



Defining a Biblical Position on Women Preaching

The Position and Approach of The Springs Church

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to address The Springs Church's position and approach on the subject of women preaching. Our heart in releasing this paper is to provide clarity on a complex biblical topic as part of an ongoing effort to release both men and women across The Springs Church into the fullness of their uniqueness, gifting, and calling.

As in all matters of life, ethics, and doctrine, The Holy Scriptures are our final authority for establishing this theological position.

This paper is written not for the minds of scholars or academics; instead, this paper is written for the local church. This paper is written for the brothers and sisters who call The Springs Church their home and are endeavoring with us to make disciples and see our city and region transformed by the gospel. At The Springs Church, we affirm women have a vital and crucial role to play in ministry leadership and believe that women can function in any leadership role except for the office of Elder (this is further expounded upon in the *Tensions in Scripture* section).¹ This paper seeks to provide a biblical framework for the role of the woman's voice within the body of Christ and the role of their voice in preaching to the gathered church on the Lord's Day Sunday.

It is our opinion as a team of Elders that the Scriptures make provision for qualified women and non-eldering men to preach within the family of God as called and equipped by our team of Elders.

The remainder of this paper will seek to provide clarity for this position by expounding upon three subjects. In "Examples in Scripture," we will highlight examples of women using their voices as part of God's plan for redemption and renewal. In "Tensions in

Scripture,” we will address and reconcile weighty scriptures that have been historically used to establish a position for or against women preaching. Lastly, in “Preaching and Practice,” we will define what preaching means at The Springs Church and how the Elder Team will equip qualified men and women to use their voices to build up the local church.

Lastly, we recognize that this paper touches on a subject that is complex and offers a wide range of emotions to be experienced. For some, this theological position is already one they subscribe to and it may be received with great joy. For others, it may feel unfamiliar and uncomfortable. Lastly, there may be some individuals who are in disagreement. Our hope is that in unity, we can pursue God’s vision for The Springs Church through an honest and humble evaluation of the Scriptures. To feel uncertain or disagree about our interpretation of Scripture does not mean we disagree on a shared stance about the authority, inerrancy, and infallibility of the Bible.² We also recognize that as an Elder team, we may be wrong, and there may be parts of this position that we don’t fully understand, seem lacking, or are incomplete. However, we feel nonetheless that this position needs to be addressed, written, and understood among our local church body, and this is our best attempt to provide written clarity for this important subject.

Our prayer for this paper is that God would be glorified, the kingdom would be advanced, and the local church be built up as we open the pulpit to hear the voices of qualified men and women proclaim from the scriptures the good news of the Kingdom of God.

Examples in Scripture

Old Testament Examples

Creation

We will begin this section by examining key scriptures and words found in Genesis chapters 1, 2, and 3. We will begin with Genesis 1:26-27:

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”- Genesis 1:26–27.

The first term we will examine is the word for “man” in Genesis 1:26. In Hebrew, the word used for man is “*adam*.” In Genesis 1, this term is used as a general term to describe mankind and implies both genders of male and female, as stated in verse 27. This means that both men and women are clearly created in the image of God and given equal dominion over the earth.

In Genesis 2, we are introduced to a more up close and personal description of God’s creation of the first humans. The general word for mankind, “*adam*”, used in Genesis 1, becomes the proper and personal name for the first created human male.

From the opening pages of Scripture, we are introduced to a good world teeming with life. It is a good world because God declared it so. The only time God says something is not good in regard to creation is when He addresses Adam’s solitude in the garden in Genesis 2:18:

¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

As a result, God creates Eve. When God creates Eve, God does not create a lesser version of Adam but an equal image bearer, co-laborer, and “helper” as described in Genesis 2:18. It’s important to highlight that the word for “helper” is not a term that describes lower status for Eve or for women in general, though this verse has been construed by different traditions to restrict women from operating in leadership roles. The word “helper,” as often translated in English, does not fully convey the meaning of the Hebrew word *Ezer*. The word *ezer* is used to describe a saving partner or companion and is most often used in the scriptures to describe God’s saving nature (i.e., Genesis 49:25, Exodus 18:4, Deut. 33:7, Psalm 20:3, 21:1-2, 115:9-11, 146:5). Commenting on this verse, Kenneth Matthews says:

“There is no sense derived from the word linguistically or from the context of the garden narrative that the woman is a lesser person because her role differs. In the case of the biblical model, the “helper” is an indispensable “partner” required to achieve the divine commission. “Helper,” as we have seen from its Old Testament usage, means the woman will play an integral part, in this case, in human survival and success. What the man lacks, the woman accomplishes. As Paul said concisely, the man was not made for the woman “but the woman for the man” (cf. 1 Cor 11:9). The woman makes it possible for the man to achieve the blessing that he otherwise could not do “alone.” And, obviously, the woman cannot achieve it apart from the man... ‘ēzer in 2:18 anticipates in an unexpected way how Eve will be a “helper” to her husband. She will be instrumental in providing salvation for fallen Adam by her “seed,” who will defeat the serpent (3:15). Hebrew zera’ (“seed”) may be a wordplay with the similar-sounding ‘ēzer

(“helper”). Since God is said to exercise the role of “helper,” the term does not diminish the person who holds that role. If anything, the divine nuance of the term “helper” in the Pentateuch gives special dignity (e.g., Deut 33:7, 26, 29)⁴“.

Both Adam and Eve are created in the image of God, and both are given equal authority to rule and reign alongside God on earth. They are co-laborers and partners in God’s commission to fill the earth and subdue it. In their gender, there is uniqueness, but when joined together, they uniquely express God’s image to the world. God’s design for men and women is unique, yet they are equally valuable in the sight of the triune God.

Fall

In Genesis 3:14-19, God’s good creation is disrupted by sin. A curse is pronounced upon Adam and Eve. In verse 16, speaking to Eve, God says:

“To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.”

As we mentioned earlier, God’s creation prior to the Fall in Genesis 3 was very good according to God’s standard. In His good design, He creates Adam and Eve as co-equals and co-laborers who walk in mutual partnership with each other. As God pronounces the curse, He is not undoing His good design by redefining Eve’s relationship with Adam by introducing pain and subordination as a new standard. When pronouncing the curse, God is not saying, “Here is how I want it to be”, rather, as a consequence of sin now ruling and reigning over them, God is saying, “Here is how it will be.⁵” But “how it will be” is not how God intended or designed it to be. To use this

verse describing man ruling over woman as God's intended standard is to miss the context of this passage. This passage describing the curse is not a prescriptive passage for the qualities of a healthy marriage or God's design for men and women. Rather, this passage describes the new dynamics man and woman will experience as a result of sin. This means that this verse does not hold enough weight to sustain a position that only men can lead and use their voices to preach and teach because men were designed to rule over women. It is our opinion that there is not enough evidence in Genesis to suggest that women using their voice in leadership is prohibited in God's original design for humankind. In a further survey of the Old Testament, we believe there is additional evidence that supports this position.

Various Old Testament Texts

Though the following texts do not provide evidence for how a local church should be organized or function, they do provide examples that support the position that a woman's voice in leadership is valuable and used by God for His redemptive purposes.

Both Exodus 15:20 and Micah 6:4 describe how Miriam held a leadership position as a prophetess and used her voice alongside Moses and Aaron to help lead God's people.

- Exodus 15:20- " Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. And Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea."
- Micah 6:4- "For I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

Consider the following brief examples of Old Testament women using their voice in leadership for God's redemptive purposes.

