Creator over and over again in hundreds of places in the Scriptures. Often when the Israelites turned from God to idols, God reminded them that He is the One Who created them and sustains them. God invited them time and again to turn from idols and worship Him, the one true God.

The story of the creation of mankind is beautiful and exciting. Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, and God affirmed the goodness of His creation. Unfortunately, there is a controversy surrounding the relationship of the male and the female. Some believe that though Adam and Eve were both created together on the sixth day, a hierarchy already existed with the superiority of men over women, but the picture of creation in the Scriptures is truly one of mutuality, not hierarchy.

Let's dig into the biblical text to get to a deeper understanding of the concept of mutuality in the creation of humans, male and female.

In Genesis chapters one and two, let's focus on the story of Eve, the first woman in creation and the mother of us all.

### **Episode Body:**

What might it have been like in the Garden of Eden in the beginning? Imagine if you will, a perfect world where the first inhabitants of the garden were kind to one another and never had any negative words. Imagine being able to pluck your dinner from a tree without having to labor for it. Imagine, ladies, what it would have been like to be able to have your babies in ease and comfort.

Perhaps the scenario would go something like this:

Eve might say, "Adam, it's time for our child to be born. I think I'll just go over to that nice spot we picked out and wait."

Adam would reply, “Okay, Eve. You go on over and get ready. I’ll go pick us some extra fruit and join you to celebrate the arrival of our baby.”

The Lord, who is walking in the garden, comes along and says, “Well, done, good and faithful servants. You are doing a fine job as my vice-regents taking care of the earth. The animals are all happy. Oh, I see that you are about to procreate. That’s exciting! You’ll be blessed with many children. There’s enough food for everyone in this beautiful garden.”

A short time later, Eve says, “Wow! It’s a girl child. What shall we name her?”

Then Adam replies, “Honey, you are the mother of all living things. You name her.”

Does this scene sound too fanciful? Is it out of the bounds of possibility? We really don’t know what life may have been like for Adam and Eve if they would not have eaten the forbidden fruit. The Scriptures don’t tell us, but they certainly would have experienced a more fulfilling life with God.

While I have imagined the previous scenario of what life would have looked like had Adam and Eve been residents of the Garden for the duration of their lives, the story that’s recorded in the Bible is the account of God’s creation and hopes for humanity.

So let’s look at what the Bible says.

Turn to Genesis 1:26–31:

*Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.*

We see that on the sixth day of creation God created mankind. God created humans—male and female—equally in His image. They were to procreate and fill the earth. They were given the authority to rule over everything on earth together. God said that this was very good.

At the beginning of Genesis, chapter two, we read that God finished His creation by the end of the sixth day and then rested on the seventh day.

Then beginning in Genesis 2:4, the narrative circles back and we get more details of God's creation of mankind. This marvelous picture of the formation of Adam from the ground and Eve from Adam's side actually takes place in the middle of the sixth day. It is important to remember that this story enlarges on what we were already told in chapter one—that God created mankind, male and female, in His image.

So let's read in Genesis 2:7, 8, 15–20:

*The Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there He put the man He had formed*

*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."*

Let's pause for a second. In chapter one, God said that everything was *very good*. Here we see that He says something is not good: it is not good for the man to be alone. Why might God say that it was not good for Adam to be alone? Well, for openers, he can't procreate by himself can he?

Here might be an appropriate spot for Eve's appearance, but instead God first brings the animals to Adam for their naming and gives him the opportunity and authority to name each animal. The Bible doesn't tell us why God decided to parade the animals in front of Adam. Let's just keep reading.

Turn back to Genesis 2:19 and 20:

*Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.*

*But for Adam no suitable helper was found.*

This last part of verse 20, "But for Adam no suitable helper was found" is the focal point of understanding how God created and designed the relationship of men and women. People who believe that God created mankind with a hierarchy say that the concept of "helper" means "subordinate". They insist that right from the beginning women were created only to serve human men, but there is nothing in the Genesis account of creation to substantiate a claim that women were not created equally with men. Remember in Genesis 1, we saw that God created mankind in His image as male and female. He didn't say there was any distinction in how each gendered person reflected His image. Furthermore, why would there need to be a hierarchy? God was the boss in the garden;

there was no need for a human boss at this time.

