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Is Biblical Womanhood Obsolete?

Exploring New Ways to Teach Biblical Womanhood

By
Eowyn Stoddard

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry.

Saint Louis, Missouri

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how women's ministry leaders in the church (WML) are adapting their teaching on biblical womanhood to disciple the next generation of women effectively.

WML face significant challenges in discipling the next generation of women, including evolving views on sex, gender roles, and biblical womanhood.

This study utilizes a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with eleven WML from various Reformed denominations with a minimum of five years of experience. The interviews focus on gaining data with four research questions:

1. What models do WML in the church currently use to teach women about biblical womanhood?
2. What challenges do WML encounter when they teach biblical womanhood to younger women?
3. What changes to their teaching on biblical womanhood have WML already undertaken to disciple the next generation of women?
4. What resources for teaching biblical womanhood do WML in the church say they will need to disciple women in the future?

The literature review presents three areas key to understanding biblical womanhood: a concise biblical theology of womanhood, Biblical Womanhood™ resources, and critiques of these resources.

This study concludes that the teaching of biblical womanhood should include elements of creation design, biblical theology, gender eschatology, and a theology of the female body. Special attention should be given to the topics of identity, feminism, and

transgenderism. Furthermore, WML expressed the necessity of providing an integrated, whole-person model of discipleship to younger women. Related to these three components, this study finds that WML face three major challenges when they teach biblical womanhood: difficulties in connecting with younger women, negative connotations of biblical womanhood, and experiential objections to it. To address these challenges, this study identifies the kind of materials and models needed for the successful discipleship of the next generation of women.

To Alethea and Emma: May you find limitless grace and abounding joy as you image the
One who made you a woman.

Καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ νύμφη λέγουσιν Ἔρχου

—Revelation 22:17

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Abbreviations

CBE	Christians for Biblical Equality
CBMW	Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood
ETS	Evangelical Theological Society
OPC	Orthodox Presbyterian Church
PCA	Presbyterian Church in America
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
WML	Women's Ministry Leaders

Chapter 1

Introduction

Biblical womanhood is in a crisis.¹ Critics within complementarian circles are asking whether the teachings of the church surrounding biblical womanhood are biblical. Though this crisis matters little to those who have abandoned any hope of rescuing the Bible from its patriarchal underpinnings, it matters greatly to those who maintain that God's inerrant word must have something good to say about sex and gender and, therefore, must be good for women. They want to know how womanhood and manhood can be lived out faithfully, according to the principles laid out in Scripture.

In her *New Yorker* article, "The Unmaking of Biblical Womanhood," Eliza Griswold writes, "The struggle over complementarianism is one of the primary fissures emerging among evangelical Christians. Some prominent leaders are beginning to break from the teachings."² While discussing Beth Allison Barr's book *The Making of Biblical Womanhood* with the provocative subtitle *How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth*, Griswold observes:

Less theologically conservative Christians argue that Barr's attempt at rereading Scripture is futile—the Bible is steeped in patriarchal thinking, and Christians should take spiritual lessons from it without reading it literally. More conservative evangelicals argue that Barr's work involves willful misreadings of both Scripture and the concept of Biblical womanhood.³

¹ See definition of terms at the end of this chapter.

² Eliza Griswold, "The Unmaking of Biblical Womanhood: How a Nascent Movement Against Complementarianism Is Confronting Christian Patriarchy from Within," *The New Yorker*, July 25, 2021.

³ Griswold.

Barr insists that the teaching of biblical womanhood is nothing more than a construct to keep women out of leadership positions and the primary cause for their oppression.

“Biblical womanhood is Christian patriarchy,”⁴ she claims. “Complementarianism is patriarchy, and patriarchy is about power. Neither have ever been about Jesus ... Go, be free!”⁵ Therefore, women should free themselves of the harmful teachings of biblical womanhood.

Others before her had taken softer approaches to critiquing the complementarian movement from within. Aimee Byrd, for example, former OPC member, wrote *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*,⁶ playing off the title of the long-standing classic complementarian work by theologians John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.⁷ In it, she pleads for a recovery of a holistic discipleship for women instead of rigid categories that sideline them. Just a year prior, Rachel Green Miller, also in the OPC, argued that the complementarian movement has placed the notions of authority and submission as the core of male-female relationships.⁸ With biblical womanhood incurring hefty critiques and challenges, the broad question asked in this study is “Is biblical womanhood obsolete?”

⁴ Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2021), 216.

⁵ Barr, 218.

⁶ Aimee Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Her Purpose*, ill ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020).

⁷ Wayne Grudem and John Piper, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991).

⁸ Rachel Green Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission: Women and Men in Marriage, Church, and Society* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R, 2019).

The teaching of biblical womanhood finds itself caught in a perfect storm. The truths that once provided the moorings for sex and gender, and, hence, for womanhood, have been untethered from the foundation of God's word and therefore are tossing about dangerously, threatening to destroy the very foundations of human society and personhood. Three areas stand out as the most influential categories causing the crisis: the questioning of moral absolutes, cultural developments antithetical to biblical standards, and changing existential realities of women. These areas overlap neatly with how the theologian John Frame constructed his paradigm for understanding truth:

I distinguish three perspectives of knowledge. In the "normative perspective," we ask the question, "what do God's norms direct us to believe?" In the "situational perspective," we ask, "what are the facts?" In the "existential perspective," we ask, "what belief is most satisfying to a believing heart?" Given the above view of knowledge, the answers to these three questions coincide. But it is sometimes useful to distinguish these questions so as to give us multiple angles of inquiry.⁹

All truth is known first as God's truth elucidated in his word, (the normative perspective), applied to the context of human relationships, structures, and culture (the situational perspective) and experienced individually in the lives of women (the existential perspective). He calls it "tri-perspectival." Ideally, any truth is understood more fully when all three of these perspectives are taken together, since they each also have a perspective on each other. Any teaching on biblical womanhood, therefore, if it is to be truthful and helpful to women, should reflect a balance of these three perspectives. This tri-perspectival approach will help understand the crisis of biblical womanhood more fully.

⁹ John M. Frame, "What Is Tri-Perspectivalism?" Frame-Poythress.org, November 28, 2011, <https://frame-poythress.org/what-is-triperspectivalism/>.

The Normative Perspective

Unmooring Inerrancy

Biblical womanhood, or anything that claims to be biblical, becomes meaningless when it is untethered from the Bible and its authority to speak into all matters of faith and practice, including how to live out manhood and womanhood. Barr attributes the subjugation of women to the doctrine of inerrancy, among other factors:

And just like that, evangelicals baptized patriarchy. Women could not preach and had to submit—not because their bodies were too flawed or their minds too weak, but because God had decreed it through Paul’s inerrant writings. Those who doubt these biblical truths doubt the truth of the Bible itself. Inerrancy introduced the ultimate justification for patriarchy—abandoning a plain and literal interpretation of Pauline texts about women would hurl Christians off the cliff of biblical orthodoxy ... Inerrancy wasn’t important by itself in the late twentieth century; it became important because it provided a way to push women out of the pulpit. It worked extremely well.”¹⁰

Once the Bible scholar undermines biblical authority by dismissing the doctrine of inerrancy as the means to oppress women, defining biblical womanhood becomes a matter of personal preference, cultural relevance, or reactionary agendas.

Extra-Biblical Ballast

Critics have questioned the teachings of biblical womanhood when they have imposed burdensome, extra-biblical expectations on women, taught as part of what it means to be a godly woman. These expectations might include prescriptions about hair and skirt length, types of acceptable schooling for children, career, standards of femininity, hobbies, and interests. Elyse Fitzpatrick, author, and counselor, explains how women have felt harmed by some of the extra-biblical teachings of biblical womanhood:

¹⁰ Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood*, 190.

I grew to understand how damaging a lot of what had been written about women, their roles, and the implications of those teachings have been to so many. I ran a social media experiment ... over 20,000 women read the post within twenty-four hours. I heard the same stories repeatedly about how they had felt ignored, pressured, disrespected, judged, and objectified by their church's leaders and eventually by their husbands who had bought into the teaching. There wasn't a place in any woman's life where she was free from the burdens placed on her simply because she is a woman. These Christian-woman "shoulds" were a proof of her godliness and shouted at her from every corner—her home, her church, the Christian culture, and even from her own mind ... The problem with this teaching on gender roles: It is devoid of the good news. Of course, women were struggling! Burdens too heavy to bear were being placed on their backs.¹¹

Extra-biblical rules and regulations added to God's revealed word fundamentally undermine what the Bible teaches about womanhood. Disillusioned women, instead of freeing themselves and their churches of these unbiblical burdens have decided to "jump ship." When it comes to upholding inerrancy, there are dangers lurking at both extremes: not taking God's word seriously enough on the one hand and adding rigid interpretations to it on the other hand. Not only is how one reads the Bible and applies its truths important to the formation of the teachings on biblical womanhood, but the surrounding culture influences women as well.

The Situational Perspective

The Feminist Experiment

Though feminism fostered some necessary societal change regarding the treatment of women, it also promoted the shift in gender norms that has led to the current crisis of biblical womanhood. Feminism promoted a theology based on focus group hermeneutics in which the reader is encouraged to understand the Bible through the lens

¹¹ Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher, *Jesus & Gender: Living as Sisters & Brothers in Christ* (Bellingham, WA: Kirkdale Press, 2022), 3.

of a feminist agenda, such as depatriarchalizing the biblical text. Tina Beattie in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* defines the feminist interaction with the biblical text:

To consciously read the Bible as a woman and to resist dominant, androcentric readings is to discover previously unrecognized challenges and meanings. This also involves the acknowledgment that the authors of scripture were male and that the Bible, like every other text, is situated within particular cultural and historical contexts that reflect the perspectives of its authors. The quest for revelation thus becomes a struggle with the text, and a resistance to authoritative readings that justify the subordination or oppression of women.¹²

The feminist approach places the reader and her cultural understanding over the text, and assumes a male-dominated reading, instead of accepting that God's inspired word has authority over the reader, even to define which cultural norms and personal preferences are aligned with its truth. Because the Bible was written in a pre-feministic era, hermeneutical questions are bound to arise. In some cases, the Bible might confirm the reader's views, but in other cases the Bible will correct them. In the case of biblical womanhood, adopting a feminist hermeneutic may lead the interpreter to either dismiss the Bible as overly patriarchal if taken at face value, or to reinterpret it to fit today's feministic assumptions by relativizing its claims.

Most young women today have grown up in a world shaped by feminism and its thought categories:

Sixty-one percent of Gen Z women identify as feminist, far greater than women from previous generations. Younger women are more concerned about the unequal treatment of women in American society and are more suspicious of institutions that uphold traditional social arrangements. In a poll we conducted, nearly two-thirds of (65 percent) young women said they do not believe that churches treat men and women equally.¹³

¹² Tina Beattie, "Feminist Theology: Christian Feminist Theology," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed., vol. 5 (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 3036, Covenant Seminary eBook collection (EBSCOhost).

¹³ Daniel Cox and Kelsey Eyre Hammond, "Young Women Are Leaving Church in Unprecedented Numbers," *The Survey Center on American Life* (blog), April 10, 2024,

This means young women will inevitably be reading the Bible through a feminist lens. Churches will have to face the fact that feminism is here to stay in the broader culture, and they are challenged to address it meaningfully if they intend to train and retain young women. Simultaneously, feminism is now facing the rising tide of the cultural moment it helped create and making young women's relationship to it complicated.

The Deconstruction of Binaries

Defining womanhood, let alone biblical womanhood, has become problematic due to the deconstruction of binary sex in the culture at large. Womanhood is no longer a meaningful category when sex and gender are placed on a scale of never-ending possibilities. Not only are gender stereotypes dismantled, but the foundational concepts of biological sex and cultural gender expressions are redefined as fluid. Scientific research on disorders of sex development (DSD) is being used to prove that sex is not binary. Claire Ainsworth claims society is resistant to this idea. "Yet if biologists continue to show that sex is a spectrum, then society and state will have to grapple with the consequences ... Many transgender and intersex activists dream of a world where a person's sex or gender is irrelevant."¹⁴ This notion of gender fluidity is influencing the identity of young people without a DSD and has paved the way for the idea that a person could transition from one sex to the other by realigning outward biology to match internal feelings. Carl Trueman writes about this phenomenon:

<https://www.americansurveycenter.org/newsletter/young-women-are-leaving-church-in-unprecedented-numbers/>.

¹⁴ Claire Ainsworth, "Sex Redefined," *Nature* 518, no. 7539 (February 1, 2015): 288–91, <https://doi.org/10.1038/518288a>.

The radical separation of gender from biological sex that transgender ideology assumes is perhaps the most dramatic example to date of the authorizing of the psychological over the physical. Gender theory, upon which transgender ideology depends, sees historic differences of sex as functions of the socially conditioned mapping of a set of cultural norms onto biological differences. The concepts of male and female are thus social constructs. As such, they are vulnerable to a further critical step: the demolition of the male/female binary in its entirety. This is what queer theory has done, advocating a fluid notion of gender with no stable core and thus a potentially infinite number of “genders.”¹⁵

How this reality will impact young women is yet to be seen, but clearly, WML will be challenged to know how to teach biblical womanhood in a culture that questions the given-ness of sex and gender.

Non-Binary Disorientation

Redefining gender as a mere social construct has impacted young women vulnerable to late onset gender dysphoria. Abigail Shrier notices this trend and writes:

Historically, it afflicted a tiny sliver of the population (roughly .01 percent) and almost exclusively boys. Before 2012, in fact, there was no scientific literature on girls ages eleven to twenty-one ever having developed gender dysphoria at all. In the last decade, as Dr. Littman began to discover, adolescent gender dysphoria has surged across the West. In the United States, the prevalence has increased by over 1,000 percent. Two percent of high school students now identify as “transgender,” according to a 2017 survey of teens issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In Britain, the increase is 4,000 percent, 25 and three-quarters of those referred for gender treatment are girls.¹⁶

On the one hand, the assumptions of the trans-sexual worldview challenge the teaching of biblical womanhood. On the other hand, it will become imperative that biblical teaching address what womanhood is and represents in the world. The task of

¹⁵ Carl R. Trueman, “How Expressive Individualism Threatens Civil Society,” The Heritage Foundation, May 27, 2021, <https://www.heritage.org/civil-society/report/how-expressive-individualism-threatens-civil-society>.

¹⁶ Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2020), 32, Kindle.

WML is discipling the next generation of young women in the context of a healthy church community that will help them understand their identity and their calling in the world. Unfortunately, an increasing number of people, young women in particular, are choosing to leave the church, in part because of the Christian sexual ethic. A 2023 survey by the Survey Center on American Life revealed that Generation Z women are leaving the church at a higher rate than their male counterparts and two-thirds of them are saying churches do not treat men and women equally.¹⁷ The researchers found that:

It's not only about gender roles. There is a cultural misalignment between more traditional churches and places of worship and young women who have grown increasingly liberal. Since 2015, the number of young women who identify as liberal has rapidly increased ... This has also coincided with the rise in LGBTQ identity among young women—nearly three in ten women under the age of 30 now identify as something other than straight. It may explain why more Americans cite this as a reason for leaving.¹⁸

Women and Church Culture

Historically, the church has understood itself to be the place where God's perspective on reality is taught and lived out in community. Unfortunately, some churches are losing their ability to shape and influence young people. Instances of misogyny, at 18 percent, is the fifth most common reason given for leaving the church, according to Jim Davis and Michael Graham in *The Great Dechurching*.¹⁹

Furthermore, women are struggling to connect with church life. Historically, more women than men attended church regularly, but this trend is changing:

¹⁷ Cox and Eyre Hammond, "Young Women Are Leaving Church in Unprecedented Numbers."

¹⁸ Cox and Eyre Hammond.

¹⁹ Jim Davis et al., *The Great Dechurching: Who's Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2023), 166.

... what may come as a surprise is the increasing number of women who are part of this cultural shift away from churchgoing (and from the Christian faith). Historically, men have been less likely to regularly attend church than women. Just over a decade ago, the gender gap was three men for every two unchurched women... fully 60% of unchurched people were men. Today, only 54% of the unchurched are men. In other words, the gender gap has narrowed from 20 points to just 8 points in the last ten years.²⁰

An even more recent study revealed that “nearly four in ten (39 percent) Z women identifying as religiously unaffiliated compared to 34 percent of Gen Z men.”²¹

Older Americans who left their childhood religion included a greater share of men than women. In the Baby Boom generation, 57 percent of people who disaffiliated were men, while only 43 percent were women. Gen Z adults have seen this pattern flip. Fifty-four percent of Gen Z adults who left their formative religion are women; 46 percent are men.²²

Five factors led to women distancing themselves from church: competing priorities, busyness, lack of emotional engagement and support, changing family structures, and changes in belief.²³ In a 2012 Barna study on women in the church, the authors conclude that women have two types of experiences:

Most express a great deal of satisfaction with the church they attend when it comes to leadership opportunities. Three quarters say they are making the most of their gifts and potential (73%) and a similar proportion feel they are doing meaningful ministry (72%). More than half say they have substantial influence in their church (59%) and a slight majority expect their influence to increase (55%).²⁴

This sounds encouraging, but there was another aspect to the study:

²⁰ Barna Group, “Five Factors Changing Women’s Relationship with Churches,” Barna, June 25, 2015, <https://www.barna.com/research/five-factors-changing-womens-relationship-with-churches/>.

²¹ Cox and Eyre Hammond, “Young Women Are Leaving Church in Unprecedented Numbers.”

²² Cox and Eyre Hammond.

²³ Barna Group, “Five Factors Changing Women’s Relationship with Churches.”

²⁴ Barna Group, “Christian Women Today, Part 1 of 4: What Women Think of Faith, Leadership and Their Role in the Church,” Barna, August 13, 2012, <https://www.barna.com/research/christian-women-today-part-1-of-4-what-women-think-of-faith-leadership-and-their-role-in-the-church/>.

Yet, the study also shows another experience for many other women. These women are frustrated by their lack of opportunities at church and feel misunderstood and undervalued by their church leaders. About three out of 10 churchgoing women (31%) say they are resigned to low expectations when it comes to church. One fifth feel under-utilized (20%). One sixth say their opportunities at church are limited by their gender (16%). Roughly one out of every eight women feel under-appreciated by their church (13%) and one out of nine believe they are taken for granted (11%). Although these represent small percentages, given that about 70 million Americans qualify as church adult women, this amounts to millions of women in the U.S. today who feel discouraged by their experiences in churches.²⁵

If these numbers were alarming then, the trends indicate a further distancing of younger women from church today. Yet, sociological studies provide only a snapshot of the facts. What are the underlying factors behind women's growing dissatisfaction and general frustration with the church? Researchers Cox and Eyre Hammond explain,

For most young women who leave it's not about any one issue. Most Americans who leave their formative faith say there was no single reason or catalyzing event that pushed them out. Rather it was a steady accumulation of negative experiences and dissonant teachings that made it difficult or impossible to stay.²⁶

Could the crisis surrounding biblical womanhood be one of these "dissonant teachings" contributing to these developments? More specific questions would need to be asked to find out whether it is the theological convictions and teaching of the churches or their practices that are alienating women. But the fact remains that it is possible for church culture to frustrate women who long to be active members whose gifts matter. A third area of crisis for biblical womanhood is the existential perspective: how women are perceiving themselves and how they are living out their womanhood.

²⁵ Barna Group, "Five Factors Changing Women's Relationship with Churches."

²⁶ Cox and Eyre Hammond, "Young Women Are Leaving Church in Unprecedented Numbers."

The Existential Perspective

A new default mode for understanding how personhood and gender is perceived and lived out has emerged in expressive individualism, a term coined by Robert Bella, professor of sociology at the University of Berkeley, who claimed that “each person has a unique core of feeling and intuition that should unfold or be expressed if individuality is to be realized.”²⁷ Expressive individualism is the elevation of the individual’s self-perceived identity and definition over—and often against—the creator’s voice, resulting in a perfectly subjective and unquestionable form of personal identity.

But inner voices can shipwreck personhood as defined by God in the Bible. God created human beings as male and female, to reflect himself in the world. Expressive individualism causes women to drift further and further away from God’s intent. David Kinnaman, the president of Barna group, asserts:

In a recent Barna Group study on identity, Millennials were significantly less likely than other generations to claim any of the surveyed factors (family, faith, country, city, state, ethnicity, career) as central to their identity. This generational sense of disenfranchisement has not helped draw young adults in general to a church—let alone young women, among whom such societal untetheredness is unprecedented.²⁸

A 2015 Barna study on identity found that:

While religious faith squeaks into the top three, there is a sharp drop from the first two factors in the number of Americans who say their faith is a major part of their identity. A majority of Americans agree their family and their country are central aspects of who they are, fewer than two out of five adults say their religious faith makes up a lot of their personal identity (38%). About the same proportion of adults give little or no credence to the idea that faith is part of their identity: 18

²⁷ Robert N. Bellah, *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 333–34.