- Judges 4 describes how God appointed Deborah, a prophetess, to function as a judge over Israel. Judges 4:4 says- " Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time."
- 2 Kings 22:14-20 recognizes Huldah as a prophetess during the reign of King Josiah.
- In the book of Esther, Esther is not only a queen but a liberator who rescues the Jewish people from destruction.

A deeper examination of the Old Testament would reveal even more examples of women used by God with just as equal or greater redemptive significance.

New Testament Examples

In the New Testament, we find that God employs a similar pattern for using the voice of women for His redemptive purposes. In the Gospels, we find not only is God affirming the voice of women through Jesus' interactions but also affirms their presence through their inclusion in Jesus' ministry. In the book of Acts and in the New Testament letters, we also find God employing the voice of women in the field and in the church to build up the body of Christ.

Beginning with the gospels, within the Gospel of Luke, we are given a rare Biblical narrative in which we see dialogue between two women, Elizabeth and Mary. As noted by famed New Testament Scholar Richard Bauckham, this instance represents a powerful departure from traditional male-centric Hebrew literature. The narration and dialogue of two women, apart from the presence of a male figure, was generally seen

as rare within the literary world of the Hebrew people, displaying even a literary shift in the active representation of women within these stories.⁶

The emphasis produces incredible moments of Gospel significance. Upon Mary's arrival, Elizabeth declares one of the first earthly declarations of the coming Messiah recorded in the Gospels:

⁴²And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? ⁴⁴For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."⁷

This powerful moment ultimately leads to what is regularly referred to as the Magnificat, Mary's declaration of praise to the Lord for the blessing of her pregnancy and the son she will bear. Within this block of text, there is one thing to note:

⁴⁶ And Mary said: "My soul exalts the Lord,

⁴⁷ And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

⁴⁸ "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bonds slave;

For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.

⁴⁹ "For the Mighty One has done great things for me;

And holy is His name.

⁵⁰ *"AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION
TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.*

⁵¹ "He has done mighty deeds with His arm;

He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.

⁵² "He has brought down rulers from their thrones,

And has exalted those who were humble.
⁵³ “HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS;
And sent away the rich empty-handed.
⁵⁴ “He has given help to Israel His servant,
In remembrance of His mercy,
⁵⁵ As He spoke to our fathers,
To Abraham and his descendants forever.”
⁵⁶ And Mary stayed with her about three months, and then returned to her
home.⁸

Within her praise, there is documented at least two references to Old Testament texts. In verse 50 (“and his mercy is upon generation after generation...”) there is a direct quote from Psalm 103:13 & 17. This Psalm directly deals with the graciousness and forgiveness of the Lord, now coming to the world in Mary’s unborn son. The second is in verse 53 (“he has filled the hungry with good things”) there is a direct quote from Psalm 107:9, a Psalm directly dealing with God’s deliverance, a deliverance again found in Mary’s unborn son. These are just direct quotes. When closely analyzed, there is evidence that verses 46-48, 49, 50, 53, 54, and 55-56 contain allusions to various Psalms and the narratives of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1-10.⁹

Why does this matter? The mastery of interpretation and Gospel application is found in the hymn of a teenage Hebrew girl. If one is to believe the Bible is to be taken literally in this narrative, young Mary certainly is gifted to interpret and apply the Old Testament scriptures to her current situation, drawing on the words of old to help readers connect the dots to a world of prophetic voices before her.

Another instance of women’s voices from early in Jesus’ life (though after his birth) is found in the story of Anna the Prophetess. Luke, again, tells us her story.

“³⁶And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. ³⁸At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.”¹⁰

While Anna’s origins and positions as prophetess are better left to other works (see Bacukham’s exploration of Anna in his work *Gospel Women*¹¹), there are two notes to be made in her story that apply to our conversation. First, it is necessary to note that Luke states she “never leaves the temple.” Moreover, the vision of Anna’s time in the temple is not that of silent presence but fasting and praying. She is an active part of the ministry presence at the local temple in Jerusalem.

Second is the incredible moment in which Anna meets the young Jesus. Luke says she “began giving thanks to God.” More importantly, she continued to speak about Jesus to all those who were looking to hear about the coming Messiah. We are not given any indication of her movement away from the temple, nor are we told her service at the temple stops in some way. Rather, the resulting vision is one of a woman so stricken by the Spirit of God that she begins to spread the news of the coming Jesus to everyone willing to listen at the temple. A woman declaring the newly born messiah at the Jewish temple. What an incredible vision!

In the Gospels, we continue to witness this pattern of God affirming the voice and presence of women and using their voice and presence for His redemptive purposes. Consider how the author Luke lists the names of women who were following Jesus alongside the 12 disciples in Luke 8:1-3:

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

These women not only followed Jesus but they also helped fund Jesus' ministry “out of their means” according to verse 3. Not only are women welcomed into proximity with Rabbi Jesus, but they are also dignified and listed as co-partners in God’s mission with men. In the NT, a new and radical distinction is made in Jesus’ approach to discipleship in calling women to follow Him. Scholars across the spectrum agree that women were extended the invitation to follow Jesus and be His disciples (Luke 8:1–3, Matthew 12:49–50, Luke 10:39, Acts 22:3, Luke 11:27, Luke 11:28, John 4, Matthew 28:19–20, Matt. 26:6–13, Mark 14:3–9, Luke 7:36–50, John 12:1–8, Acts 9:36). In the ministry of Jesus, there is no distinction between a male disciple and a female disciple. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says this about the ministry of Jesus:

“Jesus gave women human dignity...Prior to Jesus, women were regarded as inferior beings, religiously speaking.”

In the ministry of Jesus, both men and women are treated as co-equals and co-partners. In other words, in the ministry of Jesus, we see the undoing of the effects of sin in Genesis 3 and an affirmation of God’s intended design for men and women to rule and reign together in Genesis 1 and 2.

In John 4, Jesus has a lengthy discourse (45 verses) with a woman from Samaria whom society deemed inferior because of her ethnic background and personal history. Before we expound upon the significant details in John 4, we need to set it against this truth about Jesus found in the following chapter, John 5:19 says:

“So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.”

Jesus pursued and carried on a conversation with a woman, defying cultural expectations between Jews and Samaritans, and in doing so, displayed God’s heart for not only women but for reconciling and unifying the nations. After experiencing the transforming presence of Christ through a lengthy conversation, this woman returns to her home and proclaims and embodies the good news to her entire town. As a result of using her voice, “many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.”¹² Jesus employs a woman’s voice to go before Him into a town to hear the good news of the Kingdom of God. Jesus eventually makes His way to this town and makes Himself known to the individuals of that town, offering further validation for the woman’s testimony about Him. In this passage, we see a picture of God’s original desire to equally partner with His children, both men and women, in the redemption of mankind and the renewal of all things.