So let's return to verse 20: what would a "suitable helper" look like?

Does "helper" mean "subordinate"? The correct translation of the original Hebrew word for "helper" is *ezer*, spelled e-z-e-r.

The original Hebrew words for "suitable helper" are *ezer k'negdo*.

1. *Ezer* means a strong helper.
2. *k'negdo*, meaning "suitable", means literally "in front of him"—not a subordinate.

The word *ezer* appears twenty-one times in the Old Testament. Sixteen times this word is used for God Himself. Some examples are Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29; Psalms 20:2; 33:20; and many others, including Psalm 121:1–2; and Hosea 13:9.

Let's look at a couple of these verses in detail:

We read in Psalm 33:20, "Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help [our *ezer*] and our shield."

Psalm 121:1–2 we read, "I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help [my *ezer*] comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."

We would never say that God is a subordinate would we? No, God is our helper because He is actually stronger than we are and able to give help. Those who insist on a hierarchy in relationships miss the understanding of the power of the helper.

Not only is Eve a very strong helper, one that Adam can't live without, but also the other aspects of her creation equally demonstrate a relationship of mutuality between men and women, not hierarchy.

Please continue on with me in Genesis 2:21–25.

*So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, He took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.*

Here again we need to pause and take note: Some might say that Adam's naming of Eve proves his authority over her referring back to Adam's naming of the animals, but the

Bible doesn't actually say that this is when Adam gave his wife the name "Eve". We don't hear Eve's name until they are sent out of the garden in chapter 3, verse 20. By calling his wife "woman", Adam was describing his wife, "bone of my bones," not using a name. Why is this distinction important?

Adam realized that Eve was part of him, qualitatively different from the rest of creation. God created the animals out of the dust, but Eve came out of Adam. Our brothers who insist that Adam's naming of Eve proves that he has authority over her unwittingly place Eve on the same level as the animals, but that is not where God placed Eve. God created Eve in a special way apart from the animals.

Now Adam can be confident in God's intention for him since he has his *ezer k'negdo*—his suitable helper. Adam and Eve were made to tend the garden together, enjoying all of the fruits of their labor, working as one in mind and heart, freely worshipping God with whom they have complete fellowship, a beautiful picture of God's intentions for human relationships and for communion with God. Wow! Let's just pause and revel in the true goodness of God's creation.

As we digest this truth, there are several other important and interesting components of the story. In Genesis chapter 1, God said He created "mankind". "Mankind" contained Adam and Eve together in some mysterious way. Then in Genesis chapter 2, we get the picture of the woman being pulled from the man's side. Adam and Eve are two beings, but God says that when they come together as man and wife, they are one flesh. What a beautiful picture of marriage—man and wife are so close that they are one in body and heart and mind!

When we dig deeper, we see more beautiful imagery about human relationships. To become this "one flesh" the man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife. Is that how we do it today? Does the man leave his family? Marriage customs vary by culture, but more often, women leave their families and join themselves to the man symbolizing this by taking his name. The children she bears him will also take his name.

However, Eve's husband Adam joined himself to her—note the order here. God did not put Eve underneath her husband; Adam joined himself to Eve. This beautifully put together couple were designed to serve God together as His vice-regents over the entire creation.

As we move forward in the story, after God established the first couple on earth, we see Eve happily tending the garden with her husband. Eve was ruling over everything with Adam as God commanded. There were no weeds. Eve would be able to bear children with no pain. Adam and Eve had everything they needed for a flourishing life and they were enjoying perfect fellowship with God and each other. There is no sin yet, but that was about to change.