²⁸ David Kinnaman, “3 Reasons Why Women Are Leaving Church,” *Preach It Teach It* (blog), January 23, 2016, <https://preachitteachit.org/articles/3-reasons-why-women-are-leaving-church/>.

percent say faith doesn't make up much of their identity and one in five say it doesn't affect their identity at all.²⁹

If this was true in 2015, how much more will newer versions of identity formation and women's individual self-perceptions challenge WML as they attempt to adapt their teaching to address the changing tides of the culture?

Another aspect of the existential perspective on the crisis of biblical womanhood is the perceived negative treatment of women in the church as the result of the teachings of biblical womanhood. Barr asserts, "We can no longer deny a link between complementarianism and abuse."³⁰ If there is a direct correlation between biblical womanhood and complementarianism which is, according to her, inherently abusive, then biblical womanhood is indeed a most abject teaching. If, however, if what the Bible teaches about women is good for women, any correlation with abuse is an unintended consequence. The reality of the abuse of women in churches is tragic and most deplorable. Unfortunately, it can be addressed only tangentially in this study, as far as it is a factor feeding into the crisis of biblical womanhood.

These three areas are the current normative, situational, and existential contexts that form the backdrop for the crisis of biblical womanhood. The situation presented in this introduction is indeed new. The teachings on biblical womanhood from the late 1980s and 1990s (called Biblical Womanhood™ from here on out), were formulated in reaction to evangelical feminism. To understand how the current crisis of biblical womanhood emerged, and what directions might be needed to correct course for the future, the literature areas reviewed will encompass three different sections:

²⁹ Barna Group, "What Most Influences the Self-Identity of Americans?," Barna, March 19, 2015, <https://www.barna.com/research/what-most-influences-the-self-identity-of-americans/>.

³⁰ Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood*, 207.

1. A biblical theology of womanhood.
2. A survey of Biblical Womanhood™ teachings that emerged in response to evangelical feminism.
3. Contemporary concerns surrounding complementarian biblical womanhood writings.

Purpose Statement

This study will aim to find out how women's ministry leaders in the church (WML) are navigating cultural challenges as they look to the future. The young women they are tasked to teach and disciple are living in a rapidly changing world quite different from the one in which they were raised. The next generation of women needs to grasp the significance of womanhood from God's unchanging word, understand it within their confusing cultural context, and apply it to their personal life and identity. But how will women's ministry leaders do this? Because these answers are yet unclear, this purpose of this study is to explore how WML are adapting their teaching on biblical womanhood to disciple the next generation of women effectively.

Research Questions

The following open-ended qualitative research questions were asked to foster an atmosphere of creative engagement:

1. What models do WML in the church currently use to teach women about biblical womanhood?
2. What challenges do WML encounter when they teach biblical womanhood to younger women?

3. What changes to their teaching on biblical womanhood have WML already undertaken to disciple the next generation of women?
4. What resources for teaching biblical womanhood do WML in the church say they will need to disciple women in the future?

Significance of the Study

Women's ministry leaders in the church (WML) face a culture questioning the reality of binary gender, making the task of defining womanhood difficult. Furthermore, a range of views on womanhood exists within the church, from egalitarian to patriarchal. Since the concept of biblical womanhood has come under scrutiny, Christian women who wish to live biblically authentic lives face unanswered apologetic, pastoral and practical questions. Therefore, WML must address these current issues and give women biblical truth, situational hope, and personal confidence in their female identity.

Not asking the question about the future teaching of biblical womanhood will come at a cost. If the church does not equip members with teaching and tools to face current concerns, the result will be confusion, compromise, and discouragement. The teaching on biblical womanhood should provide an apologetic for embracing God's normative creation design, his ongoing situational work of redemption, and the existential aspects of the transformation of his image-bearers. Therefore, it is paramount that WML find new ways to teach the next generation of women to live out what it means to be a woman in a world that is confused about gender and rejecting the message of hope found in the Bible's story about womanhood.

Definition of Terms

Biblical theology: A form of theology that focusses on the development of the story of redemption throughout the Bible.

Biblical womanhood: What the Bible teaches about being a woman.

Biblical womanhoodTM: The researcher's definition of the teachings on female piety that emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s, contrasted with Biblical womanhood above.

Binary: Opposing yet complimentary polarity found in natural pairs.

Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE): A national, egalitarian movement that emerged in 1988 in reaction to CBMW to provide education, support, and leadership about biblical equality.

Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW): A national, complementarian organization that emerged in 1987 to counter the teachings of evangelical feminism.

Complementarian: The teaching that man and woman are made in the image of God with ontological equality but functional differences. Often used as the opposite of egalitarian.

Covenant theology: A form of theology that focusses on the covenants God made with his people throughout redemptive history.

Egalitarian: The teaching that man and woman are equal in every way, with no gender-based limitations. Often used as the opposite of complementarian.

Eschatology: The study of the end times.

Eternal Subordination of the Son (ESS): The teaching that maintains that Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, is ontologically eternally submissive to the Father.

Expressive individualism: A view in which human beings are defined by their individual psychological core, and the purpose of life is allowing that core to find social expression in relationships.

Feminism: A way of understanding the world through the lens of the advocacy of women's equal rights.

Gender: Either of the two sexes (male and female) considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones.

Gender roles: Behavioral expressions learned by a person as appropriate to their gender, determined by the prevailing cultural norms.

Hierarchy: Human structures of authority.

Imago Dei: Latin for "image of God." Also shorthand for the doctrine that man and woman are made in the image of God.

Inerrancy: The doctrine which asserts that the Bible does not contain any errors in its original manuscripts.

Man: Adult male human, also used in the Bible to refer to humanity as a species.

Non-binary: The idea that sex and gender are not categorized by polarity but fluidity.

Ontology: The study of what pertains to essence.

Patriarchy: Originally understood as father rule. Commonly understood as male-dominated structures that oppress women.

Sex: Biological traits that define a person as male or female.

Trajectory hermeneutics: A way of interpreting the Bible which assumes the progression of a topic along a trajectory which often results in applications beyond its seed form found in the Bible.

Transgenderism: The belief that it is possible to transition from one sex to the other.

Typology: Biblical theological view that the redemptive historical development of certain events, persons, institutions, or relationships are prefigured in the Old Testament as types and find their fulfillment in (or in relation to) Christ.

Woman: Adult female human.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore how women's ministry leaders in the church (WML) are adapting their teaching on biblical womanhood to disciple the next generation of women effectively. To understand what is meant by biblical womanhood, the literature review began with a concise biblical theology of womanhood based on a classic, pre-feministic hermeneutic. Biblical theology provided the framework to understand the *telos* of the creation of woman as well as the typological development of the theme of womanhood throughout the Scriptures. Then, two particularly relevant areas of literature were reviewed to provide a foundation for subsequent qualitative research.

The second area of literature provided a survey of sample Biblical Womanhood™ writings that emerged as a response to evangelical feminism. This area explored how the emerging Biblical Womanhood™ teachings engaged evangelical feminism.

A third area of literature reviewed the contemporary counter-reaction to the previous area of literature, namely the concerns surrounding complementarian Biblical Womanhood™ teachings. It observed affirmations, limitations, critiques, modifications, and considerations for the future of teaching biblical womanhood amid contemporary developments in gender ideology.

To define the content of a universal biblical womanhood paradigm, it is crucial to ask the question, "What does the Bible have to say about womanhood?" Singling out only the verses referencing women will not suffice to formulate a biblical theology of womanhood. A teaching on biblical womanhood that will be healthy and universally

applicable will be anchored in Scripture, follow the biblical redemptive storyline, and find its fulfilment in how the Bible defines it. Reviewing literature on the theology of womanhood from Reformed, evangelical authors will establish that specific position. However, gaps were filled by interlocutors from other traditions, as far as they were considered biblically sound.

A Biblical Theology of Womanhood

Geerhardus Vos defined biblical theology as “nothing else than the exhibition of the organic progress of supernatural revelation in its historic continuity and multiformity.”³¹ The theme of womanhood viewed through the lens of biblical theology is self-contained yet unfolding organically in the biblical story, starting in seed form and growing to full maturity with the progression of redemptive history.

Hence, in Genesis the reader will find the *telos* of womanhood in seed form, which gives the reader the necessary clues to develop the internal framework the Bible contains. If Vos’ claim is valid, it should not surprise the Bible reader to find New Testament authors looking for these seedling clues in the Old Testament. Indeed, Paul’s explanation of marriage takes this exact approach, as he traces the grand love story between God and his people back to an organic clue planted at the beginning. Quoting Genesis 2:24, he writes, “‘Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”³² Paul is implying that the first man and

³¹ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 7.

³² Ephesians 5:31-32.

woman were physically enacting the story of Christ and his bride, the plotline of which predated their own—Adam as a type of Christ and Eve as a type of the church.³³

God Defines Womanhood

The Ontology of Woman as Image of God

God's intent for the essence of womanhood, namely the definition of her ontology, can be found at the beginning of the book of Genesis. Theologians from all centuries have pondered the notion of man and woman made in the image of God, the nature of that image, and how the male and female image-bearers both resemble and/or differ from the other. Wherein lie man and woman's similarities and differences and what does that say about the *imago Dei*?³⁴

The Woman Images God Directly

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”³⁵

Anatomical differences between the sexes are, to the naked eye, irreducible and a part of the image of God expressed in this verse. Gordon Clark, however, asserts that the image of God in man cannot refer to the body. “God created man after his image and likeness. This image cannot be man's body for two reasons. First, God is spirit or mind, and has no body. Hence a body would not be an image of him. Second, animals have bodies, yet they

³³ Ephesians 5:32; 2 Corinthians 11:2-3.

³⁴ Image of God in Latin.

³⁵ Genesis 1:27.

are not created in God's image."³⁶ He concludes, therefore, that "the image must be reason because God is truth, and fellowship with him—a most important purpose in creation—requires thinking and understanding."³⁷ This view echoes Augustine's understanding that the image cannot be connected to sex differentiation. "Pray, have faithful women then lost their bodily sex? But because they are there renewed after the image of God, where there is no sex; man is there made after the image of God, where there is no sex, that is, in the spirit of his mind."³⁸ Leaving the body out of the image of God begs the question of the necessity and relevance of the twofold sex installation of humankind. Why did God make two sexes to reflect himself fully?

Berkouwer claims that theologians have often sought "analogies between God and man" but that "it often happened that man's body was excluded from the image of God—an exclusion generally supported previously, when theologians sought the content of the image in man's 'higher' qualities, in contrast to the 'lower' bodily qualities, which should not be considered in connection with the image."³⁹ He disliked the idea of "splitting man into various parts" though he concedes a "certain duality" in the creation of man and woman. "Duality within the created reality does not exclude harmony and unity but is exactly oriented towards it."⁴⁰ Mouw, in reviewing Berkouwer's work, is not satisfied with his lack of definition overall. "And one is certainly confronted with many

³⁶ Gordon Haddon Clark, "The Image of God in Man," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 12, no. 4 (1969): 216.

³⁷ Clark, "The Image of God in Man," 218.

³⁸ Augustine, "On the Trinity, XII, 7, Trans. Arthur West Haddan.," trans. Arthur West Haddan, Logos Virtual Library, accessed February 27, 2024, <https://www.logoslibrary.org/augustine/trinity/1207.html>.

³⁹ G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 75.

⁴⁰ Berkouwer, 211.

theological questions and answers in Berkouwer's book. His detailed discussion offers little comfort to anyone who is hoping for a straightforward account of what it means for a human being to be created in God's image."⁴¹ The subject of how man and woman, are, in their different sexed versions of humanity, in the image of God, never comes up.

Because of this omission in most of the literature, some have tried to put the sexed relationship of man and woman at the center of the image itself. Karl Barth maintained that the man-woman entity was itself the image of God, since man and woman, as relational beings, image the Trinity.⁴² Whether consciously or not, Barth's view echoes Roman Catholic teachings on the image of God and the theology of the body later summarized by Pope John Paul:

Man became the "image and likeness" of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons which man and woman form right from the beginning. The function of the image is to reflect the one who is the model, to reproduce its own prototype. Man becomes the image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion. Right "from the beginning," he is not only an image in which the solitude of a person who rules the world is reflected, but also, and essentially, an image of an inscrutable divine communion of persons.⁴³

This assertion would imply that single people cannot image God fully, without a counterpart to fulfill the image. John Frame disagrees with this view and Barth's in particular: "I don't agree with Barth that sexual differentiation *is* the image of God. But I do believe that our sexual qualities, like all other human qualities, image God. The point

⁴¹ Richard J. Mouw, "The Imago Dei and Philosophical Anthropology," *Christian Scholar's Review* 41, no. 3 (2012): 253.

⁴² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/1*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958), 184.

⁴³ Pope John Paul II, "Man Becomes the Image of God by Communion of Persons," EWTN Global Catholic Television Network, accessed February 29, 2024, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/man-becomes-the-image-of-god-by-communion-of-persons-8554>.

is not that God is male, female, or both ... our sexuality pictures God's attributes and capacities."⁴⁴ He lists creativity, love, and covenant relationship, among others.

Old Testament theologian Meredith Kline breaks the image of God in man into three aspects, one of which includes physical form:

Under the concept of man as the glory-image of God, the Bible includes functional (or official), formal (or physical), and ethical components, corresponding to the composition of the archetypal Glory. Functional glory-likeness is man's likeness to God in the possession of official authority and the exercise of dominion. Ethical glory is a reflection of the holiness, righteousness, and truth of the divine Judge And formal-physical glory-likeness is man's bodily reflection of the theophanic and incarnate Glory.⁴⁵

Both man and woman are made equally in the image of God, but each displays some similar and some dissimilar aspects of the nature of God. Bavinck summarizes this truth as follows:

The creation story in Genesis shows this clearly in the fact that both together are said to have been created in God's image (Gen. 1:27). Not merely one of them, but both, and not the one separate from the other, but man and woman together, in mutual relation, each created in his or her own manner and each in a special dimension created in God's image and together displaying God's likeness. For this reason, the Lord compares himself not only to a Father who takes pity on his children (Ps. 103:13), but also to a mother who cannot forget her nursing child (Isa. 49:15). He chastens like a father (Heb. 12:6), but he also comforts like a mother (Isa. 66:13) and replenishes for the loss of both (Ps. 27:10).⁴⁶

While Genesis 1 describes a general creation of man and woman in God's image,⁴⁷ and most agree that this account confers upon the woman equal dignity, worth,

⁴⁴ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2008), 627.

⁴⁵ Meredith G Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Self-published Meredith Kline, 1980), 31.

⁴⁶ Herman Bavinck and James Eglinton, *The Christian Family*, ed. Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (n.p.: Christian's Library Press, 2012), 3–4, Kindle.

⁴⁷ Genesis 1:27.

and ability to reflect God's image, Genesis 2, in its specificity, provides more speculation, confusion, and debate about the exact nature of the image of God in woman.

The Woman Images God Indirectly

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."⁴⁸ "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.'⁴⁹

The order, manner, and place of Eve's creation has caused theologians to wonder if Eve might not be inferior to Adam. She was made second through derivation though Adam's body, not from the dust of the ground. It appears that Ambrose, for example, saw the woman as of one nature with the man, but of inferior status:

Not without significance, too, is the fact that woman was made out of the rib of Adam. She was not made of the same earth with which he was formed, in order that we might realize that the physical nature of both man and woman is identical and that there was one source for the propagation of the human race. For that reason, neither was man created together with a woman, nor were two men and two women created at the beginning, but first a man and after that a woman. God willed it that human nature be established as one. Thus, from the very inception of the human stock He eliminated the possibility that many disparate natures should arise. He said: '*Let us make him a helper like himself.*' (Gen 2:18) ... In that respect, therefore, woman is a good helper even though in an inferior position. We find examples of this in our own experience. We see how men in high and

⁴⁸ Genesis 2:18.

⁴⁹ Genesis 2:21-23.

important offices often enlist the help of men who are below them in rank and esteem.⁵⁰

Theologians have struggled to define the image of God in woman since God made her directly in his image and she simultaneously derives her image of God through her procreation from Adam's body. Augustine could not bring himself to say that the woman, on her own, could be the image of God:

The woman together with her own husband is the image of God, so that that whole substance may be one image; but when she is referred separately to her quality of help-meet, which regards the woman herself alone, then she is not the image of God; but as regards the man alone, he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman too is joined with him in one.⁵¹

Thomas Aquinas, similarly, states:

In a primary sense, God's image is found in man as in woman as regards that in which the idea of 'image' principally consists, namely an intelligent nature ... But in a secondary sense, God's image is found in man in a way in which it is not found in woman; for man is the beginning and end of woman, just as God is the beginning and end of creation.⁵²

Chrysostom understood man and woman both to be made in the image of God and that both have dominion over the created order. Though it may seem contradictory, the woman is, at the same time, under the authority of the man. He makes use of Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians to make his case:

Only man, but woman too, since the human form is found in both sexes ... And indeed, man commands and the woman is subjected to him, as God has signified to him from the beginning. You will be under the power of your husband, and he will dominate you (Gen. 3,16.). Thus man was made in the image of God because

⁵⁰ Ambrose, "Saint Ambrose on Paradise," trans. Gary A. Anderson (University of Virginia, 1995), <http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/anderson/commentaries/Amb.html#glossGen2:18>.

⁵¹ Augustine, "On the Trinity, XII, 7," Church Fathers, trans. Arthur West Haddan, On the Trinity, XII, 7, accessed March 6, 2024, <https://www.logoslibrary.org/augustine/trinity/1207.html>.

⁵² Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologiae: The End or Term of the Production of Man (Prima Pars, Q. 93)," trans. English Dominican Fathers, accessed February 27, 2024, <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1093.htm>.

he enters into the participation of his authority, and not because God has a human form. Man therefore commands all creatures, and even the woman who is subject to it. That is why St. Paul said of man that he is the image and the glory of God, and of woman, that she is the glory of man. But if the words of Scripture were to be understood as form and figure, distinction. What the Apostle does here would be useless, since human nature is the same in man and in woman.⁵³

Calvin concluded that Eve's creation out from Adam expressed both equality and common belonging as well as wifely submission. "In this manner Adam was taught to recognize himself in his wife, as in a mirror; and Eve, in her turn, to submit herself willingly to her husband, as being taken out of him. But if the two sexes had proceeded from dissimilar sources, there would have been occasion either of mutual contempt, or envy, or contentions."⁵⁴

Whereas God formed (יצר) Adam's body from the dust of the ground,⁵⁵ Eve's physical body is built (בנה) directly from the man's.⁵⁶ Richard Batey explains that both translations of the word צלע as rib or side are possible, and both, combined with the architectural verb בנה, to build, make for an interesting connotation. Batey writes, "The Hebrew word (צלע) commonly translated 'rib' also meant 'side' and even designated a side of the ark (Exod. xxv. 12, 14; xxxvii. 3, 5) or a building (Exod. xxvi. 20; xxxvi. 25)."⁵⁷ God brings back together what he divided in the one-flesh union. "Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman,

⁵³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, trans. Robert C. Hill (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), <http://archive.org/details/homiliesongenesi0000john>.

⁵⁴ John Calvin, "Calvin's Commentary on the Bible, Genesis 2," StudyLight.org, accessed April 7, 2023, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/cal/genesis-2.html>.

⁵⁵ Genesis 2:7.

⁵⁶ Genesis 2:22.

⁵⁷ Richard A Batey, "The Mia Sarx Union of Christ and the Church," *New Testament Studies* 13, no. 3 (April 1967): 271.

because she was taken out of Man.”⁵⁸ Batey maintains that this is the point that Paul is using to explain that “The mystical union revealed in marriage, whereby two persons become one body, has theological significance for disclosing the oneness shared by Christ and his Body.”⁵⁹

Calvin reflects on the fact that God built Eve out of Adam, writing,

Moses also designedly used the word *built*, to teach us that in the person of the woman the human race was at length complete, which had before been like a building just begun. Others refer the expression to the domestic economy, as if Moses would say that legitimate family order was then instituted.⁶⁰

Kleinig, expanding on what Luther had noted, sees in the Song of Songs allusions back to the garden of Eden, where God constructed Eve’s body as a building, a home for the man and later for her children:

... by offering her body as a garden, she establishes a home for her husband and herself with her body. Through the union of her body with that of her husband, they both have a safe place where they can present themselves to each other, mentally and emotionally, personally, and spiritually. Thus, in his commentary on Genesis 2:22, Luther notes that the Lord God “built Eve from Adam’s rib. Her body is thereby envisaged as a building, a house for her to be and a home for Adam to stay in with her. He concludes, “In the same way the wife is still the house for her husband, to which he goes, with whom he dwells, and with whom he joins in the effort and work of supporting the family.”⁶¹

Eve’s creation by derivation from Adam’s flesh is what makes her able to be united to him and therefore this derivation is not to be interpreted as a sign of inferiority. So, what is it, specifically, then that differentiates the woman from the man in identity and calling?