The final and most familiar example of women’s voices being used for God’s redemptive purposes in the Gospels revolves around the resurrection of Jesus in Luke 23:55, Luke 24:1-3, John 20:1, Matthew 28:1-10, and Mark 16:1-11. Jesus personally appeared to women, and the scriptures are intentional to list the names of the women at the tomb. Similar to the scene in John 4, the Lord Jesus Christ intentionally appears

to a group of women and commissions them to proclaim the good news of His resurrection to the remaining disciples. The voices of women were instrumental in breaking the news of His resurrection. Author Michael Green comments on the significance of this moment in light of cultural practices of that day and age, he says:

“That is simply astounding....women counted for little in both Jewish and Graeco-Roman circles in those days. They were nobodies: they were goods and chattels; they could, in some circumstances, be offered for sale; they could not bear witness in a court of law. And God perpetrates the supreme irony of having two women as the first witnesses of his Son’s resurrection! Jesus had been born in an obscure province that nobody had heard of; his genealogy contains various disreputable females who might be considered liabilities in any family; he worked as a jobbing builder where nobody would have dreamed of looking for him; he went to a cross, the place associated with God’s curse, not his approval; and now the last and greatest surprise is that God allows the first witnesses of his resurrection to be women! If anyone was going to fabricate the story of the resurrection, would they have made the witnesses women? Of course not. Only God could have dreamed up so remarkable a thing. But this is the supreme irony, the supreme humour, the supreme surprise value of almighty God, that when he does his greatest act since the creation of the world, in raising his Son from the dead, he attests it through the lips of those who were so widely discounted. Magnificent!”¹³

Following the resurrection event, Jesus appears to his disciples, both men and women, and gives them what has come to be known as “the great commission” in Matthew 28:19-20. It’s important to note that the term “great commission” wasn’t used until the 17th century and popularized by the great missionary J. Hudson Taylor in the late

1800s¹⁴. Considering the storyline of scripture, the great commission is, in fact, a great re-commissioning of both men and women to subdue the earth with God's glory, this time by making and multiplying disciples of Jesus. Recall how, in the beginning, God commissioned both men and women to co-labor and co-partner in fulfilling the cultural mandate by extending the bounds of the garden until the world was subdued in God's glory. In the great commission, we see a re-commissioning, God commissions both men and women after redeeming them from the curse of sin and endows them with the Holy Spirit, re-empowering them with equal authority to advance His Kingdom by making disciples. Following this great commission, we see both Spirit-empowered men and women use the whole of their lives, especially their voices, to build the church through their proclamation and embodiment of the Gospel. Consider the following examples found within the book of Acts, Romans, and Philippians.

Beginning with Acts 2:14-21, we find Peter quoting the prophet Joel in his sermon on the day of Pentecost. Peter references the following verse from Joel 2:28-29:

²⁸ “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. ²⁹ Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

A close friend in ministry comments on this section in scripture with this question, “If the Spirit is given freely in both God's male and female servants to prophesy, why would God intend for women not to use their voice within the church?” In other words, the fulfillment and inclusion of Joel's prophecy in Peter's sermon at Pentecost, which is also recognized as the birth of the New Testament church, gives strong evidence to support the position that women's voices are welcomed in the body of Christ and

necessary for the building of the church. The Apostle Paul himself recognizes this and eagerly expresses a desire for all followers of Jesus to desire and pursue prophecy. Why? Because according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:5, “Prophecy builds the church”. Here, we find evidence to support the position that not only are women’s voices affirmed in the body of Christ but necessary for the building up of the church. Consider the following examples of women helping build the church through their Spirit-led proclamation and embodiment of the Gospel:

- Acts 16 records how Lydia was instrumental in using her home (Acts 16:40) as a church and hub for ministry within the city of Philippi.
- In Acts 18:24-28 we see how a couple, Priscilla and Aquila instruct a male Jew named Apollos in the ways of God. The significance here is that Priscilla is listed, again a practice that was uncommon in that day and age. Even more uncommon is the fact that she was instrumental alongside her husband in teaching Apollos about the ways of God. Priscilla wasn’t a silent bystander, she used her voice for God’s redemptive purposes. Here we see a picture of God’s original design at work and that design redeemed through Jesus, where both men and women are serving alongside each other to use their voice and lives to build the body of Christ.
- Acts 21:8-9 records that Phillips’s four daughters were prophets, offering further evidence that the New Testament church employed the voices of women to prophetically build up the church.
- In Philippians 4:2-3 Paul is entreating “Euodia and Syntyche...who have labored side by side within the gospel together.” It is hard to imagine Paul using this kind of language for someone he expected to be silent, not teaching, not leading, and not actively engaging and carrying on the ministry of Jesus.

- In Colossians 4:15, Paul sends his greetings to Nympha, a woman who was hosting a church in her house and helping Paul labor in the gospel.
- In addition to the women already mentioned we also see the following women recognized in the New Testament as partners in the gospel:
 - Tabitha (Acts 9:36–42)
 - Mary, Junia, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus’s mother, Julia, the sister of Nereus (Romans 16)
 - Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11)
 - Lois and Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5)
 - Claudia (2 Timothy 4:21)
 - Apphia (Philemon 1:2)
 - The mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12) the “elect lady” (2 John 1:1)
 - The women who are encouraged to prophesy in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:2–16)
- Romans 16 offers a list of men and women whom Paul commends for their efforts in advancing the gospel and building the church. The first one listed is known as “our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae...she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.”
 - In Romans 16:1–2, Paul refers to Phoebe as a *diakonos*, a term frequently used by Paul in Romans. The word *diakonos* is often translated as “deacon,” “servant,” and “minister.” Paul uses the same term to refer to himself in Romans 11:13-14 and Romans 15:25-25. The same term is used to refer to Jesus in Romans 15:7–9.
 - Below, we further explain the significance of Phoebe’s role in the early church.

Phoebe

From those examples mentioned in the remainder of the New Testament, special mention must be reserved for a woman named Phoebe. Who is Phoebe? Let's read below:

"¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church in Cenchreae. ² So you should welcome her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in whatever matter she may require your help. For indeed she has been a benefactor of many—and of me also."¹⁵

What about these verses is peculiar? A brief but detailed overview of this verse's language will go a long way in helping build the profile of Phoebe. First, we have to understand the word *commend* (συνίστημι/synistēmi) in verse 1. While the word is used elsewhere in Romans to express proving or demonstrating, here Paul uses it in a way of introduction¹⁶. The weight of this introduction and language shouldn't be taken lightly, as it carries substantive ancient context.

This unique introductory language likely pinpoints Phoebe as the letter's carrier. Unlike a modern understanding, this role was more than a mailman delivering a letter. According to scholars Robert Jewett and Roy David Kotansky, "Ancient epistolary practice would therefore assume that the recommendation of Phoebe was related to her task of conveying and interpreting the letter in Rome as well as in carrying out the business entailed in the letter."¹⁷ You didn't read that incorrectly; Phoebe would've been the first to publicly read Romans (one of the most theologically formative books of the entire Bible) and was the individual assigned to assist in interpretation of the most important theological work of Paul's life.

This is a fascinating and powerful vision. However, it also speaks to the assumption that women were somehow prohibited from speaking or teaching men in the church, but especially in the gathering of the church where this would've likely taken place. As Professor Michael Bird writes:

“This is Paul’s one chance to garner support from the Roman churches for a mission to Spain. This is Romans, his greatest letter-essay, the most influential letter in the history of Western thought, and the singularly greatest piece of Christian theology. Now if Paul was so opposed to women teaching men anytime and anywhere, why on earth would he send a woman like Phoebe to deliver this vitally important letter and to be his personal representative in Rome? Why not Timothy, Titus, or any other dude? Why Phoebe?”¹⁸

This alone is enough to merit a unique and closer look at Phoebe for this specific conversation. This goes beyond the point of her possible role as a deacon¹⁹ and the potential privileges and leadership roles associated with her “*patronage*.”²⁰ This again, offers us an incredible vision of women using their voices to build up the entire body of believers in the early church.