To understand the tragic part of our story let's turn to Genesis 3:1–7:

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"*

*The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"*

*"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

*When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

Many of us are already familiar with this story. The serpent (who we know represents the devil) came along and tempted Eve to eat from a tree that had been forbidden to her and Adam. We could all wish that she wouldn't have done it, but she did. Adam was with her and he ate some of the forbidden fruit too.

Then they were ashamed and tried to hide from God. Thankfully, the Lord came looking for them and called out to Adam. The Bible tells us what happened next. Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. God then cursed the serpent. In the midst of this curse, showing His great mercy, God also promised the Savior Who would come and defeat Satan. God then told Adam and Eve what would happen in the future because of their sin.

One of the results of the fall was that the relationship between husband and wife has changed. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were equal partners. Eve could make her own decisions because they would be right and good. After all, she had God right there and she would know what to do because she could talk with Him anytime she wanted to. When she made the autonomous decision to eat the fruit, she was disobeying God. Adam also ate and now all human beings would be sinful creatures. Now, because of their fallen sin nature, Adam and Eve would desire to get their own way. Relationships between men and women, and their relationship with God, have all been terribly distorted since the Fall.

Now after the Fall, Eve and Adam will not have an easy life. Adam will struggle with weeds as he tries to provide for his family. Eve will have pain in childbirth. Adam and Eve had to leave the beautiful garden with its fulfilling life and complete fellowship with God. We can only imagine how heart rending this must have been for Eve. How tragic to have known the sweet peace and fellowship with God in the garden and now have to go out and struggle in a pain-filled world.

But remember that God promised a Savior. Eve would have the knowledge that her sins were forgiven and fellowship was restored with God, but not like she had in the garden. As Eve and Adam went out of the garden into the world they would have struggles, but God would still be there, guiding their lives.

The Scriptures don't tell us much more about Eve and Adam. We know that they lived over nine hundred years and had many children. I believe that Eve had repented and put her faith and trust in God. This was evidenced when Cain was born. Eve said, "I have gotten a man-child with the help of the Lord" (Gen. 4:1) Clearly she was rejoicing in God's grace, compassion, forgiveness, and promises.

It seems that Eve was a faithful mother teaching her children to honor God as best as she could in this now sinful world. There was sadness as sin showed just how ugly it could be when Eve's firstborn son, Cain, killed his brother, Abel. The broken relationships from sin are demonstrated between all humans—husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, parents and children—throughout the human experience. How painful this must have been for mother Eve, but God blessed Eve with another son, Seth.

We are told that some years later, "men began to call on the name of the Lord" (Gen. 4:26). Where would these descendants of Eve have gotten the knowledge of God unless it was from their mother and father? And of course, Adam and Eve would have had the best knowledge of God since it was first hand. What a shame that they lost that close fellowship and had to live in a world of sin.

### **Application:**

How different Eve's experiences were from ours while she was in the garden. No other woman will ever be able to experience the beautiful complete fellowship that she had with God. We are born in sin and do not know the complete joy and peace of the communion with God that we will have in glory. We will have to wait for that.

### **Wrap Up:**

The Story of Eve is the first of our lessons about the female ancestors of the Lord Jesus Christ. Join us next time when we continue with the story of Sarah, who found that nothing is impossible with God.

We value your input. Be sure and leave us some comments.

## APPENDIX C

### SAMPLE LESSON FROM “WOMEN IN THE BIBLE”

This is a sample lesson from the curriculum: “Women in the Bible: Stories from the Old and New Testament.” The following pages contain: Title page; Table of Contents; Note to the Leader; Lesson 5 – Abigail; and the handout for Lesson 5 – Abigail, with discussion questions.