⁵⁸ Genesis 2:23.

⁵⁹ Batey, “The Mia Sarx Union of Christ and the Church,” 270–71.

⁶⁰ John Calvin, “Genesis 2 - Calvin’s Commentary on the Bible - Bible Commentaries,” StudyLight.org, accessed February 27, 2024, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/cal/genesis-2.html>.

⁶¹ John W. Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made: A Protestant Theology of the Body* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 97.

The Woman's Creational Identity

Expanding Fruitfulness: Chavvah

“The man called his wife’s name Eve because she was the mother of all living.”⁶²

Eve is life-giver, חַיָּה. Though life-giving is part of the task given to both Adam and Eve, it is through Eve’s body that it is fulfilled. Biblical theologian James Hamilton explains that is not just about having babies, but about the salvation of the world: “If the woman does not become a mother, the serpent will not have his head crushed. ... Motherhood makes the world’s salvation possible. Indeed, the world’s salvation will only come through motherhood.”⁶³ God had given Adam and Eve the command to be fruitful and multiply⁶⁴—a task neither one of them could do alone. Because God made Eve to help expand fruitfulness on the earth, her creational *telos*, though certainly not limited to physical fruitfulness, was nevertheless central to her original task. Alastair Roberts notes that the creation account is divided into the forming stage (naming, taming, dividing, and ruling) and the filling stage (glorifying, generating, establishing communion, and bringing forth new life). He sees the woman placed at the apex of the filling stage:

She is primarily called to fill and to glorify the structures he establishes and the world he subdues. It is less a matter of the man having authority over the woman as one of the woman following his lead. As the man forms, names, tames, establishes the foundations, and guards the boundaries, she brings life, communion, glory, and completion. Neither sex accomplishes their task alone, but must rely upon, cooperate with, and assist the other.⁶⁵

⁶² Genesis 3:20.

⁶³ James M. Hamilton Jr., “A Biblical Theology of Motherhood,” *The Journal of Discipleship & Family Ministry* 2, no. 2 (2012): 8.

⁶⁴ Genesis 1:28.

⁶⁵ Alastair Roberts, “The Music and the Meaning of Male and Female,” *Primer, True to Form*, no. 3 (2018): 12.

Roman Catholic writer Deborah Savage formulates the woman's fruitfulness in terms of what she calls the woman's specific "genius," namely, her contribution to human flourishing:

Woman's mission is grounded in her particular genius; she is to keep constantly before us the fact that the existence of living persons, whether in the womb or walking around outside it, cannot be forgotten while we frantically engage in the tasks of human living. Woman is responsible for reminding us all that all human activity is to be ordered toward authentic human flourishing.⁶⁶

Additionally, the woman is not just "life-giver,"⁶⁷ but also "helper."⁶⁸ The study of the term *ezer* (עֶזֶר), "help," "helper," or "helpmeet," has necessarily informed how many Bible scholars draw out the creational function of the woman in relation to the man, and has been the subject of many reflections.

The Woman's Creational Function

Ezer, עֶזֶר

"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'"⁶⁹

Scholars have viewed the concept of helper as a neutral term, a term of inferiority, or as a kind of superior help. Philip Payne, for example, states, "Nothing in the expression 'ezer kēnegēdô in Gen 2 implies God created woman as a subordinate helper for man. Quite the opposite, it highlights her strength to be an equal partner with man,

⁶⁶ Deborah Savage, "Woman and Man: Identity, Genius, and Mission," in *The Complementarity of Women and Men: Philosophy, Theology, Psychology, and Art*, ed. Paul C. Vitz (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 112, Covenant Seminary eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

⁶⁷ Genesis 3:20.

⁶⁸ Genesis 2:18.

⁶⁹ Genesis 2:18.

rescuing him from being alone.”⁷⁰ In a recorded session from the 67th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society with the theme, Marriage and the Family, John McKinley, coined the term “necessary ally”⁷¹ for *ezer*, based on the occurrences in the Old Testament where God is referred to as *ezer* in terms of bringing military aid. Carolyn Custis James, four years prior, had built the argument of her book on a martial understanding of *ezer*. “The ezer is a warrior.”⁷² She elaborates further, “God created his daughters to be ezer-warriors with our brothers. He deploys the ezer to break the man's aloneness by soldiering with him wholeheartedly and at full strength for God's gracious kingdom. The man needs everything she brings to their global mission.”⁷³ Savage understands the nature of the help the woman provides as based on equality:

Woman is described as *ezer kenegdo*; *kenegdo* is a preposition that means “in front of,” “in the sight of,” “before” (in the spatial sense). Thus, we can conclude *from the text* that woman is not “below” man in the order of creation, nor is she above him. She stands in front of him, before him, meeting his gaze as it were and sharing in the responsibility for the preservation of all that precedes them. ... Woman's place in the order of creation reveals her true nature and mission—that of help sent by God. And thus is another misunderstood element in the tradition—that woman is subservient to man, sent to be merely his servant—revealed in its full meaning.⁷⁴

The idea that God made the woman for the sake of the original mission (the creation mandate), is not new or unusual. The fact that the woman is “subordinate” to the man for the sake of that mission is neither pejorative nor demeaning, according to

⁷⁰ Philip B Payne, “The Bible Teaches the Equal Standing of Man and Woman,” *Priscilla Papers* 9, no. 1 (2015): 3.

⁷¹ John McKinley, “Necessary Allies - God as Ezer, Woman as Ezer” (ETS, Atlanta, GA, November 17, 2015).

⁷² Carolyn Custis James, *Half the Church: Recapturing God's Global Vision for Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 114.

⁷³ Custis James, 113.

⁷⁴ Savage, “Woman and Man: Identity, Genius, and Mission,” 109.

Stephen Clark. “The partnership between man and woman as people with the same nature is the central focus of Genesis 2. However, a further question arises: Is there any subordination in that partnership?” He explains that subordination has a negative connotation in English, but that it is the best translation of the Greek, “to order oneself under.” He continues, “Subordination simply refers to the order of a relationship in which one person ... depends upon another person for direction. The purpose of this order is to allow those in the relationship to function together in unity.”⁷⁵ He coins this notion “unity-subordination,” which is a prerequisite and integral to “genuine community” and differentiated from both “oppressive subordination” and “care subordination,” such as the parent-child relationship, though elements of care subordination might also be part of the husband-wife relationship.⁷⁶ But the mission and the relationship between the man and the woman were drastically affected by the fall and sin.⁷⁷

The Woman’s Fall and Restoration

Her Sin

The serpent approached Eve first and targeted her to deceive her. “Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”⁷⁸ For this reason, some church fathers blame Eve for the

⁷⁵ Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1980), 23–24.

⁷⁶ Clark, 51.

⁷⁷ Genesis 3:8-19.

⁷⁸ Genesis 3:13.

fall of humanity into sin. Tertullian is the harshest when it comes to placing the guilt of the fall on Eve, and, subsequently on his contemporary sisters:

She would carry herself around like Eve, mourning and penitent, that she might more fully expiate by each garment of penitence that which she acquired from Eve—I mean the degradation of the first sin and the hatefulness of human perdition. “In pains and anxieties you bring forth children, woman, and your inclination is for your husband, and he rules over you” (Gen. 3:16)—and you know not that you also are an Eve? God’s judgment on this sex lives on in our age; the guilt necessarily lives on as well. You are the Devil’s gateway; you are the unsealer of that tree; you are the first foresaker of the divine law; you are the one who persuaded him whom the Devil was not brave enough to approach; you so lightly crushed the image of God, the man Adam; because of your punishment, that is, death, even the Son of God had to die. And you think to adorn yourself beyond your “tunics of skins” (Gen. 3:21)? ⁷⁹

Chrysostom, in a similar sentiment, places blame for the fall squarely on Eve’s shoulders with punitive consequences that extend to all women:

The woman taught once and ruined all. On this account therefore he saith, let her not teach. But what is it to other women, that she suffered this? It certainly concerns them; for the sex is weak and fickle, and he is speaking of the sex collectively. For he says not Eve, but ‘the woman,’ which is the common name of the whole sex, not her proper name. Was then the whole sex included in the transgression for her fault? As he said of Adam, ‘After the similitude of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of Him that was to come’ (Rom. v. 14); so here the female sex transgressed, and not the male.⁸⁰

He then interprets the reason for the apostle Paul’s prohibition of women teaching as all women being “weak and fickle” and fallen in Eve, as men are fallen in Adam. He is implying that Eve fell in a way different to Adam. Irenaeus, however, in contrast, understands the order and nature of the fall quite differently and depicts Eve in a better light:

⁷⁹ Tertullian, “On the Apparel of Women,” Church Fathers, trans. S. Thelwall, New Advent, accessed February 29, 2024, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0402.htm>.

⁸⁰ John Chrysostom, “Homily on First Timothy,” Fathers of the Church, trans. Philip Schaff, New Advent, accessed February 29, 2024, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/230609.htm>.

Why also did it (the serpent) not prefer to make its attack upon the man instead of the woman? And if thou sayest that it attacked her as being the weaker of the two, [I reply that], on the contrary, she was the stronger, since she appears to have been the helper of the man in the transgression of the commandment. For she did by herself alone resist the serpent, and it was after holding out for a while and making opposition that she ate of the tree, being circumvented by craft; whereas Adam, making no fight whatever, nor refusal, partook of the fruit handed to him by the woman, which is an indication of the utmost imbecility and effeminacy of mind. And the woman indeed, having been vanquished in the contest by a demon, is deserving of pardon; but Adam shall deserve none, for he was worsted by a woman, —he who, in his own person, had received the command from God.⁸¹

As Irenaeus did, other contemporary thinkers correct the misunderstanding that Eve alone is responsible for the fall into sin. After explaining that Adam was standing right next to Eve when she sinned, Kathleen Nielson, former women’s initiatives director for The Gospel Coalition, writes,

Why did he not LEAP into that conversation, declare God’s word, and rescue Eve from deception? Adam’s wrong does not cancel out Eve’s, but it was no less wrong. The vulnerability of both Adam and Eve was their vulnerability to temptation and sin. So, in Genesis 3, Eve is not presented as more evil than Adam. They both fell, one right after the other.⁸²

Why the serpent first addressed the woman remains a mystery, though Vos speculates, “The tempter addresses himself first to the woman, probably not because she is more open to temptation and prone to sin, for that is hardly the conception of the O.T. elsewhere. The reason may have lain in this, that the woman had not personally received the prohibition from God, as Adam had.”⁸³

And so, the human tragedy and the enmity between the woman and her seed began. “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and

⁸¹ Irenaeus, “Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus,” *Fathers of the Church*, trans. Alexander Roberts, New Advent, accessed February 29, 2024, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0134.htm>.

⁸² Kathleen Nielson, *Women and God: Hard Questions, Beautiful Truth* (London, UK: The Good Book Company, 2018), 49.

⁸³ Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 45.

her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” 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 (or for in other translations) your husband, but he shall rule over you.’”⁸⁴

Opposing strands of thinking emerged from the different interpretations of these verses. While early church fathers such as Origen viewed Eve’s desire “for” as a positive turning toward: “In him shall be your refuge, and he shall have dominion over you,”⁸⁵ others understood the desire to be “set against” as the ESV translates the verse. Susan Foh’s interpretation gained traction as she saw the connection between the parallel construction of Genesis 3:16b and Genesis 4:7b. “Its (sin’s) desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.” She excludes the meaning of sexual desire and defines it in light of Genesis 4:7b as follows, “Sin’s desire for Cain was one of possession or control ... the woman’s desire is to control her husband (to usurp his divinely appointed headship) and he must master her, if he can. Sin has corrupted both the willing submission of the wife and the loving headship of the husband.”⁸⁶ And yet, in spite of this corruption, God would use the woman to bring about redemption.

⁸⁴ Genesis 3:15-16.

⁸⁵ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, ed. Ronald E Heine (Baltimore: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 122.

⁸⁶ Susan T. Foh, *Women and the Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism* (Philadelphia: P&R, 1978), 69.

The Promised Messiah Comes Through the Woman's Seed

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”⁸⁷ “And the man named his wife ‘Eve,’ for she was the mother of all the living”⁸⁸

Starting with Eve, who was, despite her fall, restored to her life-giving function, Andrew Wilson notes:

Numerous stories of redemption in the Bible begin with women—Eve, Hagar, Leah, Shiphrah, and Puah, Miriam, Samson’s mother, Ruth, Hannah, Esther, Elizabeth, Mary—while Israel is being oppressed by foolish or evil men. Women judge Israel (Deborah) and win military victories (Jael). Women save their husbands (Abigail), their children (Jochebed), their city (the Tekoite woman), and their nation (Esther). Women prophesy (Huldah, Philip’s daughters), compose psalms and songs that appear in Scripture (Hannah, Mary), explain the Word of God to men (Priscilla), host churches (Chloe), run businesses (Lydia), serve as deacons and patrons (Phoebe), co-labor with Paul in the gospel (Euodia, Syntyche), and are identified as apostles (Junia). And if there is a greater responsibility in human history than carrying the Messiah in your womb, I would like to hear about it.⁸⁹

Furthermore, astute biblical theologians show how certain patterns connected with the woman, such as Eve falling prey to the deceit of the serpent in Genesis 3, are reversed in subsequent Old Testament narratives. James Jordan postulates that lying or deception are “primarily a woman’s tool”⁹⁰ in the Old Testament. But why? The reversals are part of God’s solution to thwart the nefarious plans of the Seed of the Serpent. He claims: “Since Satan made his initial assault on the woman by means of a lie (Gen. 3:1-5), it is

⁸⁷ Genesis 3:16.

⁸⁸ Gen 3:20.

⁸⁹ Andrew Wilson, “Beautiful Difference: The (Whole-Bible) Complementarity of Male and Female,” *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), May 20, 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/beautiful-complementarity-male-female/>.

⁹⁰ James B. Jordan, *Judges: Gods War Against Humanism*, 1st ed. (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1985), 89.

fitting that the woman defeat him by means of a lie, according to the principle ‘eye for eye, tooth for tooth’ – lie for lie.” He continues:

Faced with the tyrant, the woman is not in a position to fight, but she can lie and deceive. ... Sarah (Gen. 12, 20), Rebekah (Gen. 26, 27), the Hebrew Midwives (Ex. 1), and Jael. According to Genesis 3:15, Satan attacks the woman as well as the seed. ... It is the Satanic, humanistic tyrant in whose face these women told their brazen lies, and God blessed them each time for it (see the blessings in Gen. 12:16-17; 20:7, 14ff.; 26:12ff.; Ex. 1:20; Matt. 1:5; Jud. 5:24).⁹¹

Beyond the redemptive function of individual women and these general patterns of reversal, a biblical theological perspective sheds light on the purpose of womanhood in the story of redemption and its relational mode between God and his people. Typology is an interpretive tool in the biblical theology toolbox. It is not in the purview of this literature review to survey resources on typology but to coalesce and assess how authors have understood and framed feminine typologies in the grand scheme of redemptive history.

The Typology of Woman

Womanhood and its differing modal subcategories such as faithful or unfaithful bride, wife, and mother, falls in the category of relational typologies, which aid in understanding the salvific work of Christ through different relational lenses. Leonhard Goppelt, who wrote the seminal work on typology entitled *Typos*, draws this aspect out:

The discovery of individual typological relationships is governed by the following principles ... Persons, events and institutions are interpreted only insofar as they express some aspect of *man's relationship to God*.⁹² ... Because Christ alone is the fulfillment of this relationship to God, another principle is always added that arises from the subject matter. This principle specifies that all typology proceeds

⁹¹ Jordan, 89.

⁹² Emphasis mine.

through Christ and exists in him. From these two principles it follows as a manner of course that the antitypes, like the types, are not merely inherent or external features, but are the important elements in the perfect relationship between God and man.⁹³

Often, this perfect relationship between God and man is elucidated by the husband-wife relationship. Church fathers understood the typology set forth at the beginning to be prophetic and proleptic. Tertullian held that, for example, "For as Adam was a figure of Christ, Adam's sleep foreshadowed the death of Christ, who was to sleep a mortal slumber, that from the wound inflicted on His side might in like manner (as Eve was formed) be typified the Church the true mother of the living."⁹⁴ Augustine also held that the church, like Eve, was born out of the side of the Second Adam:

Because of this, the first woman was formed from the side of the man when asleep (Genesis 2:22), and was called Life, and the mother of all living (Genesis 3:20). Truly it pointed to a great good, prior to the great evil of the transgression (in the guise of one thus lying asleep). This second Adam bowed His head and fell asleep on the cross, that a spouse might be formed for Him from that which flowed from the sleeper's side. O death, whereby the dead are raised anew to life! What can be purer than such blood? What more health-giving than such a wound?⁹⁵

Calvin interprets the derivation of Eve from Adam's body to be a case of proleptic typology:

Yet I am more in favor of a different conjecture, namely, that something was taken from Adam, in order that he might embrace, with greater benevolence, a part of himself. He lost, therefore, one of his ribs; but, instead of it, a far richer reward was granted him, since he obtained a faithful associate of life; for he now saw himself, who had before been imperfect, rendered complete in his wife. And

⁹³ Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Wipf and Stock, 2002), 9.

⁹⁴ Goppelt, 109.

⁹⁵ Augustine, "Tractate 120 (John 19:31-20:9)," Church Fathers, trans. John Gibb, New Advent, accessed February 29, 2024, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1701120.htm>.

in this we see a true resemblance of our union with the Son of God; for he became weak that he might have members of his body endued with strength.⁹⁶

The author of the letter of 2 Clement frames male and female in a typological way, understanding the male to reflect God's husband love and the female to be a picture of the church, as Christ's one-flesh bride, united to him before the foundation of the world:

So, then, brethren, if we do the will of our Father God, we shall be members of the first church, the spiritual,—that which was created before sun and moon; but if we shall not do the will of the Lord, we shall come under the Scripture which says, My house became a den of robbers (Jeremiah 7:11). So, then, let us elect to belong to the church of life, that we may be saved. I think not that you are ignorant that the living church is the body of Christ (for the Scripture, says, God created man male and female; Genesis 1:27; cf. Ephesians 5:22-23 the male is Christ, the female the church,) and that the Books and the Apostles teach that the church is not of the present, but from the beginning.⁹⁷

Jonathan Edwards interpreted God's making a spouse for Adam as prototypical of the spouse God prepares for his own son before the creation of the world: "God created the world for His Son, that He might prepare a spouse or bride for Him to bestow His love upon; so that the mutual joys between this bride and bridegroom are the end of the creation."⁹⁸ Similarly, Bavinck described Eve's formation in a manner that foreshadows how the church will exist in relation to Christ, her cornerstone:

Yet even though the woman was not created by the man, she was nonetheless created from the man. Adam was made first, and then Eve. Both in time and in order, the man preceded the woman. The woman was created not merely after the man, but she was also brought forth out of the man. Just as the earth supplied the material for the man's body, so the man's body in turn supplied the material from which God formed the woman. The manner in which the man was created fixed an unbreakable bond between the human being and the earth; the manner in which the woman received her existence served to place her in the kind of relationship to

⁹⁶ Calvin, "Genesis 2 - Calvin's Commentary on the Bible - Bible Commentaries."

⁹⁷ Clement, "The 'Second Epistle' of St. Clement, Chapter 14. The Church Spiritual," Church Fathers, trans. John Keith, New Advent, accessed February 29, 2024, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1011.htm>.

⁹⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *The Miscellanies: Entry Nos. A-z, Aa-Zz, 1-500*, ed. T. A. Schafer and H.S. Stout, Cor. ed., vol. 13 (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2002), 374.

the man such that she is inseparably bound to him, and thereby the unity of the human race is completely preserved. The woman was created not to be self-sufficient, nor to be independent of the man, nor apart from his mediation; she is not a unique principal and head of the human race, but she herself was formed out of the man, out of his flesh and blood. The human race is one entity, a body with one head, a building with one cornerstone.⁹⁹

This typological view of Eve as representational of the people of God is different from a mere metaphor. Adam Hensley explained that the reality behind marriage is the relationship of God to his people, culminating in Christ's relationship with the church and hence, it is another form of the "downward" nature of typology versus a simple metaphor.