Tensions in Scripture

We recognize that the aforementioned language, verses, and examples from the Old Testament and New Testament are not prescriptive texts for how the church should function or be organized. They are instead descriptive texts of events that unfolded in such a way as to fulfill God’s redemptive purposes for this age. However, it’s also important to note that the Bible wasn’t exclusively written as a handbook to describe or

answer all of our questions on how the local church should function and be organized. In part, this has been the reason why this subject has been so heavily debated in history across Christian denominations. The Bible is first and foremost a unified story about Jesus, and in the Bible, we find texts that are relevant to these questions but also recognize they don't completely and comprehensively answer all of our questions. For this reason, studying these texts requires an enormous amount of interpretive labor to formulate a position that honors the Lord and the authority of scripture. This also means we take on the interpretative labor to reconcile challenging texts, and we take on the risk of potentially getting it wrong.

With that said, as mentioned earlier, it is the opinion of The Springs Elders, as revealed and studied in the Scriptures, that the Scriptures make provision for qualified men and women to use their voice within the body of Christ. In particular, we believe there is provision for qualified women and non-eldering men to preach within the family of God on Sunday mornings as called and equipped by our team of Elders.

With patience and humility, this is our best attempt to reconcile challenging texts and further lay out a position that we believe will honor God and contribute health to the body of Christ as we open the pulpit to hear the voices of qualified men and women proclaim from the scriptures the good news of the Kingdom of God.

The following section will unpack two challenging New Testament texts found in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

The first text reads as follows:

“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.”

Before we acknowledge the prescriptive nature of this text, we need to address the broader context of 1 Corinthians. One of the key ideas that Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians is how their sin and dysfunction are affecting their worship gatherings.

In 1 Corinthians 11:4-5, Paul states the following:

“Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven.”

From this text, it is clear to observe that women are clearly praying and prophesying within the context of the family of God. If this is the case, women are not completely silent in the church, as Paul prescribes in 1 Corinthians 14, and therefore, there must be some nuanced meaning of 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 in regard to what Paul means with these words. Thomas Schreiner concludes that “this text cannot command center stage in the debate, for however it is interpreted, Paul cannot be forbidding women from speaking at all. This would clearly contradict the encouragement in 1 Corinthians 11:5 and many other texts of Scripture.”

Insight into historical perspectives and cultural practices offers further insight into reconciling Paul’s varying prescription for women to speak and not speak. In the

ancient Greco-Roman culture, asking questions was part of the normal worship gathering. Unlike the modern buildings we now occupy, the church setting felt more intentional and relational because they met in homes. These house churches were as big as the homes they gathered in allowed them to be. So, in most cases, they were small gatherings, and interactive dialogue was normal, for example, think about the natural dialogue that occurs in a community group. As we mentioned earlier, women were encouraged to pray and prophesy. There was a provision for women to use their voice in the worship gathering. Paul's restriction in 1 Corinthians possibly may emerge from the following distinct cultural realities of that day and age:

1. First, there is historical evidence related to the culture of first-century Corinth, indicating that it would have been culturally scandalous and offensive for a woman to address an unrelated man directly. This makes sense of Paul's reference to the "law" in 1 Corinthians 14:34 because there is no such law in the Torah. Craig Blomberg says, "The "Law" cannot refer to a specific Old Testament passage telling women to be silent in public worship, since no such passage exists. Neither does it likely refer to Genesis 3:16, since Paul does not elsewhere in 1 Corinthians cite the results of the Fall as a rationale for desirable Christian behavior." This may mean that Paul is alluding to mutual submission from the Genesis 2 creation order or he is referring to a cultural law that applies to the Greco-Roman world.²¹ Either way, this verse is not instructing women not to use their voices within the body of Christ.
2. Another possibility is that the type of questions that were being asked were inappropriate, disruptive, distracting, or unhelpful for the context of the worship gathering, thereby hindering the growth of the body of Christ.
3. It's important to set verse 34 against the context of marriage as Paul addresses married women specifically. It's important to note that women were generally less educated than men in the Graeco-Roman world. David Prior comments,

“The reference to their husbands at home (35) immediately indicates that the apostle is thinking about the behaviour of some married women at Corinth, behaviour which needed firm control of the kind which had clearly proved necessary in all the churches of the saints (33).”²² The idea is that a certain type of behavior was emerging among a group of women in regard to distracting questions or quarrels about prophecy. Paul’s resolution is to remain silent and weigh prophecies privately, not publicly. Wives challenging their husbands and vice versa quenches the Spirit and does not honor the Lord in the worship gathering. Instead, wives should consult their husbands at home. In regards to questions, since women were often less educated, asking questions could become disruptive and hinder or sideline the purposes of the gathering. In the modern world, this sounds repressive, but in the ancient context, Paul compassionately instructs the women to consult their husbands at home regarding questions or prophecy to enable the community to gather and worship unrestricted by distractions, disagreements, or disorderly behavior. This passage has nothing to do with restricting their voice entirely; as we have already discussed in the previous chapter, Paul makes provisions for women to use their voices to edify the church. In this case, Paul is restricting a type of vocal activity that fails to edify the church.

4. Finally, submissiveness does not imply silence or a lack of leadership. Submissiveness is encouraged for all people, male and female, throughout the Scriptures (Eph. 5:21, Heb. 13:17, James 4:7). A woman could certainly preach in the gathered body while remaining submissive to the Lord, to the Word, and even to the elders of the church.²³

Before we proceed to the second challenging text, I want to remind the reader this paper is not intended to be an academic piece but an explanation of a position written

for the men and women who call The Springs Church their home. Not every nuance of the challenging texts will be discussed, and further study is encouraged. However, from this previous text, it is clear that there is a provision for women to use their voice within the body of Christ to edify and build the local church.

1 Timothy 2:9-15

Let us now examine the second challenging text from the New Testament found in 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

¹¹ Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

There are three face-value observations from this passage. We will look at each statement and discuss the possibilities for each one.

1. In verse 11, we see that a posture of submissiveness is encouraged in regard to learning.
2. In verse 12, Paul prohibits women from teaching, or exercising authority, and instructs them to remain quiet.
3. And in verses 13-15, Paul appeals to the Genesis account regarding Adam and Eve to frame his statements.

It's been said that the scriptures have been written for us, but they were not written to us. What this means is that the original author is writing with a specific culture, people,

and context in mind, and these verses are no exception. The most obvious example of this is the fact that Paul's New Testament letters were not written in English nor in our day and age. This means that we must take on the necessary interpretative labor to revisit the historical context and cross language barriers in an effort to understand these difficult texts in a way that deepens our understanding of history while still remaining faithful to the whole counsel of scripture and within the bounds of Christian orthodoxy.

First observation– 1 Timothy 2:11

In the Greco-Roman world, women were not encouraged to learn nor were women given the same opportunities as men to pursue further education. For Paul to subvert the cultural expectation in a predominantly male-led culture by encouraging women to learn is not only groundbreaking but incredibly dignifying of women in that day and age. As we mentioned earlier, submissiveness does not imply silence or a lack of leadership. Submissiveness is encouraged for all people, male and female, throughout the Scriptures (Eph. 5:21, Heb. 13:17, James 4:7).

Second Observation: 1 Timothy 2:12

The second observation (verse 12) requires us to cross language barriers and pursue further interpretative labor to understand the meaning of the words “teaching” and “authority.”