Women in the Bible:  
Stories from the Old and New Testament

Aids for the Study of God’s Kingdom Women

Mary Walker

## Table of Contents

Introduction for the Leader

Lessons

### **Part 1: God's Female Servants in the Old Testament**

Lesson 1: Eve – First Woman in Creation

Lesson 2: Sarah – Wife and Mother of Patriarchs

Lesson 3: Tamar – Surprising Ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ

Lesson 4: Deborah, Jael – Fearless for God

Lesson 5: Abigail – Obeying God Rather Than Men

Lesson 6: Bathsheba – Wife and Mother of Kings

### **Part 2: Jesus and Women**

Lesson 7: Mary of Nazareth – Mother of Jesus

Lesson 8: Mary of Magdala – Witness for Jesus

Lesson 9: Mary of Bethany – Disciple of Jesus

Lesson 10: The Woman at the Well – Evangelist for Jesus

### **Part 3: The Holy Spirit and Women**

Lesson 11: Anna and The Daughters of Philip – Prophets

Lesson 12: Priscilla and Phoebe – Teacher and Deacon

For Further Reading

Handouts

## To the Leader

### Lesson Preparation

This guide is meant to be an outline to help you as you begin to lead a discussion of *Women in the Bible*.

Note that there is a pattern to all of the lessons. There is an introduction to each lesson that will give some background information. After you read that, read the story thoroughly and think of questions you might have. The students will no doubt have similar questions. Formulate some answers in your mind.

Think through the discussion questions. Look at any supplementary material listed with each lesson. If you want to delve in further, consider reading some of the books in the bibliography. The more you can familiarize yourself with the story as told in the Bible and in background material the easier it will be to make eye contact with the students as you teach. Students will catch your enthusiasm and listen more actively.

### The Lesson

It is very important that you read through the Scripture passages when you lead the lesson. We want to learn what God says about the men and women in His Word. Do not assume that all of the students have had time to read the Scripture passages ahead of time.

As you give the lesson, pause once in a while and let the students ask questions. Do not worry if they don't have any. There are discussion questions at the end.

Encourage questions. When you prepared the lesson you would have formulated how you would answer the questions. You won't be able to anticipate all of their questions, but having ready answers for most of them will enable you to clarify issues and give more light on the lesson.

### Helpful Tips

You do not have to wait until the end of the lesson for the discussion questions. When you prepare the lesson, you can insert questions in your notes to encourage participation. Let students respond freely.

Ask more questions to clarify rather than answering the questions all yourself. Good discussion will involve as many students as possible. The learned lessons will stay with students longer if they discover the truth for themselves.

A note on Bible translation: The Scriptures used for these lessons are from the New International Version of the Bible. Of course the students are free to follow along in any translation.

### **Aid for Student Application**

Be sure to let each member learn the Bible truths for themselves. Ask the students to take turns reading the Scripture passages.

Allow students to freely give their opinions. Do not be judgmental if their interpretation differs from yours. If you have taught the lesson well, let the Holy Spirit apply God's Word to their understanding. You can gently say what you believe, but let the group know that you are all learning God's Word and you want the Spirit to help you determine the meaning.

### **Application**

The stories are written in a way that there is application to real life made. Be sure and add your own thoughts, especially if there is a relevant situation to your group. Ask the group to reflect on the application and offer their own thoughts as to how to apply it to their lives.

### **General Outline of the Presentation:**

1. Open in prayer.
2. Pass out the handout.
3. Tell or read the introduction to the lesson giving the background for where the story fits into God's Word.
4. Tell or read the story. Don't skip over the Scriptures. We want to know what God says!
5. Discussion time.
6. Go over the Scripture references for the next lesson.

## Lesson 5

### Abigail – Obeying God Rather Than Men

It may seem obvious that we should obey God rather than men when there is a conflict between those two authorities. However, it is not always so easy when worldly authorities have the power to command our obedience and to punish us if we disobey them.

In the Old Testament there is a story of someone who believed that it is better to obey God rather than men. It was a courageous woman named Abigail.

Notes:

I Samuel 25:3–42:

The character of Abigail:

The character of Nabal:

The character of David:

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think Abigail sinned by going around her husband? Can you think of situations when a woman might need to disobey her husband?
  
2. Paul tells us in the New Testament husbands should love their wives “just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25). How were men in the Old Testament informed as to how to treat their wives?
  