He writes:

... the Bible bears witness to this marriage as a *reality* after which the human institution of marriage is patterned according to God's creative purpose. This marriage is the antitype, according to whose pattern the estate of marriage—in particular, *Christian* marriage—is typologically drawn. Nor is the subject of marriage a peripheral one in the Bible but is at the heart of the biblical witness to God's creative and redemptive work in the world through Israel and culminating in Christ; that is, the Bible consistently testifies to God's marriage to Israel through the covenant.¹⁰⁰

God's marriage to his bride is one of the greatest typological strands of the Bible's story.

He continues:

... according to Scripture God is and remains married to his bride the church ... The institution of marriage to which the biblical writers appeal in their proclamation itself derives from that marriage, not the other way around. In Paul's paraenesis human marriages are like *it* rather than *it* like them, even as they foreshadow—or "postshadow"—Christ's marriage to his bride the church as a witness to it. Accordingly, *typology* more fully describes the situation than *metaphor* because it prioritizes the "downward" direction of comparison as Paul does in his paraenesis even as the type (human marriage) facilitates the vision of its antitype (Christ's marriage). For, unlike metaphor, typology keeps in view the *ontological* nature of the patterns and analogues involved here.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Bavinck and Eglinton, *The Christian Family*, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Adam D Hensley, "The 'Metaphor' of Marriage in the Bible," *Logia* 28, no. 2 (2019): 7.

¹⁰¹ Hensley, 7.

Raymond Ortlund similarly shows how marriage is such a typology which summarizes the whole story of the Bible:

The first cosmos was created as the home of a young couple named Adam and Eve. The new cosmos will be created as the eternal home of the Son and his bride. It is not as if marriage is just one theme among others in the Bible. Instead, marriage is the wraparound concept for the entire Bible, within which the other themes find their places.¹⁰²

He explains how New Testament authors utilize the person of Eve in a typological manner in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3 to explain the feminine identity of the New Covenant bride to the second Adam:

As the first Adam is typical of Christ, the last Adam, so the first Eve is typical of the church, the last Eve ... Paul assumes the continuity between the covenanted peoples of the Old and New Testaments, such that Israel's destiny as bride of God, frustrated through her own harlotry, is to be realized in the Christian church. But even more, the fact that this passage goes back beyond historic Israel to the primeval events of Genesis 2-3 to find a precedent for the church, with Eve functioning as the analogue to the betrothed of Christ, creates the presumption of finality in the destiny of the Christian church. The biblical drama is coming full circle. With Christ, believers stand in a new Eden.¹⁰³

This drama began in the Old Testament, as Israel is frequently described as a woman and Yahweh as the pursuant husband.

The Old Testament People of God as Woman

From the creation of Eve to the exodus of the people of Israel through Moses, the identity of the woman is tied to the covenant of marriage and used as the identity of God's people in their covenant with Yahweh. Nicholas Lunn, linguist, and Bible translation expert, points out that marital language is present at the onset of the calling of God's people out of Egypt:

¹⁰² Raymond C. Ortlund, *Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 16.

¹⁰³ Ortlund, 177–78.

God instructs Moses to announce to the Israelites their forthcoming deliverance and to speak to them the direct words of God, “I will take you [לְקַחְתִּי] to myself [לִּי] to be a people [לְעָם], and I will be your God” (v. 7). Most commentators fail to detect the underlying significance of the wording at this point. The verb “take” with direct object and the twofold occurrence of the preposition לְ ('to') is a common formula indicating the act of marriage (e.g., Deut. 21:11; 24:3; 25:5; 1 Sam. 25:39; 2 Sam. 12:9).¹⁰⁴

Batey observes that, in response, the people are to prepare for their encounter with Yahweh by consecrating themselves, washing their garments and being ready for the arrival of the Lord, the bridegroom.¹⁰⁵ Ritual washing was a normal rite of cleansing during the betrothal period, “*qadash*, or consecrate or sanctify came to mean betrothal.”¹⁰⁶ Meredith Kline studies the word כָּנַף in its covenantal context and notices that the winged covering God provided for his people is part of the covenant-making arrangement. The husband promises to cover, protect, and care for his new wife, and she promises to cling and submit to her husband:

In the remarkable historical allegory of Ezekiel 16, Israel in the wilderness is a woman at the age of love, with whom the Lord enters into covenant, taking her as his wife. As a token of the marriage covenant, he spreads the corner of his robe (*kānāp*) over her (v.8), a ritual indicative of a man's bringing a woman under his protection. The allusion of this nuptial imagery is to God's sheltering of Israel under the Glory-cloud. "He spread a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light in the night" (Ps. 105:39). The psalmist here uses the same verb (*pāraš*) with reference to the spreading of the theophanic cloud-canopy as is used in Ezekiel 16:8 for God's extending the edge of his robe. Another detail in this verse that evokes the Glory-cloud is the designation of the hem of the robe by the term *kānāp*, "wing, extremity" for wings are often associated with the Glory-cloud, particularly in figurative descriptions of God's protective overshadowing of his people. According to Ezekiel's allegorical transcription of the Sinai-covenant-

¹⁰⁴ Nicholas P. Lunn, “Let My People Go!': The Exodus as Israel's Metaphorical Divorce from Egypt,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 86, no. 3 (July 2014): 241.

¹⁰⁵ Exodus 19:10-11.

¹⁰⁶ Richard A Batey, *New Testament Nuptial Imagery* (Leiden: E J Brill, 1971), 17.

making, the covering of Israel by the theophanic Presence was a divine plighting of troth.¹⁰⁷

Covenant unfaithfulness, therefore, is understood as an act of spiritual adultery committed in relation to God.

... Sinai, like Eden, begins in communion but ends in alienation. Israel's worship of the golden calf is a betrayal of the newly formed covenant equivalent to a bride committing harlotry while still under the bridal canopy. As reenactment of man's turning away from God, it is tantamount to Adam's eating of the forbidden fruit in Eden and his subsequent loss of the divine nature."¹⁰⁸

Again, identifying the people of God as a woman is one of the main typological strands and key interpretive tools for understanding the Bible's bigger story. One author who stressed that idea was Gilberte Baril, a Roman Catholic nun who presented the arguments for the feminine identity and task of the church as bride and mother.¹⁰⁹ Christl Maier¹¹⁰ and others such as Karen Jobes made the point that:

Within the historical setting of Isaiah's lifetime, it was a colloquial idiom to personify the capital city of an ethnic population as a female (often a goddess in pagan culture) whose husband was the local patron deity. The population represented by that city was referred to as the "children" (or often the "daughter") of the mother-city. During times of war when a nation was conquered, its capital overrun and its peoples exiled, the city was considered to be a barren woman rejected by her husband (or a barren widow). By reason of having no husband and no son, the barren woman herself was considered as good as dead. Thus, the plight of the barren woman portrayed the worst situation a people could find itself in. To continue in exile under foreign subjugation did indeed mean death to a

¹⁰⁷ Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 51.

¹⁰⁸ André Villeneuve, *Nuptial Symbolism in Second Temple Writings, the New Testament, and Rabbinic Literature: Divine Marriage at Key Moments of Salvation History*, vol. 92, *Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016), 20–21.

¹⁰⁹ Gilberte Baril, *The Feminine Face of the People of God: Biblical Symbols of the Church as Bride and Mother* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991).

¹¹⁰ Christl M. Maier, ed., *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space, and the Sacred in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008).

national and ethnic identity. This was precisely the historical situation of Jerusalem to which Isaiah spoke his proclamation of 54:1.¹¹¹

But Jerusalem, a representation of the people of God as a whole, despite her reprobation, divorce from Yahweh, and subsequent deportation will still have a future because of God's mercy. Yatey explains:

Because of divine grace, the unfaithful harlot (1:21) will become a pure and holy bride (62:4). Yahweh will take back Daughter Zion, the wife he sent away with a certificate of divorce, and the barren city will be so filled with inhabitants that her walls will not contain them (49:14-18; 50:1; 54:1-8; 62:5; 66:6-11). In a great reversal, Daughter Zion will be exalted as the great queen, Daughter Babylon, is stripped naked and taken away as a humiliated captive (47:1-15). Nations will stream to Zion to bring their tribute as they worship Yahweh and learn to live by his law (2:2-4; 60:1-3; 61:4-8). Central to Isaiah's eschatological vision is the anticipation that Zion will become the central place on earth ("the highest of mountains") and that the nations will live in peace and justice under Yahweh's rule (2:1-4).¹¹²

This understanding of God's people as the unfaithful bride God the Husband would rescue and make fruitful is not limited to the Old Testament, but continues into the New Testament, culminating in the new, heavenly Jerusalem.

The New Testament Church as Bride and Mother

Cyprian was the most well-known church father for understanding the church as bride and mother, a type of Second Eve, a new mother of the living for the new human race redeemed by Christ:

Thus also the Church, shone over with the light of the Lord, sheds forth her rays over the whole world, yet it is one light which is everywhere diffused, nor is the unity of the body separated. Her fruitful abundance spreads her branches over the

¹¹¹ Karen H. Jobes, "Jerusalem, Our Mother: Metalepsis and Intertextuality in Galatians," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 55, no. 2 (1993): 308.

¹¹² Gary Yates, "Isaiah's Promise of the Restoration of Zion and Its Canonical Development," *Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary (1973-2015)*, November 1, 2009, 3, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pubs/231.

whole world. She broadly expands her rivers, liberally flowing, yet her head is one, her source one; and she is one mother, plentiful in the results of fruitfulness: from her womb we are born, by her milk we are nourished, by her spirit we are animated. The spouse of Christ cannot be adulterous; she is uncorrupted and pure. She knows one home; she guards with chaste modesty the sanctity of one couch. She keeps us for God. She appoints the sons whom she has born for the kingdom. Whoever is separated from the Church and is joined to an adulteress, is separated from the promises of the Church; nor can he who forsakes the Church of Christ attain to the rewards of Christ. He is a stranger; he is profane; he is an enemy. He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother.¹¹³

Girolamo Zanchi, Italian Reformer, himself influenced by the fathers, identified the motherly role of the church with the Jerusalem from above:

Thus, the whole church is usually called our mother, since, in her and by way of her ministry, each one of the faithful is regenerated, nourished, and guided. Whence also the apostle in Galatians spoke of the Jerusalem above (that is, the church), which comes, as it were, from heaven, saying, “Which is the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:26). For many interpret the passage thus, with regard to the church.¹¹⁴

Christ, the Second Adam, the head of the new humanity, has taken a bride at his side and is expanding God’s fruitfulness in the world through her maternal agency.

Calvin formulated his understanding of the nature and task of the church with the following explanation:

I will begin with the Church, into whose bosom God is pleased to collect his children, not only that by her aid and ministry, they may be nourished so long as they are babes and children but may also be guided by her maternal care until they grow up to manhood, and finally attain to the perfection of faith. What God has thus joined, let no man put asunder (Mark x. 9): to those to whom he is a Father, the Church must also be a mother. This was true not merely under the Law, but even now after the advent of Christ, since Paul declares that we are the children of a new, even a heavenly Jerusalem. (Gal. iv. 26)¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Cyprian, “Treatise 1, On the Unity of the Church,” Church Fathers, trans. Robert E. Wallis, New Advent, accessed February 29, 2024, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/050712c.htm>.

¹¹⁴ Girolamo Zanchi, *The Spiritual Marriage between Christ and His Church and Every One of the Faithful* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2021), 131, Kindle.

¹¹⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, accessed February 29, 2024, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.vi.ii.html>.

The church, in his view, is the place where God's children are incubated, receive new life, and are matured through teaching as well as receive protection and care. The church, the bride of Christ, has now become the mother to the New Covenant community and receives the task to care for God's children. The creation of Eve's body, with her capacity to bear, sustain, and feed life in a physical way, foreshadows the formation of the church as mother and her life-giving task in the world. The third clue and proleptic seed element in the creation of Eve's body is eschatological.

Eschatology of Gender

In previous centuries, biblical scholars saw gender as an eschatological pointer to the spiritual union that began with Christ's formation of his bride and extended into the eternal Sabbath rest. Jonathan Edwards anticipated the eternal Sabbath in terms of the bride's union with Christ:

As Adam rose and received his wife, "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh" (Gen. 2:23), and when out of himself from near his heart, so Christ received his church that is "of his flesh, and of his bone" (Eph. 5:30), and as the product of his most dear dying love. As this day was a day wherein God was refreshed and rejoiced in beholding his works, and a day of rejoicing to Adam in that he then received his wife, and a day of rejoicing to Eve, being then first received into union with her companion, so the day of Christ's resurrection was a day of rejoicing to God the Father, to Christ, and also to the church, which was then begotten again to a living hope by his resurrection.¹¹⁶

Others before Edwards, in particular Zanchi, who committed an entire book to the study of the marital relationship between Christ and his bride, expounds:

Therefore, Christ's glory and the church's salvation were the first end of this union. And, on that account, He loves her and cleanses and washes her every day, that He might finally establish her glorious unto Himself, having neither spot nor

¹¹⁶ Edwards, *The Miscellanies: Entry Nos. A–z, Aa–Zz, 1–500*, 13:131.

wrinkle nor anything else of that sort, but rather that she might be completely holy and innocent, and so that they might both live together happily in heaven.¹¹⁷

In his 1952 article, Scottish Reverend Muirhead names the church Second Eve when he writes about God's work of new creation: "Christ is the Second Adam. The result of God's 'new creation' is the Second Eve, the Church, the Bride of Christ."¹¹⁸ Eve and the church are both second born, as regards to the first creation and the inaugurated new creation. All men and women bear the image of the man of dust,¹¹⁹ Adam, and yet Eve, in a unique way, foreshadowed the formation of the Second Eve, who herself points to the people of heaven. James B. Jordan elaborates on how gender distinctions and the order God placed into creation are eschatological in nature, progressing from first order to second order:

The last act of Yahweh God in creating the world was the glorification of humanity by the creation of woman. The woman is the glory of the man, and thus a "better version" of the man, an improvement in the sense of being more glorious (1 Corinthians 11:7). The man does not have glory because he comes first and is not eschatological. The woman, coming last, partakes of eschatological glory, and in doing so, brings glory to the whole situation.¹²⁰

For this reason, he argued for understanding the church as the eschatological bride built on the pattern of Eve and becoming Christ's glory for all eternity.

Word initiates; glory completes. Adam was made first, then Eve. Humanity began with a man; humanity ends as a Bride, the New Jerusalem. Jesus, who had no form or comeliness, initiates the Church; but at the end the Bride is all glorious

¹¹⁷ Zanchi, *The Spiritual Marriage between Christ and His Church and Every One of the Faithful*, 130.

¹¹⁸ I. A. Muirhead, "The Bride of Christ," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 5, no. 2 (1952): 185, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930600001162>.

¹¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:47.

¹²⁰ James B. Jordan, "Restoring the Office of Woman in the Church, I," *Theopolis Institute* (blog), November 11, 2013, <https://theopolisinstitute.com/restoring-the-office-of-woman-in-the-church-i-2/>.

within and without. At the end, human males will all be part of a glorious Bride.¹²¹

Discussions on the nature of biblical womanhood are enriched by the understanding that male and female represent something of God's very essence and reveal the eschatological trajectory of the Bible itself, planted in seed form at the beginning.

Summary of the Biblical Framework

The literature review of the biblical theology of womanhood revealed that the biblical teaching surrounding womanhood is more than a collection of verses about individual women. In fact, womanhood is the relational paradigm through which God chooses to interact with his old and new covenant people. The creation, the identity, and purpose of the woman are not only necessary to image God in his fullness but also understood in terms of a relational pattern between God, the heavenly husband, and his bride, his people. Biblical theologians noted that relational typology is the best way to understand the paradigm of womanhood in relationship to God. God's bridal people are given the task of fruitfulness at Christ's side. Even though Christ is most unlike Adam, who desperately needed Eve's help, Jesus, the sovereign ruler of the universe, deigns to unite himself to his bride and make her necessary to the fulfillment of his desire for fellowship with her and his purposes in the world with, through and for her. Calvin states that Christ is the church's head, and she is his body¹²² and his fullness. She is the new

¹²¹ Jordan.

¹²² "And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent." (Colossians 1:18)

creation apex and culmination of Christ's work of redemption. He writes in amazement in his commentary on Ephesians:

This is the highest honour of the Church, that, until He is unified to us, the Son of God reckons himself in some measure imperfect. What consolation is it for us to learn that, not until we are along with him, does he possess all his parts, or wish to be regarded as complete! Hence, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, when the apostle discusses largely the metaphor of a human body, he includes under the single name of Christ the whole Church.¹²³

A second area of literature surveyed the Biblical Womanhood™ teachings that emerged in response to evangelical feminism. It was not in the purview of the research to give a full account of the vast field of evangelical feminist literature. It merely explored how the teachings defined as Biblical Womanhood™ attempted to redress the perceived errors of evangelical feminism.

A Survey of Biblical Womanhood™ Writings

A Formulation of the Complementarian Doctrine of Biblical Womanhood™

Evangelical feminism assumes that if the Bible is to be of any use today, it needs to be rid of its patriarchal underpinnings. Feminist interpreters have struggled to take the Bible at face value because of its androcentrism and its treatment of women more generally and started interpreting the texts about men and women differently. Complementarians perceived this new feminist focus as an undermining of God's word, particularly his creational structure, which included order for the sexes in marriage, the family, as well as the life of the church. Thus, the formulation of complementarian

¹²³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 218.

doctrine attempted to reclaim the orthodox understanding of biblical manhood and womanhood in previous centuries.

CBMW vs. CBE

Few specialized books on biblical womanhood had been written prior to the rise of The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. Pamphlets, sermons, and specialized treatises were in circulation. Some stand-out examples include Elizabeth Prentiss' fictional coming of age story *Stepping Heavenward* in 1869,¹²⁴ or Presbyterian pastor J.R. Miller's 1882 book, *Home-Making*.¹²⁵ Hermann Bavinck wrote *The Christian Family* in 1912.¹²⁶ They paint a traditional picture of marriage and family structures. Edith Schaeffer played a big part in re-popularizing homemaking as the duty of a Christian woman in 1971.¹²⁷ Just prior to the 1980s counter-feminist revolution, Elizabeth Elliot, a role model for many Protestant women, formulated what became a Christian form of gender essentialism in her 1976 classic, *Let Me Be a Woman*,¹²⁸ followed by *Passion and Purity* in 1984.¹²⁹ Based on her belief in God's absolute sovereignty over all things, she declared that our sex is no accident, but rather, "it is our nature. It is the modality under which we live all of our lives; it is what you and I are

¹²⁴ Elizabeth Prentiss, *Stepping Heavenward* (Orlando, FL: Okitoks, 2017).

¹²⁵ J.R. Miller, *Home-Making* (San Antonio, TX: The Vision Forum, 2004).

¹²⁶ Bavinck and Eglinton, *The Christian Family*.

¹²⁷ Edith Schaeffer, *The Hidden Art of Homemaking*, 2nd ed. (Tyndale House, 1985).

¹²⁸ Elizabeth Elliot, *Let Me Be a Woman* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1976).

¹²⁹ Elisabeth Elliot, *Passion and Purity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2002).

called to be—called by God, this God who is in charge. It is our destiny, planned, ordained, fulfilled by an all-wise, all-powerful, all-loving God.”¹³⁰

Meanwhile Stephen B. Clarke, leading Roman Catholic renewal theologian wrote his landmark *Man and Woman in Christ*,¹³¹ from which Catholic and Protestant theologians alike drew their inspiration. That same year Westminster Seminary graduate, Susan Foh, wrote *Women and the Word of God*,¹³² which would influence subsequent complementarian readings of Genesis 3:16. In the same vein, and including references to Foh’s work, the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) formed in 1988 to assess the problem of evangelical feminism:

CBMW has been in operation since 1987, when a meeting in Dallas, Texas, brought together a number of evangelical leaders and scholars, including John Piper, Wayne Grudem, Wayne House, S. Lewis Johnson, James Borland, Susan Foh, and Ken Sarles. These figures were concerned by the spread of unbiblical teaching. Under Piper’s leadership, the group drafted a statement outlining what would become the definitive theological articulation of “complementarianism,” the biblically derived view that men and women are complementary, possessing equal dignity and worth as the image of God, and called to different roles that each glorify him.¹³³

Months later, Christians for Biblical Equality formed their own organization and stated their goal:

Disturbed by the shallow biblical premise used by churches, organizations, and mission groups to exclude the gifts of women, evangelical leaders assembled in 1987 to publish their biblical perspective in a new scholarly journal, Priscilla Papers. Included in the group were Gilbert Bilezikian, W. Ward Gasque, Stanley Gundry, Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, Catherine Clark Kroeger, Jo Anne Lyon, and Roger Nicole. The group determined that a national organization was needed to provide education, support, and leadership about biblical equality. With the help

¹³⁰ Elliot, *Let Me Be a Woman*, 17.