These two words, “teaching” and “authority”, may appear to mean simple things because of how straightforward the verse reads but to adopt a plain-sense reading of the text without doing a further word study of the original languages and cultural context would be irresponsible especially if one is going to set a position for or against women preaching. Verse 12 may be the single most scrutinized verse in the New Testament. Faithful and biblical scholars have landed in opposite camps, yet they can

still remain within the bounds of orthodoxy, though their interpretations differ. Scholarly work done on the words “teaching” and “authority” give us further insight into what these words mean in the Greek and how these words relate to each other as The Apostle Paul intended:

- The word for “teach” in 1 Timothy 2:12 is the greek word *didaskō*. This is a very common Greek word used 15 times throughout the New Testament that carries a positive meaning for instructing or teaching.
 - The negative sense of the word is *heterodidaskaleō*. This is the word Paul uses in 1 Timothy 1:3 and 1 Timothy 6:3 when Paul is clearly referring to false teaching.
- The word for “authority” in Greek is the word *authenteō*. Though the Greek word “teach” is very common in the New Testament, the Greek word Paul uses for authority is found nowhere else in the New Testament and is very rare in Greek literature.
- Linda Belleville says the following on the word *authenteō*:
 - “If Paul had wanted to speak of an ordinary exercise of authority, he could have picked any number of words. For instance, within the semantic domain of “to exercise authority,” Louw and Nida’s lexicon has twelve entries, and of “to rule,” “to govern,” forty-seven. Yet Paul picked none of these. Why not? A logical reason is that *authentein* carried a needed nuance that was particularly suited to the Ephesian situation²⁴.”
- The fact that this word is so uncommon has caused interpretive headaches in the history of the church. The New Testament scholar, Leland Wilshire, further illustrates how uncommon and how varying the definition for the word for “*autheneō*” is, when he evaluated the 329 known uses of the term in Greek literature spanning the five centuries before and the five centuries after the time of Christ. His work shows that prior to the first century the term often had

negative meanings of “domineer” or even “murder.” However, sometime after the first century, the meaning of the word changed and it began to mean something more positive.²⁵ This raises the question, which meaning of the word was Paul using? Was he using the positive sense of the word “authority” or the negative connotation?

- Insight into New Testament grammar rules helps clarify whether or not Paul is using the positive sense of the word authority or is using the negative sense.
 - Both the words “to teach” and “to exercise authority” are infinitives. Infinitives are special forms of verbs that are usually made by adding the word *to*. The main verb is “I do not permit.”
 - Scholar Andreas Köstenberger has shown that anytime two infinitives are joined together they are communicating either two positive ideas or two negative ideas. Scholars have also shown that this use of grammar is also consistent with Greek literature of that day and age.²⁶
 - As we mentioned earlier, the word “teach” has a straightforward and positive meaning. The word for “authority” is a bit more ambiguous. But since two infinitives are employed here it is communicating two equal ideas. Either a positive idea or negative idea. And since Paul uses the positive word for teach (*didaskō*) instead of the negative word for teach (*heterodidaskaleō*) we can conclude that Paul has in mind the positive sense of the word authority.
 - Scholar Craig Blomberg offers further clarity on this in his book, *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, by highlighting a second grammatical study from New Testament scholar Philip Payne. He says: “the conjunction *oude* (“nor”) that connects the two key verbs in verse 12 regularly joins together expressions that in some sense are mutually defining. In formal

terminology this is called a “hendiadys” (from Greek words that mean “one through two”).²⁶

- In other words, Paul is not forbidding two separate things, teaching and exercising authority, rather he is forbidding one action or role. It could be read that Paul is not permitting the exercise of “authoritative teaching” in the positive sense. Blomberg points to the larger context of 1 Timothy 2 for supporting this interpretation.
- This raises a second question, what does Paul have in mind when referencing the exercise of “authoritative teaching”? When is “authoritative teaching” a positive function and role? The broader context of 1 Timothy 2 and 3 helps answer this question.
 - Most Christian scholars on either side of this position generally agree that Paul is highlighting the office of Elder. This conclusion makes the most sense since the next immediate passage of scripture describes in detail the qualifications for serving as an Elder and then he describes the qualifications for serving as Deacon.
 - Where scholars tend to disagree is whether or not prohibiting women from eldering also means that women should be prohibited from teaching.
 - A possible argument that suggests that Paul is not prohibiting women from teaching but is solely prohibiting women from serving as Elders is the fact that in the New Testament there are a handful of examples of women using their voice to teach, prophecy, and edify the church. However, there is no New Testament example of a woman serving as an Elder. Therefore, we can conclude that there is a provision for women to teach, but there is a restriction on

Eldering and women using their voice in the role and function of an Elder.

Craig Blomberg offers further helpful insight into this tension. Blomberg draws the conclusion that the only action Paul is prohibiting is authoritative teaching and that action is related to the role and function of being an Elder²⁷. In other words, Paul is only limiting women from being elders or overseers in the church. To support this statement, Blomberg goes on to say:

“We do not have to look very far to find a convincing answer. In the very next chapter of 1 Timothy, Paul sets forth criteria for the two leadership offices of the church—overseers and deacons (3:1–13). Note the two most obvious distinctions between the two groups of leaders: (1) Only in his instructions for elders must candidates be “able to teach” (v. 2), and (2) Only in his instructions for deacons do women appear (v. 11)²⁸... thus, the two important responsibilities that set apart the elder, or overseer, from the rest of the church are their teaching and their exercising of authority— precisely the concepts involved in 2:12. It appears probable, therefore, that the only thing Paul is prohibiting women from doing in that verse is occupying the office of overseer or elder...This fits what we saw in our survey of Acts and the nonprescriptive material in the Epistles—women filling every major role in church life and leadership except that of elder.”²⁹

The broader context of 1 Timothy in light of cultural practices occurring in Ephesus also helps support this idea:

- 1 Timothy is a letter Paul wrote to Timothy instructing him to remain in the city of Ephesus which was steeped in Greco-Roman culture and idolatry.

- Ephesus was also home to the Artemis cult (Acts 19). Artemis was a female goddess whose female adherents thought they were superior to men in the Greco-Roman world.
 - Artemis was also viewed as the protector of women and a guardian of their virginity.
 - The influence of the Artemis cult throughout the city of Ephesus was pervasive. Yet, at the same time, the way of Jesus was exploding, and disciples were being multiplied in Ephesus. As temples that celebrated false gods were being emptied, house churches were being filled with followers of Jesus who were turning away from idols and sinful lifestyles and claiming exclusive allegiance to King Jesus.
 - This was met by biblically-documented backlash from the Artemis cult to the church in Ephesus.
 - The influence of this cult is quite likely why Paul addresses both “false teaching” and “women” in 1 Timothy more than he does in any other of his New Testament letters.
 - The influence of the Artemis cult could also make sense of the passage's confusing turn use of the phrase "women will be saved through childbearing," when considered in light of the cultish practice of guarding women's virginity for the false-goddess Artemis.
- The context for 1 Timothy 2 also revolves around a motif of prayer and how one should present themselves in a public gathering. 1 Timothy 2:8-15 reads as follows:

“⁸I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; ⁹likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, ¹⁰but with what is proper for women who profess godliness— with good works. ¹¹Let a

woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

- Commenting on the issue of attire, Craig Blomberg says:

“Surely, for example, there can be nothing intrinsically wrong with braided hair! On closer inspection, it seems better to take both verses as fundamentally timeless in outlook. No one disputes that decent, appropriate, and modest dress (v. 9a), while varying in specifics from one culture to no another, is still appropriate for all Christian women (and men!). Likewise, all believers should metaphorically clothe themselves with good deeds (v. 10). But what about the braided hair and jewelry of verse 9b? The Greek here in fact reads, “not with braids and gold or pearls or costly garments.” James Hurley has observed how wealthy Greco-Roman women often invested hours in daily coiffure, intricately weaving their hair and holding it together with costly gems. This emphasis on ostentation is surely always wrong...Far too readily, even if unwittingly, this becomes a temptation to flaunt one’s wealth, to distract other worshipers, and to make the less well-to-do feel like second-class citizens in God’s household. Fortunately, in many Christian contexts today there no longer is the same pressure to dress up as there once was.”³⁰”
- Robert W. Wall and Richard B. Steele point out that in the Greco-Roman world, “The woman’s public identity—that which is observed by others

and by which an opinion of her is formed—is her dress. In fact, her relationships with others are, in this sense, also formed by what she wears.” Though the culture is different, the same principle applies today for both men and women, and they give this example from a different time period, “The first members of my Free Methodist Church refused to wear jewelry or expensive clothes for fear that they would offend the poor and prevent them from seeking God in worship. In this sense, they “dressed down” in order to form an unnatural solidarity with outsiders.”³¹

Christians on either side of this position generally conclude that Paul’s commands for men to lift their hands in prayer and for women to not adorn themselves with gold or braided hair are related to a specific context and culture. Could it be that the immediately following verses about women teaching and exercising authority should also be interpreted in light of a specific cultural context? Paul is a missiologist and church planter and is clearly combating specific cultural practices and issues in an effort to undo the negative fruit of the idolatrous Greco-Roman world that included the hyper-feminist Artemis cult in Ephesus. We know false teachers were infiltrating the church, and it could be possible that these teachers were women from the Artemis cult who were accustomed to domineering and possessed a tainted view towards men. Another equally valid option is that the Ephesus church was also home to converts who turned away from the Artemis cult. It is possible that these women were accustomed to a certain lifestyle and that old life is slowly creeping back into the church. We are all too familiar with the experience of someone coming to know Jesus yet, at the same time, they are slowly experiencing freedom from a former way of life as the old sinful ways creep in every now and then. In this case, these women could be attempting to domineer or assume authority of the church from a place that is

motivated by distrust of men instead of the scriptural ethic to love and serve another in mutual submission.

With this in mind, it's clear to see that there is a specific kind of culture that Paul is challenging and is most likely referencing when giving guidelines for learning and not permitting women to teach and exercise authority. Given the overall context of 1 Timothy, it is equally valid to conclude that Paul is not prohibiting a specific action but instead a specific role and function, the role and function of overseeing the church as an Elder. In other words, women can use their voice to preach and teach within the body of Christ, as we have seen already in the New Testament, but Paul is prohibiting women from using their voice within the office of Elder. At The Springs, while we believe the office of Elder is reserved for men as understood within the overall context of 1 Timothy and Titus, upon further examination, we believe qualified non-eldering men and women can use their voice in preaching and teaching within the body of Christ.

Third Observation: 1 Timothy 2:13-15

We are still presented with Paul's challenging words in 1 Timothy 2:13-15. For the purpose of this paper, some generalized conclusions will be shared regarding these two verses:

- Men and Women are both saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ.
- Paul is not describing a character flaw women possess in that they may be more deceivable because of the Fall.
- Because the next immediate verse deals with the qualifications for elders, one argument suggests that Paul is highlighting the unique design of men and women. In the same way that women were designed to be able to bear children, Paul could be using the Adam and Eve dynamic to further

suggest that men are designed to elder and oversee in the same way that men are designed to be fathers or heads in marriage.

- J.R. Briggs and Bob Hyatt, in their book *Eldership and the Mission of God*, point out that Paul was also correcting another heresy that was circulating and taught by the Sophists.³² This philosophical group was also accustomed to goddess worship, and they believed “that it wasn’t Eve that sinned first, but Adam, and that in fact she was the one created first.” In other words, Paul brings up the creation order to further combat an early form of extreme religious feminism that was being circulated by the Sophists.

When considering the broader cultural context, a common objection that arises is the temptation to believe that other prescriptive scriptures bear no weight in our lives if we play the “culture card.” This is the idea that certain things that were restrictive in the Scriptures are no longer restrictive in our culture because those commands applied to a different culture and historical context. For example, subscribing to a position that allows women to preach on the Lord’s Day Sunday can be viewed by well-meaning Christians as a slippery slope to non-biblical ideals and practices. We believe the “culture card” cannot be applied here as the sole basis for our conclusion based on the aforementioned exegesis and the fact that we still affirm that there is a prescriptive nature and command from 1 Timothy 2:12. We believe Paul is clearly prohibiting “something”. As mentioned earlier, we believe that “something” is the office of Eldership and the unique responsibility Elders bear in overseeing and in leading the church with authoritative teaching. When we examine the Old and New Testament examples of women using their voices to proclaim the gospel, prophesy, and teach, we conclude there is provision for women to use their voices in that capacity because we have scriptural examples of such activity. However, as Blomberg states, there is no

New Testament example of women functioning as Elders, and for that reason, along with our exegesis of 1 Timothy, we believe there is a restriction for women to use their voice within the office of Elder.

Another question arises: what constitutes authoritative teaching? While this has been heavily debated, the answer to this question cannot be summed up as a black-and-white list of preaching subjects that are off-limits for women and non-eldering men to speak on. As we mentioned earlier, authoritative teaching is in and of itself a role and a function. For this reason, we believe authoritative teaching is teaching (function) that is done while holding the office of an elder (role). The local church elders are called to oversee, govern, and shepherd the local church under Chief Elder Jesus. This is their role. One of the unique functions Elders employ is setting the course for defining and declaring sound doctrine. In other words, Elders set the course for what the church believes doctrinally and how that doctrine is practiced, pursued, and distilled in the life of the local church. With this task comes also the responsibility to protect sound doctrine, protect the church from false teachers, and enact church discipline when false teachers try to corrupt the church. This is not to say that women and non-eldering men are not capable of defining and declaring doctrine. We are simply stating that the function of Elders as revealed in the New Testament is to set pace and course for what the church believes doctrinally and how those beliefs are practiced. We believe it's the responsibility of the Elders, who are appointed to oversee, govern, and shepherd, to define, declare, and clarify what the church believes (this position paper is an example of such a task.) As we have said earlier, we believe that qualified women are called and empowered to practice the *function* of preaching and teaching, with the exception of using their voice in the *role* of the Elder. The key reminder here is that Paul is instructing this *role* and *function* as an Elder in the context of overseeing, governing, and shepherding a local congregation.

In conclusion, we recognize that these sections can be confusing and challenging. While we hope we have communicated our positions and interpretative conclusions sufficiently, we understand the complexity of these issues rarely leaves someone completely satisfied. Even after what feels like countless hours of study, there can be elements of dissatisfaction in our own hearts. The study of this subject is complex and challenging, sometimes leaving more questions than there are answers. Judith Gundry Volf captures the complexity well:

“In sum, Paul seems to affirm both equality of status and roles of women and men in Christ and women’s subordinate or secondary place. He appears to think that sometimes the difference between male and female is to be expressed in patriarchal conventions and that sometimes these conventions should be transcended or laid aside.”³³

Further speaking into the complexity of this issue, we echo the words of Professor Michael Bird who says:

“I do not know what the middle ground is called, who holds it, or where it even is, but I have reached the point where I do not want to be pigeon-holed into either camp. I do not profess to have complete clarity on every exegetical issue, but personally I would rather listen to a sermon by a gifted woman than a sermon by an ungifted man. I have reservations about women occupying the senior roles of bishop or senior pastor since male headship still seems normative to me and more missionary contexts seem conducive to limiting women’s roles in some instances. For ecumenical reasons too, I also have reservations about female ordination to the highest offices since this creates barriers

with other ecclesial communities, but I recognize the authority of Scripture over any council, confession, or magisterium. As a husband and a father I do my best to lead and nurture my family, and as a Christian professor I do my utmost to empower and equip my female students to serve our common Lord in whatever way they feel led to do so and wish them every blessing and encouragement that I can offer them.”³⁴

Like Professor Bird, we want to empower women in our church to serve our Lord in any way we can and in any way available to us in scripture. We believe this seems to be a very broad invitation, including the space to preach. It is our hope that, through this, we would honor the Lord and see men and women from across our community and city drawn to Jesus. It’s something we believe will help us fulfill our mission of seeing our city and region transformed by the Gospel of Jesus.