3. Demonstrate how you think Abigail showed wisdom in her confrontation with David. What specifically did she do that you would emulate when you are in a confrontational situation?
  
4. Abigail did what she thought was right even though she knew the consequences could be dire. What advice would you give a woman who is in a quandary about an abusive husband?
  
5. Men, what advice would you give the Nabal’s you know?

**For next week:** Bathsheba

**Scriptures:** 2 Samuel 11:1–27; 12:1–24; 28–31; I Kings 1:21; 2:13–25; Song of Solomon 3:11

## Lesson 5

### Abigail – Obeying God Rather Than Men

#### **A Note About Obeying God Rather Than Men:**

It may seem obvious that we should obey God rather than men when there is a conflict between those two authorities. However, it is not always so easy when worldly authorities have the power to command our obedience and to punish us if we disobey them.

A familiar New Testament story involves the apostles Peter and John. The Jewish priests and Sadducees were angry when the apostles were preaching about Jesus and threw the disciples into prison. The next day, when the rulers met they questioned Peter and John. It was apparent that the rulers could not keep them in prison, so they let them go but admonished them to stop preaching in Jesus's name. Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you or to him? You be the judges!" (Acts 4:19).

The Jewish leaders saw themselves as the authorities in Israel. But the apostles said that God is a higher authority.

Peter and John were not the first to disregard earthly authority rather than disobey God. When the Hebrews were enslaved in Egypt, Pharaoh instructed the midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, to kill all of the male babies. "The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do: they let the boys live" (Exod. 1:17). God blessed the midwives with families of their own for obeying Him.

There is another story in the Old Testament of someone who believed that it is better to obey God rather than men. This was a woman named Abigail.

Her husband Nabal was her earthly authority. Nabal acted foolishly and his faithful wife tried to rescue the situation and save his life. The way that Abigail took things into her own hands would have made her husband angry. If Nabal had known what Abigail was going to do, he would have forbidden it. Abigail risked severe punishment, but she feared God more than her husband.

Let's turn to I Samuel 25 and read this story of the wise woman Abigail.

#### **Abigail: Wise Counselor**

*Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him, and they buried him at his home in Ramah. Then David moved down into the Desert of Paran.*

*A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel. His name*

*was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband was surly and mean in his dealings—he was a Calebite.*

*While David was in the wilderness, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep. So he sent ten young men and said to them, "Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name. Say to him: 'Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours! Now I hear that it is sheep-shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not mistreat them, and the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing. Ask you own servants and they will tell you. Therefore, be favorable toward my men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them.'*

*When David's men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David's name. Then they waited (1 Sam. 25:1–9).*

At the time our story takes place, Saul is the king of Israel. You may remember that the Israelites were at war with the Philistines during these times. When David was a lad, he fought the champion of the Philistines, the giant Goliath. After that he went to work at the palace for Saul. As Saul grew older, he became jealous of David. He even threatened to kill him, so David had to go away and hide from Saul. He was on the run.

He had a large following of men who stayed with him, living in the wilderness of Paran. There he was not only safe from Saul, but he was able to be of real service to his countrymen by protecting the large flocks which pastured far and wide from the predatory raids of the wild tribes of the desert.

One of the people that David protected was Nabal, a wealthy landowner. Nabal had many flocks of sheep. A special time for sheep farmers was when they did the shearing. It was a time of rejoicing, for when the fleeces were sold, there would be much money and a big celebration. Nabal had sold his wool and was throwing a huge party. Because David and his men had protected Nabal's sheep, they felt that they should be invited to the celebration. David sent a delegation of ten men to greet Nabal and ask for something in return for his service.

Nabal answered David's men roughly and sent them away empty handed. He had insulted them by acting as if he didn't even know who they were. They went back to tell David about Nabal's rejection, and when David heard this, he was very angry. He had four hundred men put on their swords and follow him back to Nabal's place. Two hundred men stayed behind with the supplies.