¹³¹ Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ*.

¹³² Foh, *Women and the Word of God*.

¹³³ CBMW, “Our History,” CBMW, accessed February 27, 2024, <https://cbmw.org/about/history/>.

and vision of these individuals, CBE International (founded as Christians for Biblical Equality) was established on January 2, 1988.¹³⁴

Evangelical feminists did not dismiss what the Bible had to say about men and women, as secular feminism did, but rather, they were interpreting the same texts differently. Each of these groups got to work publishing resources through their websites and scholars in their respective institutions. Whereas feminist women scholars were writing and publishing books and articles on the topic, conservative, complementarian Protestant women scholars were few. Roman Catholic scholars such as Sister Prudence Allen who traced the philosophical notions surrounding womanhood throughout history¹³⁵ and previously mentioned Baril¹³⁶ were making significant contributions to the philosophical and theological debates surrounding the essence of womanhood and the feminine nature of the church's identity and mission, respectively.

One of CBMW's first goals was to write a compendium volume summarizing the complementarian view of the sexes and their roles in home and church. It was in the year 1991, after the 1988 creation of CBMW that *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (RBMW)¹³⁷ was published. The work was a self-proclaimed clarion call by its twenty-two contributors to formulate a clear teaching on a biblical understanding of manhood and womanhood. It countered evangelical feminism's abandonment of traditional interpretations of Scripture.

¹³⁴ CBE, "History of CBE - CBE International," CBE International, accessed February 27, 2024, https://www.cbeinternational.org/primary_page/cbes-history/.

¹³⁵ Sister Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman, Vol 1: The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 B.C. - A.D. 1250* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

¹³⁶ Baril, *The Feminine Face of the People of God*.

¹³⁷ Grudem and Piper, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.

Countering New Interpretations of Scripture

The main problem CBMW authors has with evangelical feminists was their interpretation of Scripture. The latter, they assert, claimed the authority of Scripture, yet applied a vastly different exegesis, arriving at different meanings of the texts. “These authors differ from secular feminists because they do not reject the Bible’s authority or truthfulness, but rather give new interpretations of the Bible to support their claims.”¹³⁸ This, they claim, has led to conflicting views on gender roles: “Men and women are simply not sure what their roles should be.”¹³⁹ Their writing of RBMW is what should help men and women “recover a noble vision of manhood and womanhood as God created them to be.”¹⁴⁰ But their critique went beyond how men and women related to each other. Grudem predicted the result of feministic beliefs:

Following the denial of male headship in marriage, and the denial of the restriction of leadership roles in the church to men, and the denial of anything uniquely masculine other than the physical differences among human beings, it is to be expected that egalitarians would begin to blur and then deny God’s identity as our Father.¹⁴¹

Complementarians felt strongly about not blurring the lines between the sexes because of the binary nature of the creation account and the clearly laid out structures of marriage and church governance.

¹³⁸ Grudem and Piper, xiii.

¹³⁹ Grudem and Piper, xiii.

¹⁴⁰ Grudem and Piper, xiv.

¹⁴¹ Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions*, Reprint edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 509.

Women in Ordained Ministry

RBMW stressed the headship of the husband in the home, and by extension and in parallel, the leadership of ordained men in the church. All agreed that the ordained elders had final authority over the teaching of doctrine and the exercise of discipline under their governance. All rejected ordained, pastoral roles for women with spiritual authority, as stated in the Danvers Statement, Affirmation 6: “In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:2-16; 1 Tim 2:11-15).”¹⁴²

They often used the notion of economic difference in the roles of the three persons of the Trinity in their teaching to undergird and explain the relationship between men and women. For example, Orlund wrote in a 2020 revised edition of RBMW:

After all, God exists as one Godhead in three Persons, equal in glory but unequal in role. Within the Holy Trinity the Father leads, the Son submits to Him, and the Spirit submits to both (the economic Trinity). But it is also true that the three Persons are fully equal in divinity, power, and glory (the Ontological Trinity). The Son submits, but not because He is God, Jr., an inferior deity. The ranking within the Godhead is a part of the sublime beauty and logic of true deity. And if our Creator exists in this manner, should we be surprised and offended if His creaturely analogue on earth exists in paradoxical form?¹⁴³

Contributors had slightly differing views on what gifts women could exercise in the church. Some of them even welcomed women teachers in mixed settings. For example, contributor John Frame wrote elsewhere:

Scripture does not say that women may not teach men. Acts 18:26 indicates that both Priscilla and her husband Aquila were involved in teaching Apollos,

¹⁴² <https://cbmw.org/about/danvers-statement/>.

¹⁴³ Raymond C. Orlund, “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, Rev ed. (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2020), Covenant Seminary eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

mentioning Priscilla's name first Scripture does not say that women may never speak in a church meeting. First Corinthians 11:5 refers to women praying and prophesying in worship. The attempt of some to argue that Paul mentions but does not approve this practice, is not persuasive.¹⁴⁴

And further:

In general, a woman may do in the church anything an unordained man may do. So there are vast areas of service in the church for all believers, women and men alike. As one instance, I think that women may contribute much to the church as biblical scholars, and it is appropriate for women who are expert in Scripture and other relevant fields to instruct men preparing for ordination. I have no objection to women as seminary professors.¹⁴⁵

Piper, on the other hand, does not believe women should teach men in the church or at a seminary.¹⁴⁶ RBMW scholars were hence not uniform in their thinking when it came to specific applications of their theology.

The conservative voices of CBMW and other more traditional thinkers called women to consider the errors of and conclusions that feminists were drawing for the family and, most poignantly, the church. Complementarian women took it upon themselves to instruct other women to reclaim what they called “biblical womanhood.” This genre became a kind of brand name; hence the researcher coined it Biblical Womanhood™ for simplicity and clarity.

¹⁴⁴ John M. Frame, “The Fifth Commandment: Man and Woman,” in *The Doctrine of the Christian Life, A Theology of Lordship Ser* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), Men and Women in the Church, Covenant Seminary eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

¹⁴⁵ Frame.

¹⁴⁶ John Piper, Is There a Place for Female Professors at Seminary?, *Desiring God*, January 22, 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/is-there-a-place-for-female-professors-at-seminary>.

The Rise of the Biblical Womanhood™ Movement

Biblical Womanhood™ Materials

In this section of the literature review, the researcher focused on books on biblical womanhood written by women in the thirty years after the birth of the complementarian movement and CBMW. It was a challenge to find sources that met the standard and rigor required for academic research. In fact, most of the books presented were not academic in nature, but neither could they be ignored. The researcher was unable to locate many relevant books written by women that approached biblical womanhood from a biblical theological perspective. This fact alone revealed that the women promoting and teaching Biblical Womanhood™ were not writing for an academically or theologically trained audience. Yet, it was important to examine the most widespread books on Biblical Womanhood™ to understand the later critiques of the movement and the following countermovement.

The books fell into two overlapping categories: biographical accounts of authors disillusioned with the claims of feminism and/or teaching content for women looking for what it means to be a godly woman. Sometimes, a book was a combination of both. Since the market for these kinds of books exploded in the 1990s, not every book could be included and only some of the most influential works were selected.

The Rebuttal of Feminist Claims

The first and most influential scholarly book already mentioned above for its influence was Susan Foh's watershed *Women and the Word of God*. In it she responds to the claims of contemporary egalitarian scholars Paul Jewett, Virginia Mollenkott, Letha

Scanzoni, and Nancy Hardestry. She first addresses the feminist hermeneutic. She quotes Mollenkott's assertion that "we cannot assume that because the Bible was written against the backdrop of a patriarchal social structure, patriarchy is the will of God for all people in all times," and responds with the following assertion:

Mollenkott's statement is a good summary of the feminist approach to the Bible. Her statement also suggests that God is not consistent (patriarchy was his will only some of the time, when the Bible was being written); her God is not sovereign or all-powerful (he could not speak without cultural contamination or pick the best time for Christ's coming, when the culture would better reflect his ultimate will, such as now when women have almost gained "equality.")¹⁴⁷

Countering the feminist view she critiques, she claims that:

the progressive nature of biblical revelation accounts for the preparatory (typological and symbolic) externalized character of the Old Testament ... The biblical feminists do not comprehend this principle. Consequently, their approach to the Old Testament is critical... They also deny the unity of the Bible when they pit Paul against Jesus, as many feminists do...¹⁴⁸

And further, "Another indication that the biblical feminists do not comprehend the redemptive-historical nature of revelation is that they apparently do not accept the New Testament as the culmination and end of God's revelation to his people."¹⁴⁹ When explaining the male headship principle, she wrote, "The difference between men and women can be termed economic or functional subordination. It means that while men and women are equal in personhood, God has ordained a difference in function."¹⁵⁰ Her opponents responded that the distinction would limit God's call on women's lives to use their gifts or hold church office. Foh, while standing against women's ordination, saw the

¹⁴⁷ Foh, *Women and the Word of God*, 27–28.

¹⁴⁸ Foh, 24.

¹⁴⁹ Foh, 25.

¹⁵⁰ Foh, 260.

office of deacon open to women: “She may become a deacon.” She believes women could teach on certain levels, like Sunday School because “the Sunday School teacher does not have the authority to enforce his or her teaching; it is nonofficial, informal teaching ... that resembles the mutual teaching all believers are to engage in (Col. 3:16).”¹⁵¹

The contribution to the complementarian movement she helped shape has been historically controversial. It was her interpretation of Genesis 3:16 in connection with Genesis 4:7 which introduced the negative meaning to the word “desire” and the man’s necessary mastery of the woman, as Cain was to master his sin. Here she describes the implications of this view:

The curse here describes the beginning of the battle of the sexes. After the fall, the husband no longer rules easily; he must fight for his leadership. The woman’s desire is to control her husband (to usurp his divinely appointed headship) and he must master her, if he can ... Wives have desires contrary to their husbands’ and often have no desire (sexual or psychological) for their husbands. But wives have a desire, whether overt or covert, conscious or unconscious, to control or manipulate their husbands.¹⁵²

Foh’s exegesis of these verses convinced quite a few complementarian theologians and influenced the ESV’s translation committee’s choice of translation of Genesis 3:16 as “Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.”¹⁵³ (It was years later that other complementarian female academics responded to the claims of feminist scholars. Margaret Köstenberger, CBMW council member, examines the main

¹⁵¹ Foh, 258.

¹⁵² Foh, 259.

¹⁵³ Genesis 3:16.

evangelical feminists' claims and counters them with those of the complementarian movement in her 2008 book¹⁵⁴).

Claire Smith, Ph.D. in New Testament from Moore Theological College, claims that not all that feminism has wrought is bad, commenting, "The gender-based inequality that feminism in its most basic form seeks to correct *is* contrary to God's purposes."¹⁵⁵ Thus, feminism has brought about some changes for the good:

Women can now vote, own property, have bank accounts, and an unrestricted education, and sit at board tables; rape in marriage is now a criminal offense; violence against women is now a community concern; fathers are now involved with their children; ... It's a shame it was left to the feminists to force these changes, but they are good changes that sit well with God's love for justice and for all those he has made.¹⁵⁶

Her aim is to blow off the "fine dust" of feminism that has settled on every discussion and interpretation of Bible passages to return to their plain meaning, even if that plain meaning is counter cultural.

The dust of feminism has settled on the pages of our Bibles and obscured God's word. What the Bible once said clearly about men and women is no longer clear to us. The plain meaning of texts no longer seems plain. Some would tell us these texts mean something very different now from when they were written. Others would say that feminism has made some texts unsellable and unbelievable. In the face of these objections, and like the all-pervasive red dust, feminism has reached into every corner of Christian truth. Even God has had a feminist makeover.¹⁵⁷

Other authors address what is distinctly womanly, namely the woman's ability to bear and nurture children, authored books to plead with women to not lose sight of the

¹⁵⁴ Margaret Elizabeth Köstenberger, *Jesus and the Feminists: Who Do They Say That He Is?* Illustrated edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

¹⁵⁵ Claire Smith, *God's Good Design*, ed. Matthias Media, 2nd ed. (Sydney: Matthias Media, 2109), 15.

¹⁵⁶ Smith, 15.

¹⁵⁷ Smith, 12.

needs in their homes, their husbands, and children as they pursued independence, career, and successes of their own.

Valuing Motherhood and Domesticity

A few years after Susan Foh's book was published, Mary Pride, interacting with Foh, wrote *The Way Home*. Pride was a former radical feminist who graduated from Covenant Seminary in St. Louis. Her book was explosive and controversial. She argues for a married woman's return to the home and against feminist careerism: "You may have an important job. People may be depending on you. Nonetheless, God still wants you at home. If your job is a strong temptation to you, ... you have to quit. Flat. All idols must be cut off."¹⁵⁸ "The Bible teaches that childbearing is a wife's basic role."¹⁵⁹ Homeworking, raising children, by which she means home-schooling, should be, according to her, the top priority.¹⁶⁰ "Homeworking produces stable homes, growing churches, and children who are Christian leaders."¹⁶¹ "Raising Christian children is really not so difficult"¹⁶² and "Godly childrearing (the cause) produces a godly child (effect)."¹⁶³ She discourages parents from sending their children to college. "College is no place for boys and girls."¹⁶⁴ Mary Pride's book is radical: its tone is forward and

¹⁵⁸ Mary Pride, *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1978), 212.

¹⁵⁹ Pride, 41.

¹⁶⁰ Pride, 95, 99.

¹⁶¹ Pride, xiii.

¹⁶² Pride, 113.

¹⁶³ Pride, 105.

¹⁶⁴ Pride, 123.

forceful, and her book was instrumental in starting a large home-schooling movement. However, it does not address the calling of single women at all.

Similarly, Martha Peace, a biblical counselor who had left feminism, wrote another influential book for wives in 1995. Based on Proverbs 31, Peace takes her reader through the qualities of an excellent wife. She assumes Foh's understanding that the woman's fallen desire is to dominate and that "women are more often easily deceived."¹⁶⁵ She uses a hierarchical understanding of the relationships of the persons of the Trinity similar to CBMW's upon which she bases the distinct roles of men and women. "So just as Christ glorified the Father by doing the Father's 'work,' you are to glorify your husband by doing the husband's 'work.' Your role is to glorify your husband. You were created for him."¹⁶⁶ A lack of obedience to a husband is viewed as rebellion: "Rebellion is a very serious sin. If you disobey your husband, you are indirectly shaking your fist at God ... When you rebel against your husband's authority, you are grievously sinning."¹⁶⁷ Anger, fear, loneliness, and sorrow are the wife's primary sin struggles.¹⁶⁸

In a similar vein, Elizabeth George, a popular speaker, and teacher at women's events, encourages women to love house and home, children, and husband, and more than anything else to be a woman after God's own heart. She describes the husband as "the king in his castle"¹⁶⁹ for whom everything is dropped and whom everyone serves. She describes how monarchies fly a flag and all assist to serve the king when he is home.

¹⁶⁵ Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife: A Biblical Perspective*, Exp. ed. (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2005), 63.

¹⁶⁶ Peace, 51.

¹⁶⁷ Peace, 181.

¹⁶⁸ Peace, 205–37.

¹⁶⁹ Elizabeth George, *A Woman After God's Own Heart*, Exp. ed. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2006), 107.

“Adopting this attitude and this approach (have your kids join you!) will help you pamper and love your king when he arrives home.”¹⁷⁰ “If your husband is king of the castle, you will surely delight in pleasing him. And pleasing him means paying careful attention to his wants, his likes, his dislikes, — and this takes a little doing.”¹⁷¹

Dorothy Patterson, though not employing this exact terminology, expresses similar ideas in *The Christian Homemaker's Handbook*¹⁷² and *A Woman Seeking God*.¹⁷³ Patterson, D.Th., was professor of theology in women's studies at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and contributed a chapter entitled “The High Calling of Wife and Mother in Biblical Perspective” to RBMW. She defines home-making as a “career,” an “assignment to the wife from God himself,” which she bases on Titus 2:3-5, and countering the feminist adage that “housewives are parasites on society.”¹⁷⁴ The rest of the book displays an understanding of what it takes to be a parent, take care of a home and the various people in it, and many practical tips for homemaking.

The next group of books studied fell into the category of the True Woman Movement, or books to help women be godly women, according to a complementarian framework. They focus on the godly characteristics and calling of what makes a woman a “true woman” as opposed to the “real woman” often regarded as more significant in the secular world.

¹⁷⁰ George, 104.

¹⁷¹ George, 107.

¹⁷² Dorothy Kelley Patterson et al., *The Christian Homemaker's Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

¹⁷³ Dorothy Kelley Patterson, *A Woman Seeking God: Discover God in the Places of Your Life* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2013).

¹⁷⁴ Pat Ennis and Dorothy Kelley Patterson, *The Christian Homemaker's Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 91.

The True Woman Movement

The True Woman Movement views itself as a counter-revolution to the feminist sexual revolution. For more information on the history of the True Woman Movement, see the Revive our Hearts website.¹⁷⁵ Central to this movement is the True Woman Manifesto.¹⁷⁶ There, classic complementarian statements that pattern the woman's submission to male leadership on Christ's submission to his father are made: "When we respond humbly and appropriately to God-ordained leadership in our homes and churches, we demonstrate a noble submission that honors God's Word and reflects Christ's obedience to the will of His Father." Specific female virtues are encouraged: "We will seek to glorify God by cultivating such virtues as purity, modesty, submission, meekness, and love." Influential Christian women and men have joined hearts and hands and lent their pens to build up the movement and create resources,¹⁷⁷ including Susan Hunt.

Hunt, a former director of women's ministries of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and CBMW member is the mother of the Titus 2 movement in the PCA and beyond. In *Spiritual Mothering*,¹⁷⁸ *The Legacy of Biblical Womanhood*,¹⁷⁹ and other resources, Hunt explained the calling of older women to instruct younger women based

¹⁷⁵ "History of the True Woman Movement," Revive our Hearts, accessed April 8, 2024, <https://www.reviveourhearts.com/true-woman/#history>.

¹⁷⁶ "The True Woman Manifesto," Revive our Hearts, accessed April 8, 2024, <https://www.reviveourhearts.com/true-woman/manifesto>.

¹⁷⁷ Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, Joni Eareckson Tada, Janet Parshall, Mary Kassian, and Susan Hunt, among others. For a complete list of women authors, see the True Woman website: <https://www.reviveourhearts.com/books/authors/>.

¹⁷⁸ Susan Hunt, *Spiritual Mothering: The Titus 2 Model for Women Mentoring Women*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Franklin, TN: Legacy Communications, 1993).

¹⁷⁹ Susan Hunt, Barbara Thompson, and Charles H. Dunahoo, *The Legacy of Biblical Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003).

on Paul's instructions to Titus.¹⁸⁰ If women are not called to be pastors, this distinction does not mean that they are not to teach at all. They are commanded to teach the younger women in the church. The content of that teaching is to be how to love husbands, children, and home.¹⁸¹ Her emphasis on Titus 2 ministries has had a significant impact on the PCA's women's ministry, giving women a sense of purpose and a vital ministry to other women. In *The True Woman*,¹⁸² she uses the four cardinal virtues of female piety described by British clergyman John Angell James in 1852.¹⁸³ They are piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. "Piety," she writes, "is a biblical virtue ... to be pursued by Christian women."¹⁸⁴ The woman's purity is to be obvious contrasted with the "new woman's" lifestyle, and by that she means the sexually liberated and promiscuous woman.¹⁸⁵ Domesticity is "devotion to home life"¹⁸⁶ based on the description of the Proverbs 31 woman.¹⁸⁷ Submission, is a voluntary gift wives give their husbands based

¹⁸⁰ Titus 2: 3-5.

¹⁸¹ "Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled." (Titus 2:3-6)

¹⁸² Susan Hunt, *The True Woman: The Beauty and Strength of a Godly Woman* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997).

¹⁸³ John Angell James, *Female Piety*, ed. Don Kistler, 2nd ed. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1999).

¹⁸⁴ Susan Hunt, *The True Woman: The Beauty and Strength of a Godly Woman*, rev. ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 160.

¹⁸⁵ Hunt, 182.

¹⁸⁶ Hunt, 188.