Likewise, we will not sever formal or informal connections and relationships with churches that hold positions other than ours. We understand the complexity of this study leads to various positions, and we respect that. Our desire is not to build relationships on common secondary or tertiary ground but on the common ground of Jesus.

In light of the overall context of 1 Timothy and our study of the Old Testament and New Testament, we believe there is a provision for qualified women to use their voices, specifically from the pulpit on Sunday morning, within the body of Christ to edify and build the local church as overseen by the Elders. The only restriction from scripture we see is in prohibiting women from occupying the *role* and *function* of Elder/Overseer. Let us now discuss how we plan to practice this position at The Springs Church.

Preaching and Practice

Our heart in releasing this paper is to provide clarity on a complex biblical topic as part of an ongoing effort to make disciples, equip the saints, and release both men and women across The Springs Church into the fullness of their uniqueness, gifting, and calling.

Both men and women have a unique part to play in building the church. The church is a family, and we believe God has ordained the family unit to serve as a model for the entire church. In the family, the presence of the father's voice and mother's voice is necessary for a healthy family unit, as described in Ephesians 5. In Ephesians 5, the call for women is to "submit to your own husbands," while the command to husbands is to "love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." The call to wives is healthy and mutual submission. The call to husbands is a sacrificial service that models Christ's sacrificial death. I believe that in this portrait of marriage, we can also see a picture of healthy church leadership. The church is the family of God where the Elders of the church are sacrificially leading, elevating, serving, empowering, and loving every member of the body into all that God has called them to be. In our pursuit of this vision, this means we also seek to empower, elevate, and equip women to proclaim and embody the Gospel. Proverbs 1:8 says, "Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching." The Elder Team and I believe that a healthy family needs both the instructions and teaching of men and women. The voices of qualified non-eldering men and qualified women will provide health to the body of Christ as we receive a steady stream of nourishment from God's word through different family members who contribute uniquely to the body of Christ through their Spirit-empowered gifts.

Another unique way this will provide health to the church body is by forming a preaching team that will help me (Pastor Alberto) share the burden of week-to-week preaching. I can honestly say that preaching is incredibly life-giving, and I'm so thankful for each Sunday the Lord has allowed me to open His word and proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. However, week-to-week preaching can be time-consuming and can have a unique toll on the body. Sharing the burden of preaching will free me up to further focus on our disciple-making efforts, provide more time to discern God's will for The Springs, and allow me more time to discern and pursue God's will for equipping the saints. Most importantly, sharing the burden of preaching with a preaching team will allow me to experience more opportunities for rest with my first ministry, my family. As the Lead Pastor, I can't stress enough how much of a joy it is to preach, and it will continue to be my responsibility to preach the majority of Sundays each year. With that said, our goal is to establish and equip a preaching team that will consist of qualified men and women and release them to preach on Sunday mornings in a manner that is covered and overseen by our team of Elders. My prayer coming out of this and moving forward is that God would be glorified, the kingdom would be advanced, and the local church would be built up as we open the pulpit to hear the voices of qualified men and women proclaim from the scriptures the good news of the Kingdom of God.

Appendix

Additional Doctrinal Clarity

We recognize that though this position has been clarified, it still may be unsettling or introduce fear and anxiety because of its unfamiliarity in light of differing cultural and religious backgrounds. As a result, sadly, yet understandably, there is a temptation to believe that allowing women to preach is a slippery slope that leads to progressive and unorthodox Christian beliefs and practices, especially around gender and sexual ethics. To help alleviate this idea and preserve unity in our church body, here are brief doctrinal statements we have always held to and will continue to guard and uphold according to the truth and authority of the Bible:

1. We believe there is one God, and beside Him, there is no other. In unity and equality, God eternally exists in three Persons: The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit.
2. We believe that the Holy Bible is God's inspired and written word. We believe the holy Scriptures are infallible, sufficient, and without error as originally given. We believe the Scriptures are the ultimate and final authority to guide all matters of life and doctrine.
3. We believe in the historical Christian view of marriage and sexual expression; namely, that marriage is a lifelong one-flesh covenant union between two sexually different persons (male and female) from different families and that all sexual relationships and expressions outside of marriage are sin.
4. We believe gender is assigned by God at conception, is realized at birth, and is a critical aspect of God's design for humanity, that we might bear His image and fulfill His purposes.

Overview of Modern Positions

An overview of modern positions may be best understood along a spectrum. While there are nuanced positions that often find themselves between the various points on this spectrum, four major points are often placed on the spectrum as reference points. The descriptions below are not detailed, thorough descriptions regarding these larger interpretive structures. Instead, below is an attempt to summarize these positions on the spectrum. These are not meant to show you every detail of the position but an attempt to use broad language to build an idea and see where our position fits within the spectrum. As you will see, no position on this spectrum is completely false. Each bears some element of truth and elements of concern. It would not be surprising for each of these to inspire some measure of appreciation in you in different ways. Let's examine each point ³⁴:

1. **Christian Feminism** often sees women as an oppressed minority in culture and in scripture. Consequently, there is often an attempt to preach against the grain of scripture. This may mean maligning scripture out of its original context and intention or even using it as an example of patriarchy that is meant to be overthrown. Concerns with this position are rooted in its approach to scripture. The primary hermeneutic of this philosophy can often be *feminist liberation* rather than *authorial intent*.
2. **Evangelical Egalitarianism** is the position of complete uniformity under submission to scripture. This view believes all positions and giftings described in scripture are available to all Christians, regardless of sex or gender. There is a belief that Scripture maintains a vision of complete equality and dignity for all people, culminating in the New Testament church. Concerns with this position are rooted not in its approach to what biblically unites men and women (dignity and value), but in its neglect of what biblically distinguishes men and women (roles and uniqueness).
3. **Moderate Complimentarianism** is the belief that, while women and men share in the dignity and value of God's image, women are prohibited from the offices of bishop and overseer because of God's complimentary design of men and women

in the image of God. These details are beyond the scope of this paper. In this view, women are, however, often allowed to teach men in specific settings and outside of the church altogether. Concerns with this view are rooted in philosophical inconsistencies that come from misinterpretation of “*prohibitive*” texts.

4. **Hierarchical Complementarianism** is the view that women are prohibited from teaching men in any capacity within the church. While women are prohibited from teaching men, their leadership roles and gifts are often promoted in the areas of women’s ministry and children’s ministry. Concerns with this view are rooted in what we believe are misinterpretations of “*prohibitive*” texts. The results limit the church’s ability to bless and build itself up and isolate women from leading and serving the church in ways each woman is gifted to.