Continue with I Samuel 25:14–17:

*One of the servants told Abigail, Nabal's wife, "David sent messengers from the wilderness to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. Yet these men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. Night and day they were a wall around us the whole time we were herding our sheep near them. Now think it over and see what you can*

*do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him.”*

In the meantime, one of Nabal’s servants had heard how Nabal mistreated David’s emissaries. This servant knew that it would be no good to try and reason with his master who was “such a wicked man that no one can talk to him.” He ran and told Abigail, Nabal’s wife. Abigail was a wise woman and could be trusted to know what to do. The servant told her all about how David and his men had protected them all those months that they tended the sheep. Abigail immediately resolved to take action.

Abigail was not only beautiful, but also intelligent. She knew what needed to be done, and that it had to be done quickly. She had the servants load up some food and beverages and put them on donkeys. She told them to go on ahead of her to meet David. She herself followed on her donkey as soon as she could, “But she did not tell her husband Nabal” (I Sam. 25:19).

Imagine what courage Abigail must have had. She had heard that David and four hundred armed soldiers were coming after her husband. She had no way of knowing what the outcome would be. She did not know if David was so angry that he would punish everyone before she had a chance to talk to him. She knew that she had to hurry and meet David before he reached her house.

Continuing with verse 20:

*As she came riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, there were David and his men descending toward her, and she met them. David had just said, “It’s been useless—all my watching over this fellow’s property in the wilderness so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good. May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!”*

Abigail may have been trembling when she saw David, but she met him bravely. She got down off of her donkey and bowed to the ground and begged him to listen to her.

Continuing at verse 24:

*She fell at his feet and said: “Pardon your servant, my lord, and let me speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. Please pay no attention, my lord, to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name—his name means Fool, and folly goes with him. And now my lord, as surely as the Lord your God lives and as you live, since the Lord has kept you from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, may your enemies and all who are intent on harming my lord be like Nabal. And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my lord, be given to the men who follow you.*

This is a pretty amazing speech. Abigail is speaking disrespectfully of her husband. But there is a good reason for this; Abigail wants David to know that Nabal’s reputation is terrible with everyone. He’s just a fool, and not worth David’s time. In contrast to

Nabal's wickedness, Abigail praises David, calling him "lord." She appeals to his honor as a man who wants justice. She reminds him that God has stopped him from avenging himself with his own hands. Abigail is the one who prevented David from committing bloodshed, but she tactfully gives him the credit for not continuing to pursue revenge.

Instead, Abigail asked him to put all of the blame on her. She told him to treat her as his maidservant. She apologized for not knowing sooner about the young men that David had sent to see Nabal. She begged him to accept the gift of food that she had brought.

Abigail continues with a prophecy for David. Turn to verse 28:

*Please forgive your servant's presumption. The Lord your God will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my lord, because you fight the Lord's battles, and no wrongdoing will be found in you as long as you live. Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my lord will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the Lord your God, but the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling. When the Lord has fulfilled for my lord every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him ruler over Israel, my lord will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the Lord your God has brought my lord success, remember your servant."*

Abigail shows foresight and wisdom in this speech. She continues to build David up as a man of God who would not really want to do something that would stay on his conscience forever. She gave David a chance to save his face. By then David had cooled off. Abigail appealed to his character as a man of God. David repented and admitted to Abigail that she was right.

Continuing with verse 32:

*David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. Otherwise, as surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak."*

David accepted Abigail's gift with thanks. He then told her to go home in peace.

When Abigail went to Nabal he was holding a great banquet. He was in high spirits and very drunk. So she decided not to speak to him until the next morning. In the morning Abigail told Nabal all that had happened the day before. Nabal's heart failed him and he became like a stone. About ten days later the Lord struck Nabal and he died.

When David heard that Nabal was dead, he knew for certain that God had upheld his cause against Nabal for treating him with contempt. God had also kept him from doing wrong by avenging himself on Nabal.