¹⁸⁷ Hunt, 190.

on Christ's willing submission to his Father. Quoting Prentiss' *Stepping Heavenward*, she writes, "Submission is not silly subservience."¹⁸⁸

The woman's creational design, also expounded in her book *By Design*,¹⁸⁹ is to be an *ezer*, a helper,¹⁹⁰ which means she must be a part of the covenant community to live it out. The woman's redemptive calling is to be a life-giver. Hunt is careful to point out that:

We tend to have a myopic view of mothering. We limit it to women who have birthed biologically. The covenant way is bigger and bolder. Every redeemed woman is a life-giver. Failure to understand this biblical perspective diminishes motherhood. The results: We will be shortsighted and fail to extend our life-giving capacity in every relationship and ministry. Single and barren women are deprived of the joy of fulfilling their creational life-giving design and the covenant community is denied their mothering ministry. Covenantal motherhood is inherent in God's plan for his people.¹⁹¹

The creation design of woman as an *ezer* or helper is corroborated by Fitzpatrick. Though she is not officially affiliated with the True Woman Movement, she is a trained theologian and biblical counselor and held a complementarian understanding of the sexes. To elevate the calling of helper, she draws parallels to the role of the Holy Spirit as helper. "The Holy Spirit was sent by our heavenly Father to our side: right there, close by, helping, comforting, aiding, and guiding. Isn't it precious that Eve was formed from Adam's side and is called to stay there, adapting herself so that she provides aid, comfort,

¹⁸⁸ Hunt, 220.

¹⁸⁹ Susan Hunt, *By Design: God's Distinctive Calling for Women*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998).

¹⁹⁰ Hunt, *The True Woman*, 2019, 20.

¹⁹¹ Hunt, Thompson, and Dunahoo, *The Legacy of Biblical Womanhood*, 162.

counsel, and succor?”¹⁹² Fitzpatrick sees the connection between Eve being made as a helper to the first Adam and the church’s role of helper to Christ:

God ... didn’t stop at making Eve for Adam. As the Second Adam’s Father, God created a beautiful bride for His Son, Jesus ... He birthed her, made her one with Him, and called her to his side to help Him by serving and being the means through which He completes his Father’s will to build a kingdom that will glorify his name forever and display the magnitude of his love.¹⁹³

This typological insight is not seen by many others in the Biblical Womanhood™ movement nor used to make any significant claims about the meaning of womanhood in redemptive history. (In the egalitarian world, Bette Boersma uses the same argument to underscore the full inclusion of women into all forms of ministry because the bride of Christ includes men and women.¹⁹⁴) Fitzpatrick also makes the point that “submission is not only for wives,” as each person is in submission to God and others in interdependent relationships.¹⁹⁵

Some widespread women’s books on Biblical Womanhood™ present God’s calling on women in stark opposition to secular feminism’s vision for them. Nancy Leigh DeMoss (now Wolgemuth) wrote *Lies women Believe*, with a foreword by Elisabeth Elliot. She addresses lies feminists introduced about God, the self, sin, marriage, and children:

They redefined what it means to be a woman and tossed out widely held views of a woman’s priorities and mission in life. Concepts such as virtue, chastity, discretion, domesticity, submission, and modesty were largely eliminated from our vocabulary, and replaced with choice, divorce, infidelity, and unisex lifestyles

¹⁹² Elyse M. Fitzpatrick, *Helper by Design: God’s Perfect Plan for Women in Marriage* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2003), 42.

¹⁹³ Fitzpatrick, 43.

¹⁹⁴ Bette Boersma, *The Second Eve: Understanding Biblical Equality* (Grandville, MI: Junia, 2006), 124–25.

¹⁹⁵ Fitzpatrick, *Helper by Design*, 146.

... One of the most devastating objectives and effects of this “new” view of womanhood has been to demean marriage and motherhood and to move women—both physically and emotionally—out of their homes and into the workforce.¹⁹⁶

Countering this feminist stress on career, she writes:

In the will of God, there is no higher, holier calling than to be a wife and mother ... There is no greater measure of a woman’s worth or success than the extent to which she serves as the heart of her home. God’s plan is that a woman’s primary attention and efforts should be devoted to ministering to the needs of her husband and children.¹⁹⁷

Carolyn McCulley from Sovereign Grace ministries also stresses the importance of women tending to their homes, because it is the place where life and nurture takes place and it images God’s own homemaking. “Homemaking is a foretaste of the eternal haven that awaits us when Jesus returns.”¹⁹⁸ Mary Kassian, CBMW council member, responded to the *Girls gone Wild* magazine theme with her book *Girls Gone Wise*¹⁹⁹ as well as in *The Voices of the True Woman Movement*, a compendium of multiple authors. Her theme is how feminism misled women:

Feminism promised women happiness and fulfillment. But it hasn’t delivered. The new generation is disillusioned. They can see that feminism hasn’t brought women the satisfaction it promised. Today’s women are searching for answers. They want to know how to make life work ... The time is ripe for a new movement—a seismic, holy quake of countercultural Christian women who dare to take God at His word, ... and delight in God’s plan for male and female.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, *Lies Women Believe: And the Truth That Sets Them Free* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2018), 124.

¹⁹⁷ Wolgemuth, 132.

¹⁹⁸ Carolyn McCulley, *Radical Womanhood: Feminine Faith in a Feminist World*, new ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2008), 115.

¹⁹⁹ Mary A. Kassian, *Girls Gone Wise in a World Gone Wild*, new ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2010).

²⁰⁰ Nancy Leigh DeMoss, ed., *Voices of the True Woman Movement: A Call to the Counter-Revolution*, New edition (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2010), 69–70.

The other contributors encourage women to seek wisdom instead of liberation, domesticity instead of careerism, modesty, and purity instead of licentiousness and sexual immorality, and self-control instead of limitless freedom.²⁰¹

Wolgemuth builds on Hunt's Titus 2 model adding what it means for women to help each other to be "adorned" with the beauty of the gospel in all areas of life.²⁰² The structure of the book follows Paul's instructions in Titus 2: 3-5. Since it does not come naturally to them, women need to be "trained" in the following areas: "loving our husbands, loving our children, working at home, being submissive to our husbands."²⁰³ Wolgemuth does not disapprove of all work outside the home, as Pride does, and understands that the apostle Paul is "... not mandating that women are *only* to work at home or that the home is to be their only sphere of influence or investment."²⁰⁴ Rather, she calls it a matter of "appropriate priority."²⁰⁵ In summary, the True Woman movement emphasizes classic complementarian views on female piety, priorities and purpose.

The last grouping of literature reviewed under the category of Biblical Womanhood™ encompassed books written as an apologetic for the Bible's traditional view of women in the face of feministic claims. Their titles ask apologetic questions: "*Does Christianity Squash Women?*"²⁰⁶ or "*Is the Bible Good for Women?*"²⁰⁷

²⁰¹ DeMoss, *Voices of the True Woman Movement*.

²⁰² Titus 2:10.

²⁰³ Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, *Adorned: Living Out the Beauty of the Gospel Together* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2018), 207.

²⁰⁴ Wolgemuth, 213.

²⁰⁵ Wolgemuth, 215.

²⁰⁶ Rebecca Jones, *Does Christianity Squash Women?* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2005).

Defending the Bible's High View of Women

Defending God's design of the sexes and opposing feminist claims that complementarian theology turns women into passive individuals with reduced agency, complementarian women authors felt compelled to prove that the Bible portrays women as active, fierce, and feisty, while still understanding their complementarian calling.

Rebecca Jones, former CBMW council member and graduate writing instructor at Westminster Theological Seminary, wrote *Does Christianity Squash Women?* in 2005. "The Bible is full of evidence that God values women as much as he values men. They are of the same substance. Both are in God's image (Gen.1:27). Both are commissioned to rule the earth and to fill it (Gen.1:28). Both answer to God for sin."²⁰⁸ She explains the primacy of Adam not in terms of him being superior but in terms of how his "representation prepares us for another Adam whose representative role will also be crucial for humanity."²⁰⁹ The book is covenantal in nature, helps with Bible interpretation skills, including Jesus' own method of interpreting the Bible,²¹⁰ and shows how the women in the Old Testament were included in salvation history, playing important redemptive roles (Chapters 5-7). Her description of how Jesus treated women climaxes in how he relates to the church, his bride, and how women can flourish there. This book is unique because of its theological focus on the redemptive storyline of the Bible.

Jumping ahead in time, Wendy Alsup, former deacon for Women's Theology at Mars Hill in Seattle, asks a similar question: "*Is the Bible good for Women?*" Like Jones,

²⁰⁷ Wendy Alsup, *Is the Bible Good for Women?: Seeking Clarity and Confidence Through a Jesus-Centered Understanding of Scripture* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2017).

²⁰⁸ Jones, *Does Christianity Squash Women?*, 38.

²⁰⁹ Jones, 38–39.

²¹⁰ Jones, 60–66.

she follows the “scarlet thread” through the Bible that leads to Christ.²¹¹ Looking back at Genesis she writes, “When God made woman in his image, he gave her *dignity in her inherent identity ... and purpose in His larger plan.*”²¹² She tackles the Old Testament law and asks whether it is good for women, differentiating between prescriptive and descriptive passages and digs into the difficult passages in the New Testament. Finally, she describes God’s view of women as best because God’s justice is supreme, yet never promotes the kind of independence from man secular feminism promises.²¹³ Both these authors move away from biblical advice for women and focus instead on the goodness of God in creating woman with a purpose, the trustworthiness of God’s character and plan in including woman into his salvation story, and redeeming her through Christ.

Others sought to recapture fierce womanhood from feminism by showing the Bible does not require women to leave their passion, brain, or strength at the door to be a godly woman. Betty Friedan had called women “millstones hanging around their (husbands’) necks,” and “parasitic.”²¹⁴ Simone de Beauvoir wrote that “marriage turns women into leeches,” “praying mantises,” and a “dead weight” for their husbands.²¹⁵ Kimberly Wagner stressed that fierceness is beautiful when rooted in Christ. “She’s a warrior at heart—not violent or aggressive—but tempered by humility. She’s a soft

²¹¹ Wendy Alsup, *Is the Bible Good for Women?: Seeking Clarity and Confidence Through a Jesus-Centered Understanding of Scripture* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2017), 17, 30.

²¹² Alsup, 43.

²¹³ Alsup, 193–94.

²¹⁴ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963), 379, 382, 391, 425.

²¹⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1949), 382, 724.

warrior. Loving God and others with sacrificial devotion.”²¹⁶ Former CBMW member, Courtney Reissig, writes about common caricatures of biblical submission: “The Doormat. People who see submission as a means to make women brainless doormats think it takes away a woman’s voice and removes her ability to have opinions. She is simply supposed to sit there and look pretty.”²¹⁷ Or further:

The Personality Killer. Others see submission as limiting a woman’s personality... submission, has no room for a strong, boisterous personality. It sees “gentle and quiet spirit” as a personality trait, and one that not every woman can conceivably conform to.²¹⁸

Public figures Penny Young Nance, CEO, and president of Concerned Women for America, and Julie Roys, Moody Radio Network host, focus on fierce femininity in the public sphere,²¹⁹ and fighting for the right causes in a fierce yet womanly way.²²⁰ Not only did complementarians feel the need to defend what they saw as God’s design for men and women, but in a sense, they sought to defend God himself as the one being questioned. Was God being fair to women by giving them these “roles”?

Kathy Keller, influenced by Elisabeth Elliot in her student years,²²¹ was convinced of the rightness of complementarianism but she had experienced firsthand the

²¹⁶ Kimberly Wagner, *Fierce Women: The Power of a Soft Warrior*, New ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2012), 20.

²¹⁷ Courtney Reissig, *The Accidental Feminist: Restoring Our Delight in God’s Good Design* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 72.

²¹⁸ Reissig, 72.

²¹⁹ Penny Young Nance, *Feisty and Feminine: A Rallying Cry for Conservative Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016).

²²⁰ Julie Roys and Kay Arthur, *Redeeming the Feminine Soul: God’s Surprising Vision for Womanhood* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017).

²²¹ Collin Hansen, in his book on *Timothy Keller, His Spiritual and Intellectual Formation*, recounts how Kathy was enrolled in one of Elizabeth Elliott’s classes at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary and how Elizabeth Elliot quoted Kathy’s essay on masculinity and femininity in her *Let Me Be a Woman* book.

pain and frustration of women who felt called to the ministry. Her focus was much less on classical female piety and more on the justice of God's ordering of the sexes. She wrote:

... many women have been crushed by being told that their gifts, gifts given by the Holy Spirit, are not allowed, not wanted, even nonexistent or imaginary. No wonder the discussion is so often opened with the words, "This is a justice issue!" I have heard this cry from women with whom I'm having a quiet discussion and from women who are weeping ... While I understand the frustration from which this sentiment is born, it has nevertheless been my task ... to explain that, no, it is not primarily a justice issue, but first a theological issue. What did God say?²²²

She spends much of the book explaining 1 Timothy 2 and concludes that it is in the office of elder that the hendiadys of teaching and authority come together, resulting in the restriction of authoritative teaching to qualified men. The submission of women to their husbands as the church submits to Christ is a mystery that displays the inner working of the Trinity. As with the original drafters of RBMW, the argument from the Trinity is strong in her work. "The son's ontological equality with the Father, and yet his economic submission for the purpose of salvation in taking on the role of a servant, lead us into the heart of the mystery of the Trinity. How else can this even begin to be conveyed without human players who enact the same truths, the same roles?"²²³ Ultimately, "Justice, in the end, is whatever God decrees. So, whether or not you are able to see justice in divinely created gender roles depends largely on how much trust you have in God's character."²²⁴ She concludes:

The justice behind God's creation of male and female and his arrangement of the different roles he chose for them may not always be apparent to us. But why one

²²² Kathy Keller, *Jesus, Justice, and Gender Roles: A Case for Gender Roles in Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Part 2: Personal Journeys, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

²²³ Kathy Keller, Part 2: Personal Journeys.

²²⁴ Kathy Keller, Part 2: Personal Journeys.

and not the other? But should we expect our finitude to understand the infinite, omnipotent, wise, good, lovely, gracious, justice of God? Perhaps some inkling resides in the dance of the sexes, by which we reveal truth about the inner life of the triune God. The rest is clothed in mystery, to which we yield, with full confidence that it is meant for our good.²²⁵

Collin Hansen, reflecting on the legacy of Tim and Kathy Keller, summarized, “The Kellers upheld biblical teaching on male leadership in marriage and the church while defying some cultural expectations of men and women.”²²⁶ They lived this out at the risk of being viewed as “progressive” within their PCA church family and “regressive” in the eyes of the world.²²⁷

Kathleen Nielson, speaker and writer and former director of women’s initiatives at The Gospel Coalition wrote her short book *Women & God*, almost titling it *Is God Sexist?*²²⁸ In it, she addresses the most difficult verses in the Bible that have to do with women, and puts them in the context of the “unified story”²²⁹ of the Bible and concludes with “the goodness of God toward his female image-bearers.”²³⁰

Younger complementarian women authors and thinkers have written more positively on the topic because of allegations that complementarianism lends itself to abuse and stereotyping women. Abigail Dodds, for example, CBMW council member counters the argument that complementarianism leads to stereotyping of women. No

²²⁵ Kathy Keller, Part 2: Personal Journeys.

²²⁶ Collin Hansen, *Timothy Keller: His Spiritual and Intellectual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2023), 78.

²²⁷ Princeton Seminary denied Tim Keller the Kuyper Prize for Excellence in Reformed Theology and Public Witness for his conservative stance on the ordination of women.

²²⁸ Nielson, *Women and God*.

²²⁹ Nielson, 14.

²³⁰ Nielson, 15.

Christian woman views herself as a stereotypical woman because women have different understandings of what a true woman even is. "... few of us think of ourselves as a typical woman."²³¹ She also writes about submission in a careful way, not insinuating that it looks the same in every marriage. "Marital submission is a comparison (of the church to Christ), not an exact replication. Husbands are not Christ, ... we do not need husbands the way we need Christ. But the comparisons help us to know what we ought to be like."²³² Her message is classic complementarianism, but her manner is gentle and more nuanced, as is her chapter on women and work, though she recommends that women focus on the home.

Katie McCoy holds a Ph.D. in Old Testament from Southwestern Seminary. Unlike other Biblical WomanhoodTM resources, *To Be a Woman* does not address classic complementarian doctrines, rather, it places cultural concepts of womanhood and gender ideology in dialogue with the Bible's theological vision for womanhood. She stresses the creational differences between men and women and the importance of the female body. "To sever gender identity from biological sex robs the body of its theological meaning and its inherent worth."²³³ McCoy defines gender complementarity in terms of "interdependent harmony," like "notes in an intricate composition. They give each other context and indicate direction."²³⁴ In the end, she believes that God's vision for the sexes will prevail even though gender ideology has become a "cultural dictator that demands

²³¹ Abigail Dodds, *(A)Typical Woman: Free, Whole, and Called in Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 60, Kindle.

²³² Dodds, 82, Kindle.

²³³ Katie J McCoy, *To Be a Woman: The Confusion Over Female Identity and How Christians Can Respond* (Brentwood, TN: B&H, 2023), 101.

²³⁴ McCoy, 92.

allegiance and controls through fear. And it has plundered what is immeasurably priceless—countless women (and men) created to know and reflect their Creator.”²³⁵ She calls Christians to stay engaged: “We will need unwavering conviction that female identity symbolizes more than the physical body it comprises. Because to possess a female identity *is* to be a woman. And to be a woman is to reflect the reality and intent of the Master Artist.”²³⁶ This book is an apologetic for womanhood at the most basic level of biology, countering the transsexual view of gender.

Summary of The Rise of the Biblical Womanhood™ Movement

Having surveyed a representative selection, though not all, of the complementarian literature written by women which followed the creation of CBMW, the researcher observed the following areas of focus. First, there was a clear clarion call to Christian women to doubt the feminist script reinterpreting the Scriptures to promote an egalitarian view of the genders, enticing women to believe they could find ultimate fulfillment in independence away from the traditional roles of wife and mother, and, instead, to look for it in sexual liberation and careerism. The books focused on the creational design of women as helper, the pre-fall structure of authority and submission, and the use of the Trinity to ground male-female relationships in the nature of the Godhead.

Second, and as a result, the female authors called their readers to return to valuing the female distinctives expressed in being a wife and mother, with domesticity as a virtue

²³⁵ McCoy, 136.

²³⁶ McCoy, 136.

and as part of their call from God. Women were told to focus on this high calling, not seek professional work outside the home, if possible, and invest in their husbands and children to build the kingdom of God. Single women were not always addressed.

Third, a new sense of calling for women was awakened in the True Woman Movement to teach and mentor other women to embrace and pass on these teachings. While women were not to teach men in the church, they most certainly instruct other women, based on the Titus 2 command for women to instruct other women the good, which is to love their husbands and children and to be workers at home.

Fourth, some thoughtful women desired to defend the Bible's view of gender roles based on God's love for women, his plan of redemption, which included women, and his prerogative to structure the relationship between men and women as he saw fit, while at the same time, rescuing women from stereotypes and a perceived servility. These authors wanted to show glimpses of how womanhood was a part of God's great plan from the beginning and how the task of the woman was a type foreshadowing the role of the church in her relationship to Christ.

Of course, not all received the writings of Biblical Womanhood™ with full enthusiasm and, in the following years, these teachings have been met with criticisms of various kinds. In the next section, the researcher surveyed objections to complementarian teachings and Biblical Womanhood™ materials. The goal was to answer the question, has biblical womanhood been rendered obsolete by its critics? And further, will the Biblical Womanhood™ resources of the past provide satisfying, positive answers for young women seeking to live out their identity as Christian women today and into the future?

Concerns with Biblical Womanhood™

The following section of the literature review summarizes the main critiques and concerns surrounding Biblical Womanhood™ teachings well as authors' attempts to modify, enhance, and expand what was missing, overlooked or even theologically inaccurate. This step set the stage for the interview phase of the qualitative research project. It is the assumption of the researcher that the concerns and critiques of Biblical Womanhood™ materials would shape how receptive women would be to WML's teaching. So, what were the common critiques of the teachings of Biblical Womanhood™?

Critiques of Biblical Womanhood™ Resources

Legalism and Stereotypes?

In 2012 an explosive book hit evangelical bookstores. Intended to be lighthearted and humorous, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*,²³⁷ by Rachel Held Evans, an award-winning writer, initiated criticisms of the writings and movement of Biblical Womanhood™. Evans grew up in conservative evangelicalism and observed a renewed interest in Biblical Womanhood™. In a yearlong experiment, Evans applied the commands of Scripture concerning biblical womanhood literally. Along the way she criticized many aspects of Biblical Womanhood™, starting with CBMW,²³⁸ including the

²³⁷ Rachel Held Evans, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood: How a Liberated Woman Found Herself Sitting on Her Roof, Covering Her Head, and Calling Her Husband "Master."* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012).