Our Position within the Spectrum

As you may have noticed, concerns arrive at each point on this spectrum. While we acknowledge the varying degrees of truth found in each position, we also acknowledge the challenges we feel on a cultural level, but more importantly on a Biblical level, with each point on this spectrum. As you have read by now in this paper, our position finds itself somewhere between evangelical egalitarianism and moderate complementarianism, with a closer leaning to moderate complementarianism on the spectrum. Other camps in the Christian faith may call this position “soft complementarianism.” While others may call it “neither egalitarian nor complementarian”. It’s important to note that no category or title can perfectly sum up this position, which is why we do not introduce this paper with a title for this position. However, we believe it’s helpful to be aware of the varying positions that exist and where ours lies in regard to them. Hopefully, you can see how this paper is not meant to disprove any other positions nor prove our own but rather to invite those who call The Springs their home to understand the Biblical foundation and interpretations that have led us to our view and practice.

Endnotes

Introduction

¹ Our study of scripture leads us to believe that the position of Elder is reserved for qualified men as outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 2.

² God's Good Design Regarding Women in the Church, page 1. A position paper by Pastor Chris Millar.

Examples in Scripture

³ Genesis 2:18

⁴ K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, vol. 1A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 214.

⁵ God's Good Design Regarding Women in the Church, page 7. A position paper by Pastor Chris Millar.

⁶ Bauckham, Richard. *Gospel women : studies of the named women in the gospels*. 58 : Eerdmans, 2002.

⁷ New American Standard Bible, 1995 Edition: Paragraph Version (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Lk 1:42–45.

⁸ New American Standard Bible, 1995 Edition: Paragraph Version (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Lk 1:46–56.

⁹ For further research, consult Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament. David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Luke,” in Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 261.

¹⁰ New American Standard Bible, 1995 Edition: Paragraph Version (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Lk 2:36–38.

¹¹ Bauckham, Richard. Gospel women : studies of the named women in the gospels.: Eerdmans, 2002.

¹² John 4:39

¹³ Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 313.

¹⁴ <https://www.jesusfilm.org/blog/what-is-the-great-commission/#:~:text=As%20far%20as%20we%20can,Hudson%20Taylor%20that%20popularized%20it>.

¹⁵ Christian Standard Bible (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Ro 16:1–2.

¹⁶ “The verb *συνίστημι* was used in 3:5* and 5:8* with the connotation of to prove or demonstrate, but here it bears the sense of “commend” or “introduce.”⁶ An example of this verb in introducing someone in a social situation is Socrates’ comment in *Xenophon Mem.* 1.6.14: “And if I have any good thing, I teach (them) and recommend (them) to others (*διδάσκω καὶ ἄλλοις συνίστημι*) from whom I consider that they might derive some benefit toward virtue.” In a period shortly after Paul’s, Chariton writes, “I introduce to you (*συνίστημί σοι*) my child

whom you also gladly know.” “I recommend” and its cognates are typically associated with letters of recommendation, but in view of the tendency toward periphrastic use of this term in the Roman period,⁸ the forthrightness of Paul’s commendation is striking. It has frequently been asserted that this formula of recommendation implies that Phoebe was in fact the bearer of the letter to the Romans.¹⁰ The likelihood of this assertion as well as the confidential role played by letter bearers are sustained and illustrated by Pseudo-Demetrius’s example of a typical letter of recommendation” Robert Jewett and Roy David Kotansky, Romans: A Commentary, ed. Eldon Jay Epp, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 942.

¹⁷ Robert Jewett and Roy David Kotansky, Romans: A Commentary, ed. Eldon Jay Epp, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 943.

¹⁸ Bird, Michael F. Bourgeois babes, bossy wives, and bobby haircuts : a case for gender equality in ministry. Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 2012

¹⁹ *““Servant” (KJV, NASB, NIV) is the Greek diakonos, which is sometimes translated “deacon” (e.g., NRSV), probably the owner of a home in which churches met. The term for “deacon” probably corresponds to the chazan of the synagogue, who was in charge of the building (see comment on 1 Tim 3:8 for the meaning of “deacon”). If deacons filled this office or the office of charity overseers, they held an office that was respected in Jewish synagogues (and not normally assigned to women). But the New Testament usually applies the term diakonos to “ministers” of God’s word, like Paul and his colleagues; Paul may have this meaning in view here (although ancient Judaism did not allow women to teach the law publicly to men).”* Craig S. Keener, The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Ro 16:1.

²⁰ “Recent studies by Theissen, Holmberg,⁵³ Funk, Murphy-O’Connor,⁵⁵ Meeks, Kearsley,⁵⁷ Trebilco, and Garrison⁵⁹ of the leading role played by upper-class benefactors, both male and female, in early Christian communities provide the social background of the description of Phoebe’s status. The host or hostess of house churches was usually a person of high social standing and means, with a residence large enough for the church to gather, who presided over the eucharistic celebrations and was responsible for the ordering of the congregation. The fact that Paul mentions Phoebe as a patroness “to many, and also to me” indicates the level of material resources that would support this kind of leadership role. In light of her high social standing, and Paul’s relatively subordinate social position as her client, it is mistaken to render *προστάτις* as “helper” or to infer some kind of subordinate role.”Robert Jewett and Roy David Kotansky, *Romans: A Commentary*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp, *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 947.

Tensions in Scripture

²¹ Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 282.

²² Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 282.

²³ David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 252.

²⁴ Linda L. Belleville, “Women in Ministry: An Egalitarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and James R. Beck, Revised Edition., Zondervan Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan, 2005), 83.

²⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, “Women in Ministry: A Complementarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and James R. Beck, Revised Edition., Zondervan Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan, 2005), 169–170.

²⁶ Craig L. Blomberg, “Women in Ministry: A Complementarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and James R. Beck, Revised Edition., Zondervan Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan, 2005), 169–170.

²⁷ Craig L. Blomberg, “Women in Ministry: A Complementarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and James R. Beck, Revised Edition., Zondervan Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan, 2005), 169–170.

²⁸ Craig L. Blomberg, “Women in Ministry: A Complementarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and James R. Beck, Revised Edition., Zondervan Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan, 2005), 171

²⁹ Craig L. Blomberg, “Women in Ministry: A Complementarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and James R. Beck, Revised Edition., Zondervan Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan, 2005), 172.

³⁰ Craig L. Blomberg, “Women in Ministry: A Complementarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and James R. Beck, Revised Edition., Zondervan Counterpoints Series (Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan, 2005), 168.

³¹ Robert W. Wall and Richard B. Steele, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner, *The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 89.”

³² J. R. Briggs, Bob Hyatt, and Alan Hirsch, *Eldership and the Mission of God: Equipping Teams for Faithful Church Leadership* (Westmont, IL: IVP, 2015).

³³ Judith Gundry-Volf, “Paul on Women and Gender: A Comparison of Early Jewish Views,” in *The Road from Damascus: The Impact of Paul’s Conversion on his Life, Thought, and Ministry* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 186.

³⁴ Bird, Michael F. *Bourgeois babes, bossy wives, and bobby haircuts : a case for gender equality in ministry*. Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 2012. 30.

Appendix

³⁴ Definitions adopted from “Who’s Who in the Zoo?” Excerpt From *Bourgeois Babes, Bossy Wives, and Bobby Haircuts* Michael F. Bird

³⁵ Christian Standard Bible (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Ro 12:3–8.

³⁶ Christian Standard Bible (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Lk 3:16–17.

³⁷ Christian Standard Bible (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Lk 3:18.

³⁸ Christian Standard Bible (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2020), Ac 2:40.

³⁹ C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, *International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), 156.