God rewarded the faithfulness and courage of Abigail. Turn to verse 39:

*Then David sent word to Abigail, asking her to become his wife. His servants went to Carmel and said to Abigail, "David has sent us to you to take you to become his wife." She bowed down with her face to the ground and said, "I am your servant and am ready to serve you and wash the feet of my lord's servants." Abigail quickly got on a donkey and, attended by her five female servants, went with David's messengers and became his wife.*

Abigail was now under David's protection as one of his wives. David was getting a wife that would be his spiritual equal as a good companion and counselor.

We don't know any more about Abigail than what we read in I Samuel 25. We can be encouraged from what we do know that God cares for His children. How exciting it will be to hear about the rest of her life when we get to Heaven!

### **Application:**

The Bible tells us that Nabal was a worthless and foolish man. He was harsh and evil in all his doings. In spite of this, Abigail was a loyal wife. Some have criticized her because she took the very large quantity of food to David without telling her husband. She did not try to tell Nabal until the next morning. Some have said that she is not a good example of a submissive wife. However, consider:

- The midwives lied to Pharaoh. (to save the baby boys)
- Rahab lied to her king. (to preserve the Israelite spies)  
Jonathan lied to Saul about David's whereabouts.
- Peter and John disobeyed the religious rulers. They said, "We must obey God rather than men."

In Patriarchal times, women were expected to obey their husbands no matter what. Today as Christians we have instructions for holy living in the New Testament. While women should be respectful of their husbands, men should also love their wives as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25).

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Do you think Abigail sinned by going around her husband? Can you think of situations when a woman might need to disobey her husband?
2. Paul tells us in the New Testament husbands should love their wives "just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). How were men in the Old Testament informed as to how to treat their wives?
3. Demonstrate how you think Abigail showed wisdom in her confrontation with David. What specifically did she do that you would emulate when you are in a confrontational situation?

4. Abigail did what she thought was right even though she knew the consequences could be dire. What advice would you give a woman who is in a quandary about an abusive husband?
5. Men, what advice would you give the Nabal's you know?

**For next week:** Bathsheba

**Scriptures:** 2 Samuel 11:1–27; 12:1–24; 28–31; I Kings 1:21; 2:13–25; Song of Solomon 3:11

## APPENDIX D:

### DETAILS ON RENEWYOURTHINKING.NET WEBSITE

This website was designed by a professional with attention to appearance, ease of use, and room for many topics. Feedback is important and space was made for comments and questions. Please go to the website <http://www.renewyourthinking.net/wordpress/> and observe the following elements:

The menu bar contains: “Home,” “Articles,” “About,” “Podcast,” “Resources,” “Contact.”

#### “Home”

There are 5 main categories to choose from: “Stories From the Past,” “Education & Life of the Mind,” “Politics & Culture,” “Kingdom Life,” and “Stone Soup.”

The page also contains: Quote for the day; featured books, and the category links; and a place for subscribers to sign up.

#### “Articles”

When the viewer clicks on “Articles,” they will be given the option to choose from the five categories. “Featured Books” and the subscription button will also appear.

#### “About”

Why This Website?

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2).

The authors of the website, RenewYourThinking.net desire to aid those who seek to love God more with their whole hearts, souls, and minds. The site will present resources with ideas, challenges, encouragement, and practical help in their study.

Why do so many Christians in our day fail to understand the necessity of sanctifying the mind? What does it mean to think Christianly, to have a Christian Mind? How do we have the “mind of Christ”?

One area of thinking that needs renewing is the so-called “gender debate.” The stories and articles from the Bible and history should be considered carefully by those who

desire to know God's will for women. How may women be used in the kingdom of God?

These are some questions we hope you will explore in this blog. We hope this is a two-way conversation. Please leave us your thoughts and comments.

### **“Podcast”**

The “Podcast” button is scheduled to be operational by January 10, 2019.

### **“Resources”**

Resources are listed for all of the categories. They include written and electronic materials.

### **“Contact”**

The Contact page allows readers to ask questions. It is a typical form page with room for the sender's name, email, subject, and message.

Resources and the subscribe buttons are also found on this page.