²³⁸ Evans, xix.

overemphasis on the place of the woman at home,²³⁹ as well as Vision Forum,²⁴⁰ and even Christian polygamy.²⁴¹ She applied certain aspects of Proverbs 31 literally, made herself available to her husband for sex on demand,²⁴² bought a doll to practice childcare, dressed modestly in a long dress, never cut her hair, sat on her roof, and held up a sign at her city's "gate" praising her husband. She criticized the writings of Dorothy Patterson, Martha Peace, and Debi Pearl and ridiculed the overall concept of Biblical Womanhood™.

Mary Kassian, Kathy Keller, and Trillia Newbell each wrote critical reviews of her book. *Christian Post* reporter, Audrey Barrick, compiled their reactions. Kassian rejected the stereotypes Evans claimed Biblical Womanhood™ confirms:

If you hear someone tell you that complementarity means you have to get married, have dozens of babies, be a stay-at-home housewife, clean toilets, completely forego a career, chuck your brain, tolerate abuse, watch 'Leave it to Beaver' re-runs, bury your gifts, deny your personality, and bobble-head nod 'yes' to everything men say, don't believe her.²⁴³

Kathy Keller, however, agreed with certain aspects of her criticism of Biblical Womanhood™ since those aspects were not biblical but had major concerns about how Evans misuses and misinterprets the Bible:

Rachel, I can and do agree with much of what you say in your book regarding the ways in which either poor biblical interpretation or patriarchal customs have sinfully oppressed women. I would join you in exposing churches, books, teachers, and leaders who have imposed a human agenda on the Bible.

²³⁹ Evans, 23.

²⁴⁰ Evans, 51.

²⁴¹ Evans, 58–59.

²⁴² Evans, 100.

²⁴³ Audrey Barrick, "'Year of Biblical Womanhood' Draws Criticism from Complementarian Women," *The Christian Post*, November 13, 2012, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/year-of-biblical-womanhood-draws-criticism-from-complementarian-women.html>.

However, *you have become what you claim to despise; you have imposed your own agenda on Scripture in order to advance your own goals*. In doing so, you have further muddled the waters of biblical interpretation instead of bringing any clarity to the task. As a woman also engaged in trying to understand the Bible as it relates to gender, I had hoped for better.²⁴⁴

Trillia Newbell concurred with Keller's most stinging critique. Evans' experiment was based on her own misunderstandings and misapplications of Scripture as well as a lack of insight into the redemptive storyline of the Bible.

Throughout *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*, Evans works to prove that the Bible is not without error and therefore cannot be applied literally—and in some cases cannot be trusted (as we see by the implications of Paul's and Peter's motives, she says, to keep their culture in the Scriptures). Furthermore, the Scriptures are called sacred but never inspired by God, never the very words of God. Evans selects various Old Testament laws regarding women and discusses the horror of such laws, yet she never rises to the place where the purpose of these laws is made sense of. And yet she never introduces the redemptive history of Scripture.²⁴⁵

Though Evans' book might be categorized as slightly trivial, she ended up a self-proclaimed egalitarian and, ironically, many of the valid criticisms she brought forth opened a floodgate of critical literature against Biblical Womanhood™, including criticisms coming from the complementarian camp itself. Concerns were correctives of perceived misapplications or erroneous theology.

Trinitarian Confusion and Ontology of Inequality?

Upon the death of Elisabeth Elliot, Letha Dawson Scanzoni, a friend of hers and with whom Elliot exchanged correspondence for years, remembered the progression of their discussions about biblical womanhood in a tribute to her. In the end, Scanzoni

²⁴⁴ Kathy Keller, "A Year of Biblical Womanhood," The Gospel Coalition, October 30, 2012, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/year-biblical-womanhood/>.

²⁴⁵ Trillia Newbell, "A Year of Biblical Womanhood: A Review," Desiring God, October 8, 2012, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/a-year-of-biblical-womanhood-a-review>.

arrived at an egalitarian view of the sexes, but they had sharpened each other's thinking for years. Scanzoni reports how Elizabeth Elliott had responded to one of her letters:

When she received the copy of "Women's Place: Silence or Service?" she thanked me for what she called "the very fine article" and said, "I agree with all you say." In that letter of July 3, 1967, she also told me of an extreme example she had experienced in one church where she was invited to speak. The men were so concerned about a woman's teaching when men were present and usurping male authority (based on their interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12) that they asked her to speak to the women in the church sanctuary, arranged to have her message recorded, then played the recording for the men downstairs afterwards!

Betty reminded me of C. S. Lewis's views on hierarchy, which she called "ineluctable," and said that, from a Christian viewpoint, "the question of women being 'equal' to men in any sense other than political or as objects of grace is not debatable. We are not."²⁴⁶

Is what Elizabeth Elliot meant by "we are not (equal)," a statement about ontology, a statement about sameness, or a perception that complementarianism was communicating, even if inadvertently? In RBMW, she had written about man and woman in a Barthian manner: "These two people, together, represent the image of God—one of them in a special way the initiator, the other the responder. Neither one nor the other was adequate alone to bear the divine image."²⁴⁷ "... our inequalities are seen as essential to the image of God, for it is in male *and* female, in male as male and female as female, not as two identical and interchangeable halves, that the image is manifested."²⁴⁸ By inequalities, she means a lack of sameness or asymmetry. And yet, the fear that a woman might always be seeking to usurp male authority (based on Foh's negative interpretation of the

²⁴⁶ Letha Dawson Scanzoni, "A Christian Feminist Remembers Elisabeth Elliot," *Christian Feminism Today*, June 24, 2015, <https://eewc.com/christian-feminist-remembers-elisabeth-elliott-1926-2015/>.

²⁴⁷ Elisabeth Elliot, "The Essence of Femininity: A Personal Perspective," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, by Wayne A. Grudem and John Piper (Crossway Books, 1991), 397.

²⁴⁸ In Grudem and Piper, 399.

woman's desire) was very real in CBMW writings, which included female "dos and don'ts," depending on varying levels of personal influence or directive tasks. This thinking went beyond a woman not teaching or having authority over a man as part of the calling of the elder. "To the degree that a woman's influence over a man is personal and directive it will generally offend a man's good, God-given sense of responsibility and leadership, thus controvert God's created order."²⁴⁹ It was Piper's view that:

A woman may design the traffic pattern of a city's streets and thus exert a kind of influence over all male drivers. But this influence will be non-personal and therefore not necessarily an offense against God's order ... It would be hard to see how a woman could be a drill sergeant over men without violating their sense of masculinity and her sense of femininity.²⁵⁰

Such applications were drawn from the definitions Piper formulated:

At the heart of mature manhood is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for, and protect women in ways appropriate to a man's differing relationships.²⁵¹

At the heart of mature womanhood is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive, and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman's differing relationships.²⁵²

Because what is at the heart of femininity, according to this definition, is receiving the leadership of men in every situation, each encounter with a man needs to be considered from the perspective of not making a man feel led by a woman. This would imply that leadership and submission are part of a person's essence. When Aimee Byrd

²⁴⁹ Grudem and Piper, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 51.

²⁵⁰ John Piper, "Should Women Be Police Officers?" *Desiring God*, August 15, 2015, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/should-women-be-police-officers>.

²⁵¹ Grudem and Piper, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 35.

²⁵² Grudem and Piper, 36.

was asked by a *Christianity Today* interviewer Andrea Palpant Dilley about her book²⁵³ and why she viewed the prevailing CBMW view of women as parasitic or defined as supporting the aims of men, with women reduced to the role of masculine affirmers, she answered:

I'm critiquing the book *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, where John Piper defines the heart of femininity as "affirming men." Piper has contributed so much to the church. But that definition leaves no room for female agency or feminine contribution. I don't believe my femininity is defined by how I nurture male leadership. Women have unique contributions that are needed in the church. There's a reciprocity between manhood and womanhood that's dynamic, that moves us to our shared purpose: eternal communion with the triune God.²⁵⁴

Byrd counters the idea that the woman brings nothing intrinsic of her own, that, she is defined in the negative with her default mode of existence being the affirmation of men. If all women were to be submissive to all men, since leadership is at the core of the masculine essence, then all men exert leadership in all their relationships. However, this conclusion was not expressly stated in RBMW. "Paul does not ask every woman to submit to every man, but rather asks wives to submit to their own (*idios*) husbands."²⁵⁵ Claire Smith related to the difficulty of defining what is masculine and what is feminine while reviewing Byrd's book but did not find the definition Byrd offered in RFBMW satisfying either:

In short, *RFBMW* shows that the task of understanding what Scripture has to say about personhood, sex and gender is a work-in-progress, but the book itself provides little fresh grist for the mill. Moreover, Byrd's assertion that "I simply

²⁵³ Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.

²⁵⁴ Andrea Palpant Dilley, "The Cure for Complementarianism Gone Wrong," *Christianity Today*, April 20, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/may-june/aimee-byrd-recovering-biblical-manhood-womanhood.html>.

²⁵⁵ Grudem and Piper, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 169.

am feminine because I am female” (p. 114, cf. p. 120) just does not wash in a culture grappling with the challenge of transgenderism.²⁵⁶

Beyond the challenge of defining what is essentially feminine (or masculine), another main theme in RBMW is how the relationship of authority and submission is lived out among men and women in various contexts. Rachel Miller, author, and blogger at A Daughter of the Reformation, wrote to challenge Christians to expand their view of male-female relationship beyond the sole and narrow relational lens of authority and submission. She prefaces her book with the following statements:

Authority and submission are one aspect of the husband-and-wife relationship, not the whole. A husband’s leadership isn’t about power and privilege or figuring out who’s in charge or who should have the final say. A wife’s submission isn’t about catering to preferences. Submission is “appropriate, logical, and Christian,” in marriage because it’s “based on a love relationship in which one party yields to another who uses his power to sacrifice on her behalf.” The emphasis is how to serve one another in Christ while working together as co-laborers.²⁵⁷

Miller suggests other possible biblical lenses through which to view the husband-and-wife relationship such as unity, interdependence, and service which have been disproportionately overlooked.²⁵⁸ Furthermore, she critiques the standard Biblical Womanhood™ materials which had drawn their notions of femininity from the Victorian era, rather than directly from Scripture. For example:

The Victorian influence on complementarian authors is demonstrated through the use of Victorian sources. Dorothy Patterson, wife of former seminary president Paige Patterson, quotes from the Victorian poem, “The Angel in the House,” in her defense of the domestic work of women as “God’s assignment to the wife” to

²⁵⁶ Claire Smith, “Book Review of Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Her Purpose Written by Aimee Byrd,” *Themelios* 45, no. 3 (November 17, 2020), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/recovering-from-biblical-manhood-and-womanhood-how-the-church-needs-to-rediscover-her-purpose/>.

²⁵⁷ Rachel Green Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission: Women and Men in Marriage, Church and Society* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R, 2019), 20.

²⁵⁸ Green Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission*, 135ff.

create a haven for their families. Mary Kassian and Nancy DeMoss quote from the Victorian John Angell James's book *Female Piety* to explain the importance of women in preserving the health of society. Like James, they call on women to "use their influence to impact their communities for good and for godliness."²⁵⁹

Miller takes the True Woman teaching materials to task on her blog, primarily for

teaching a version of ESS (Eternal Submission of the Son to the Father in the Trinity)

based on Grudem's teachings as the model for the submission of the wife to the husband.

When Reformed theologians speak about the Son's submission to the Father in the work of redemption, they are generally speaking of the economic Trinity, i.e., the way the persons of the Trinity work together in the acts of creation, redemption, etc. This is distinct from the ontological Trinity which concerns the very nature of God. The problem with Grudem's formulation here and its subsequent use in the True Woman 101 book is that by saying God the Father has supreme authority "just because He is Father," he is making an ontological statement about the very nature of God. This is contrary to the traditional formulation found in the Athanasian Creed: And in this Trinity none is afore, nor after another; none is greater, or less than another. As a result, the book teaches that there is an inherent inequality in the nature of the Godhead. This is troubling. And it appears to be the result of a desire to ground the complementarian understanding of the relationship between husband and wife in a "deeper truth."²⁶⁰

Both Green and Byrd sparked a debate on social trinitarianism which ended up involving Liam Goligher who opposed the views of Grudem, Bruce Ware and others.

Byrd invited Goligher to post his articles on her page at the Reformation 21 website.

There, he wrote:

The internal life of the Trinity is neither egalitarian nor hierarchical because of the very nature of God as God. Only in His voluntary state as a servant do we read that 'the head of Christ is God' (1Cor.11:3). Only in the economy of redemption, in His state of humiliation, is this true...

So, here is the bottom line: God has revealed Himself as Trinity. To speculate, suggest, or say that there is a real primacy of the Father or subordination of the Son within the eternal Trinity is to have moved out of Christian orthodoxy and to

²⁵⁹ Green Miller, 126.

²⁶⁰ Rachel Green Miller, "True Woman 101: Divine Design," *A Daughter of the Reformation* (blog), May 8, 2015, <https://rachelgreenmiller.com/2015/05/08/true-woman-101-divine-design/>.

have moved or be moving towards idolatry. Idolatry is to believe or say of God something which is not true of Him. Scripture is our authority in the matter; and the church's confessed faith is a safety check on our understanding of it.²⁶¹

The danger was, of course, creating a blind spot and loss of Scriptural revelation as to the nature of the Triune God, and consequently, that the ESS doctrine would be used as an argument for the eternal subordination of the woman to man or of women to men, more generally, creating an immutable ontology of inferiority. Whereas egalitarians such as Kevin Giles viewed this recognition as the final downfall of complementarian doctrine,²⁶² CBMW asserted this faulty view of the Trinity was not a necessary foundational pillar for complementarianism. Denny Burk, who became the president of CBMW after Owen Strachan, wrote in his reflections on the debate on the Trinity:

I am a Danvers complementarian. That view of gender is not and never has been reliant upon an analogy to the Trinity. Biblical complementarianism neither stands nor falls on speculative parallels with the Trinity. It may be that some writers have pushed such analogies, but that has never been an essential ingredient of Danvers complementarianism.²⁶³

Nevertheless, much of complementarian theology was built upon such a social trinitarian theory that trickled down into most Biblical Womanhood™ resources. Other critiques had to do with the notion of fixed “roles,” a word that appears as a *Leitmotiv* through complementarian writings.

²⁶¹ Liam Goligher, “Reinventing God,” *Reformation 21* (blog), June 6, 2016, https://www.reformation21.org/mos/housewife-theologian/reinventing-god#.V3JB_5MrKIE.

²⁶² Kevin Giles, *The Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017).

²⁶³ Denny Burk, “My Take-Aways from the Trinity Debate,” *Denny Burk A Commentary on Theology, Politics, and Culture* (blog), September 10, 2016, <https://www.dennyburk.com/my-take-aways-from-the-trinity-debate/>.

Fixed Roles and Categories

Egalitarians have long critiqued the concept of “role” found in complementarian writings. Tim Krueger, a former editor of CBE’s magazine, *Mutuality*, writes about the complementarian view of gender roles as follows:

Observable differences are only symptoms of what really matters: manhood and womanhood. These are defined by so-called “roles” (men lead and provide; women submit and nurture). The symptom (differences) and condition (roles) are inextricably linked. To unlink them is to rebel against God’s design. This explains the alarm when egalitarians say gender roles are invalid. But there is no cause for alarm. We acknowledge that differences exist, but we don’t believe they’re linked to God-ordained “roles.” This isn’t because we want to undermine God’s way. We honestly don’t believe “roles” are God’s design, and we want to be faithful to God and the Bible.²⁶⁴

But a similar critique of “roles” as something one can put on or put off like a role in a play emerged from within complementarianism. Byrd asserts: “We need to stop using the word ‘role’ in reference to permanent fixed identity. Roles can change, especially in different cultures. My sexuality is not a role I play. I don’t need to act like a woman; I actually am a woman. Furthermore, role playing is neither our identity nor our eternal aim.”²⁶⁵ In critiquing the second affirmation of the Danvers Statement which reads “Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Gen. 2:18, 21–24; 1 Cor. 11:7–9; 1 Tim. 2:12–14),”²⁶⁶ she continues:

Here we see that word “role” being used as a fixed, ontological identity—so much so that we are to find an echo of it in every human heart. How can this be, when the Bible never even mentions these so-called ontological roles being the very thing that distinguishes men and women? We don’t see it in the creation account,

²⁶⁴ Tim Krueger, “5 Things Egalitarians Believe about Gender Differences,” CBE International, June 5, 2017, <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/5-things-egalitarians-believe-about-gender-differences/>.

²⁶⁵ Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 120.

²⁶⁶ <https://cbmw.org/about/danvers-statement/>

the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, or anywhere Christ teaches about our mission. Nor do we see it in the verses provided on the Danvers document.²⁶⁷

Gavin Ortlund, a committed complementarian, conceded:

(i)n cultures where complementarianism is embraced, it can be all too easy to confuse the essence of masculinity or femininity with one particular expression of it. But marriages and church cultures patterned after complementarian convictions will not always look the same; they take on shape and beauty as expressed through particular personalities, cultural locations, and relationship dynamics.²⁶⁸

Is the question surrounding the usefulness of the term “roles” merely one of semantics, or is it getting to the core of the distinctions between the sexual identity of men and women leading them to differences in calling? If so, cultural expressions of the latter would be secondary, but not peripheral. These questions dovetail into the aspect of what a woman’s work is.

Women and Work

Though most complementarians authors of the Biblical Womanhood™ resources reviewed did not say outright that a woman should never work outside of the home, the focus was usually on work in the home. Exceptions were made for outside work if the husband could not provide. The idea that women should never work outside of the home was gently critiqued by Nancy Pearcey when she made keen observations about why feminism was appealing to women. “Instead of suppressing women’s ambitions and quieting their tongues, it would have been better for fundamentalists to ask *why* women

²⁶⁷ Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 122.

²⁶⁸ Gavin Ortlund, “4 Dangers for Complementarians,” The Gospel Coalition, June 16, 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/four-dangers-for-complementarians/>.

were seeking a wider role in church and public life.”²⁶⁹ She explains how the historical circumstances made women receptive to the feminist message of finding greater meaning:

... industrialization took women’s work outside of their home as well—baking, brewing, gardening, canning candle making, spinning, and weaving. Wives also lost access to crafts and trades where they had once worked alongside their husbands ... In short, women no longer controlled a range of home production processes ... As functions once performed in the home were outsourced to the marketplace or the state, it began to seem that the really important work of society was performed in the public realm.²⁷⁰

The public realm was led by men. She explains further,

On one hand, feminism could not have become so widespread if it were not tapping into women’s genuine experience ... On the other hand, feminism proposes to solve the problem largely by promoting more of the same—by degrading the home yet further and exalting the public sphere as the source of woman’s true fulfillment.²⁷¹

Authors of the Biblical Womanhood™ materials seldom wrote about the woman’s work in terms of it being a part of the image of God with potential impact reaching far beyond the individual woman’s family and home. Hannah Anderson explained in an interview with Aaron Blumer why she wrote *Made for More*.²⁷² “The vision to write about *imago Dei* came because I saw a lot of young women struggling to make sense of their lives and their Christian experience. They were not rebels, but they were struggling to find fulfillment in roles and family structures alone.”

Once I started exploring the frame of *imago Dei*, the pieces began to fall into place. I wrote *Made for More* to minister to women who haven’t been taught to

²⁶⁹ Nancy R. Pearcey, *The Toxic War on Masculinity: How Christianity Reconciles the Sexes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2023), 188.

²⁷⁰ Pearcey, 188–89.

²⁷¹ Pearcey, 189.

²⁷² Hannah Anderson, *Made for More: An Invitation to Live in God’s Image*, new ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2014).

think of themselves in any terms other than womanhood and roles. These are good things—don’t misunderstand—but they only make sense if they are founded on the truth of being image bearers. The irony is that even though *Made for More* is written to women, the content isn’t gender specific—I think it could be beneficial to men too.

One of the biggest challenges facing Christians is understanding what gender is and what it isn’t ... In the 1960s, feminism reacted to this by downplaying the significance of gender. The conservative Church has since responded to feminist paradigms, but I’m not convinced that we have crafted a distinctly Christian one. In contrast to both Freud and feminism, the Scripture teaches that gender is both a significant means of reflecting God’s image but not the ultimate source of our identity.²⁷³

The critique was not that women were never helped by Biblical Womanhood™ teachings but that often, the teaching surrounding work, meaning, and the image of God in women was understated or missing. This omission led to a limited understanding of how women were to be disciplined.

Women’s Experiences of Discipleship

Biblical Womanhood™ resources took Paul’s instructions in Titus 2 seriously. The flipside is that discipleship often took place and shape in segregated spheres of the church, along gender lines. Anderson wrote:

Many women’s discipleship programs are framed entirely around gender. By sheer weight of conversation, these women were being taught that sanctification means becoming a certain type of woman, not being conformed to Christ’s image. The more I explored, the more I realized that (1) We were starting our conversations about calling and identity in Genesis 2 and (2) We were parsing the sum total of human experience through gender.²⁷⁴

Byrd agrees and states: “In Scripture we don’t find that our ultimate goal is as narrow as biblical manhood or biblical womanhood, but complete, glorified resurrection to live

²⁷³ Aaron Blumer, “Made for More: An Interview with Author Hannah Anderson,” *Sharper Iron*, April 21, 2014, <https://sharperiron.org/article/made-for-more-interview-with-author-hannah-anderson>.

²⁷⁴ Blumer.

eternally with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.²⁷⁵ Byrd claimed that women who asked deeper questions do not fit neatly into the Biblical Womanhood™ model.

I have seen the cost in my own experiences, and I am seeing it in all the emails I am getting from women who can't use a word like career, lest it sound too ambitious; women who have no voice in their churches because the men are the leaders who have all the valuable input; women who are stuck in ministries that teach "true womanhood" and are considered divisive if they point out heretical teaching on the Trinity in their book study; women who are frustrated because they do not fit into the "biblical womanhood" box of nursery duty and potlucks and feel marginalized in their own church; women who have expressed their conflict of desiring to be "good complementarians" while wanting to cry when they read some of the material marketed to them by so-called trusted Christian resources; and women who are encouraged to go to seminary for a master of arts degree but then discover doors closed for most paying jobs for which they are qualified.²⁷⁶

While this may not be every woman's experience, these critiques illustrate how Biblical Womanhood™ resources have sometimes caused pain and frustration, especially when these teachings have been the cause of worse abuse.

Ignoring, Abusing, and the Purity Movement Gone Awry?

The claim that complementarianism is abusive has been made by egalitarians before:

Complementarianism ... is a form of gender inequality where the opportunities available to a person in church and family life are predetermined according to gender. Gender inequality arises from prescribed gender roles, whether socially, culturally, or theologically constructed. This chapter will assert that the risks and dangers in the complementarian church and household are not sufficiently mitigated by the most commonly proclaimed defense of male headship: that it is only enacted in loving kindness. Gender inequality exists not only in attitudes, but

²⁷⁵ Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 109.

²⁷⁶ Byrd, 131.

in cultures, structures, prejudices, and biases. Gender inequality, even if benevolently intended, is a primary foundation for domestic abuse.²⁷⁷

Patricia Holman and Amy Burdette, who conducted a study on sexism in the church in found that of 2,234 women of an average age of 47, more women suffer health problems when they attend complementarian churches compared to more progressive churches.²⁷⁸ However, Pearcey, responding to some of the research on abuse also notices that nominal men who absorb enough of the male headship paradigm and apply it in a toxic way are the culprits for skewing many of the numbers when it comes to abuse. “Whereas committed churchgoing couples report the lowest rate of violence of any group (2.8 percent), nominals report the highest rate of any group (7.2 percent)—higher than secular couples.”²⁷⁹ Her point is that understanding biblical manhood leads to less violence against women, not more.

Patriarchy can offer a handy means for abusive men to justify their domination (‘I am the head’) and to justify physical abuse (‘She wouldn’t submit, so I had to put her in her place’). This is not to say that biblical teaching causes abuse but that oppressive men may distort Scripture to justify it.²⁸⁰

Ortlund, in his article on the dangers of complementarianism, distances complementarianism from patriarchalism and hierarchical and finds the movement at fault for failing to celebrate the contribution of women:

²⁷⁷ Kylie Maddox Pidgeon, “Complementarianism and Domestic Abuse: A Social-Scientific Perspective on Whether ‘Equal but Different’ Is Really Equal at All,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Biblical, Theological, Cultural, and Practical Perspectives*, by Ronald W. Pierce, Cynthia Long Westfall, and Christa L. McKirland, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 573, Covenant Seminary eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

²⁷⁸ Patricia Holman and Amy Burdette, “When Religion Hurts: Structural Sexism and Health in Religious Congregations,” *American Sociological Review* 86, no. 2 (2021): 234–55.

²⁷⁹ Pearcey, *The Toxic War on Masculinity*, 37.

²⁸⁰ Pearcey, 230.

We should be enthusiastic about the myriad ways that God calls and uses women. Too often this comes across as a concession from complementarians, rather than something to rejoice in. And too many complementarian churches are not just “male led,” but “male heavy” in their various ministry spheres.

In the Bible, women are involved in ministry in many different ways. Just to pick out one example: many women throughout the Old Testament were prophets (Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and so on), and in the New Testament the gift of prophecy is clearly given to both men and women (Acts 2:17-18, 21:9, 1 Corinthians 11:5). In our complementarian settings, do we seek to accommodate anything like this example? Even if we are cessationist, do we seek to implement the principle? Do we make equal room for both genders to exercise their spiritual gifts toward the body?²⁸¹

Another criticism involves the purity movement often connected with Biblical Womanhood™ teachings. Purity, chastity, and modesty are taught as great female virtues. A fierce critic of the so-called purity movement has been Sheila Wray Gregoire who has made it her goal to redress the impact of the common teachings that she feels have harmed women with the wrong message about their bodies and their sexuality. In her book about raising girls, she covers the topics of boundary-setting, messages about modesty, virginity, dating and marriage which she felt were distorted by the purity movement and had a devastating negative impact on women.

Parents today are woefully aware that the Christian subculture they so gladly embraced as adolescents did not provide the safety it promised. The sex abuse scandals, the devastation left in the wake of the purity culture, and the mass church exodus these things caused have made it impossible to ignore it any longer: the bubble may have kept some harmful stuff out, but it allowed a different form of harm to grow unchallenged. Kids were protected from the lyrics of Nirvana ... but not from sixty-year-old elders who blamed their lust problems on preteen girls.²⁸²

²⁸¹ Ortlund, “4 Dangers for Complementarians.”

²⁸² Sheila Wray Gregoire, Rebecca Gregoire Lindenbach, and Joanna Sawatsky, *She Deserves Better: Raising Girls to Resist Toxic Teachings on Sex, Self, and Speaking Up* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2023), 16.

Gregoire never puts forth what a teaching on modesty should look like, other than to encourage girls to ask themselves three questions: “Is this appropriate for the activity that I will be doing? Am I showing any parts of my body that people aren’t expecting to see? Is what I’m wearing in line with what other people my age would wear to similar events?”²⁸³ But the topic of the impact of clothing on others around them is left out for fear of making a young woman feel responsible for the sin of others.

Considering these critiques, a third way movement between egalitarianism and complementarianism was born in which proponents reconciled what the Bible said about the differences between the sexes while stressing their basic equality.

Modifications: The “Neither-Egalitarian-nor-Complementarian” Movement

A Third Way?

Michelle Lee Barnwell (whose book title *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian* could have been selected to become the name of a nascent movement) states that the priorities Christ came to instate were less about roles, authority, and rights and more about their reversal. Even the notion of headship is radically reinterpreted to mean service and sacrifice.

For Paul, the head is also the source of unity, but only as the head acts in a manner that is very unheadlike, by not exerting power or privilege but rather doing the opposite. This is the crucial element of the “reversal.” The point is that it is the head, not any other member of the body, that is acting in this way. The husband, like Christ, accomplishes his purpose by acting in a paradoxical kingdom way. Yet he must first be the head in order for his actions to be effective. Thus he leads and provides, but not as the one with privileges associated with the honored position, as would traditionally be the case. As with Christ, the head/husband sacrifices rather than expecting sacrifice from the other. As the

²⁸³ Gregoire, Lindenbach, and Sawatsky, 230.

head, he fulfills his duty through the application of kingdom values rather than exercising his worldly rights.²⁸⁴

Similarly, Bartlett claims a “neither-complementarian-nor-egalitarian” approach and by focusing on 1 Corinthians 7 and the mutuality of sexuality expressed therein, he reaches a more egalitarian position in the end.²⁸⁵ John McKinley, in his paper presented at the 2021 ETS Annual Meeting, stresses the need for a third way between egalitarianism and complementarianism. His claim for this necessity is two-fold:

Complementarianism is a theological model of women and men that faces two problems. The first problem is the perception that this theology demeans women. When many people hear the discourse about role distinctions of women and men, they hear an emphasis on inequality. Some people also hear an implication that women are ontologically inferior, or they are more vulnerable to deception than men ... Many women have been hurt by complementarian institutions. I know that many proponents of complementarianism do not intend these impressions and experiences. We should all deplore this impression that complementarianism makes some women feel diminished, inferior to men, and less valuable to God.²⁸⁶

The second problem, according to McKinley, is that complementarians cannot agree with each other.

The two competing definitions for one label causes confusion that could be fixed by pursuing a distinct position that is neither egalitarianism nor normative complementarianism (restriction of women from teaching men and from leadership functions in churches) ... An alternative to normative complementarianism and egalitarianism is needed to continue the work on thinking about sex distinctions, relationships, and God’s calling to individuals.

He delineated seven proposals for as a “third way” as follows:

1. The goal of humility.

²⁸⁴ Michelle Lee-Barnewall, Lynn Cohick, and Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian: A Kingdom Corrective to the Evangelical Gender Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 162.

²⁸⁵ Andrew Bartlett, *Men and Women in Christ: Fresh Light from the Biblical Texts* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2019).

²⁸⁶ John McKinley, “The Need for a Third Way Between Egalitarianism and Complementarianism,” *Fathom* (blog), January 27, 2022, <https://www.fathommag.com/stories/the-need-for-a-third-way-between-egalitarianism-and-complementarianism>.

2. Jesus is our goal, instead of restrictive gender stereotypes and roles.
3. Women are the image of God alongside men.
4. Paul's meaning of the head-body metaphor according to his actual use of it.
5. Update theological discourse and Bible translations.
6. The metaphor of the church as a family.
7. Distinguish a third way of Gender Humility.²⁸⁷

Language and Translation Issues

Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher, the authors of *Worthy*²⁸⁸ and *Jesus and Gender*,²⁸⁹ made similar arguments around needing a “third way.” They coined a term to define the essence of redeemed men and women recreated in the image of Christ: *Christic* or “relating to or resembling Christ.”²⁹⁰ It remains to be seen if this term will catch on as a new category of Christlike, neither-complementarian-nor-egalitarian men and women. Revisiting the New Testament passages in which believers are addressed “*adelphoi*” (the plural of brother in Greek which can also mean siblings, i.e., brothers and sisters), the authors showed the beauty of how Paul intended the New Testament community to function. McKinley would concur:

Translations should properly show women as included in the intended audience of biblical statements and as essential members of collective humanity and the church. Unfortunately, readers of our most popular translations (especially the ESV) hear an unintentionally distorted biblical voice that God speaks primarily to men and about men, leaving women to the margin as less valuable and less important to God (the marginalization is false) ...

One example is the use of “man” or “mankind” to translate the Hebrew *adam* and the Greek *anthropos*. These ancient terms were (mostly) intended to communicate as collective terms of humanity, human beings, a human being, and refer broadly to women and men. English usage of the male collectives carried the broad

²⁸⁷ McKinley.

²⁸⁸ Elyse M. Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher, *Worthy: Celebrating the Value of Women* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2020).

²⁸⁹ Fitzpatrick and Schumacher, *Jesus & Gender: Living as Sisters & Brothers in Christ*.

²⁹⁰ Fitzpatrick and Schumacher, 27.

meaning for several centuries. To readers in the present day, the collective meaning is diminishing quickly. The term “man” has become specific as a reference to males only.

Another example is the Greek term *adelphoi*, usually translated as “brothers” or “brethren.” This term carries the rich family metaphor of sibling bonds for the church in a way that made sense to the ancient readers. The original usage referred to women and men. Some English translations have adjusted translations of the hundreds of uses of *adelphoi* with the intended ancient meaning brothers and sisters.²⁹¹

Amy Peeler, a New Testament professor at Wheaton College, asked the question about the language used for God. Without denying the fatherhood of God and his self-revelation, she nevertheless charges theologians of the past of assuming that God was male, and that patriarchy was the inevitable ensuing evil. “Although many Christian theologians would assert to the contrary, the assumptions and actions of interpreters from the past to the present disclose and underlying belief that God is male.”²⁹² Anne Kennedy, however, responded to these claims in a review at The Christian Research Institute by asserting that no serious theologian, past or present, has ever believed that God is male:

The patriarchy, I believe, is a diversion, a tired, limping boogie man. It is the easiest villain, shielding both men and women from experiencing the true life-changing knowledge that their created design is good, and that the order God, as Father, establishes for His Kingdom is not oppressive. Recovering this forgotten and gracious gift would, indeed, benefit both men and women. Rather than recovering it, however, Peeler sets out to rescue God from an idea that no one, especially in mainstream evangelicalism today, falls prey to. God, she explains, in case it had not occurred to you, is not male.²⁹³

²⁹¹ John McKinley, “Seven Needed Revisions within Complementarianism,” CBE International, April 30, 2022, <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/seven-needed-revisions-within-complementarianism/>.

²⁹² Amy Peeler, *Women and the Gender of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2022), 2.

²⁹³ Anne Kennedy, “Women and the Genderless Jesus: A Review of ‘Women and the Gender of God’ by Amy Peeler,” *The Christian Research Institute* (blog), August 16, 2023,

Peeler finds the value of the feminine side of Jesus through his incarnation within Mary but never goes as far as calling God Mother, as other feminists do. Mary's ability to bear Christ is, for Peeler, permission enough for a woman to be a minister of the sacraments.

The Christian God loves women, a conviction most keenly felt, I should say, not in the library, where I feel God's pleasure in discovery, not even in the classroom, which I love more than I can articulate, but chiefly when I stand at the altar each week, where I cross the cross emblazoned over my chest as one has been granted the supremely undeserved grace to come in the name of the Lord. Throughout the years in which I have struggled through texts and conversations that whispered that God's love was less for me because I am female, the Lord I met at the table each week would never allow me to believe the lie.²⁹⁴

Whether or not one agrees with her conclusions, the discussion surrounding language, the image of God in women, and how women connect to God through a male Christ, all flow into the discussions surrounding biblical womanhood today.

Summary of Concerns with Biblical Womanhood™

To summarize the critiques of complementarianism more generally and the Biblical Womanhood™ teachings more specifically, the researcher assigned them to three broad categories of questions. First, regarding the normative perspective: What does the Bible teach about womanhood, and is it based on the intra-trinitarian relationships within the Godhead, and if so, which ones, and are they warranted? If there is a relationship of authority and submission within the Trinity at all, what does it look like to make such a structure the model for husband-wife and men-women relationships? Would this notion imply the woman's eternal, ontological subordination? Second, regarding the

<https://www.equip.org/articles/women-and-the-genderless-jesus-a-review-of-women-and-the-gender-of-god-by-amy-peeler/>.

²⁹⁴ Peeler, *Women and the Gender of God*, 190.

situational perspective: What are the woman's roles in marriage and society? Can they be affected by the cultural situation? What does it mean for women's status, whether married or single, their work, and their broader influence in the world? Other critiques came from a third perspective, namely, an existential perspective. Have these teachings produced good fruit in the lives of individual women? Have legalism and stereotyping or poor use of language and translations alienated women? Has the burden of purity and modesty fallen to women to bear? Have churches and homes been safe environments which include, value, promote, and celebrate the contributions of women?

Summary of the Literature Review

Three main groupings of literature were examined: first, a biblical theology of womanhood, second, the resourcing books responding to evangelical feminism with definitions of womanhood. These were labelled Biblical Womanhood™ books. Third, this literature review concluded with the critiques against these writings and concepts, including from within the complementarian movement. Considering the literature examined, few resources written on the biblical theology of womanhood exist, and even fewer women have contributed to the formulation of that theology. Biblical Womanhood™ books did indeed define womanhood from the Bible but did not always provide a balanced approach for the holistic discipleship of women, and few of them taught womanhood from a biblical theological viewpoint. The reactions against these Biblical Womanhood™ teachings show how they trickled down into the lives of women painfully at times.

This literature review was intended to be the backdrop for the qualitative research, providing the development of the theological debates surrounding womanhood from a

pre-feminist viewpoint, as well as through the teachings which developed as a reaction to feminism, the content of which this researcher named Biblical Womanhood™.

One more question remains to be asked: Will these teachings address the current state of confusion surrounding womanhood and gender deconstructionism and be sufficient to equip the next generation of women?

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore how women's ministry leaders in the church (WML) are adapting their teaching on biblical womanhood to disciple the next generation of women effectively. The assumption of this study was that WML will be challenged to adapt their teaching on biblical womanhood to address contemporary ideas on womanhood. The goal of this study was to provide insights on how to teach it in the future, including the need to create updated resources.

The researcher developed open-ended questions to find out whether WML are adapting their teaching on biblical womanhood to address theological (normative), cultural (situational), and personal (existential) changes. The following questions guided the qualitative research:

1. What models do women's ministry leaders in the church currently use to teach women about biblical womanhood?
2. What challenges do women's ministry leaders encounter when they teach biblical womanhood to younger women?
3. What changes to their teaching on biblical womanhood have women's ministry leaders already undertaken to disciple the next generation of women?
4. What resources for teaching biblical womanhood do ministry leaders in the church say they will need to disciple women in the future?

Design of the Study

Sharan B. Merriam defines a general, basic qualitative study as a way to understand “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences.”²⁹⁵ In this case the researcher wanted to explore how WML experienced the receptivity of their own teaching on biblical womanhood, how they constructed their teaching on the subject in the past, and how they are interpreting women’s responses to their teaching now. What meaning do they attribute to the term “biblical womanhood,” and how do they feel they will have to change the way they communicate about it to adapt to the current cultural challenged surrounding sex, gender, and womanhood?

Merriam identifies four characteristics of qualitative research: “the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive.”²⁹⁶

This study employed a qualitative research design and conducted semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data gathering. This qualitative method uncovered comprehensive and descriptive data from participant perspectives in the narrow phenomena of the teaching of biblical womanhood by WML in Reformed, evangelical churches.

²⁹⁵ Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed. (Jossey-Bass, 2015), 15.

²⁹⁶ Merriam and Tisdell, 15.

Participant Sample Selection

This research required participants able to communicate in depth about women's ministry. To gain data towards best practices, the participants self-reported to the researcher that they had more than five years of experience in women's ministry and felt that their efforts increasingly resulted in hoped-for outcomes. Therefore, the purposeful study sample consisted of a selection of people from the population of women's ministry leaders in evangelical, Reformed churches.

Participants were chosen for their good reputation as mature women's ministry leaders in local churches, their quality content and experience in teaching, and their ability to be self-reflective and innovative. Participants varied in location, age, and experience for a broader study perspective. Eleven women's ministry leaders were invited to participate via an introductory letter, followed by a personal email or phone call. All expressed interest and gave written informed consent to participate. In addition, each participant signed a "Research Participant Consent Form" to respect and to protect the human rights of the participants. The Human Rights Risk Level Assessment is "minimal" to "no risk" according to the Seminary IRB Guidelines and the researcher used the following consent form.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

I agree to participate in the research which is being conducted by Eowyn Stoddard to investigate how to best teach biblical womanhood considering contemporary challenges. My participation is entirely voluntary. I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that they can be identified

as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, and/or destroyed. The following points have been explained to me:

- 1) The purpose of the research is to investigate how to best teach biblical womanhood considering the aftermath of the criticisms of Biblical Womanhood™ and contemporary challenges.
- 2) Potential benefits of the research may include identifying gaps in teaching materials, gaining creative perspectives on new ways to present and discuss the idea of biblical womanhood and provide an apologetic for gender that is biblical, compelling, and attractive to the next generation. Though there are no direct benefits for participants, I hope they will be encouraged by sharing their experiences with an eager listener and learner.
- 3) The research process will include interviewing eleven Women's Ministry Leaders, compiling their answers to the research questions and using their answers to interact with the literature and propose further areas of research and collaboration for developing creative teaching materials.
- 4) Participants in this research will answer questions surrounding the research topic and elaborate on their answers according to the interview protocol established at the onset. The interviews will last between one and one and a half hours.
- 5) Potential discomforts or stresses: The Potential risks are minimal to none: Minimal – the Human Rights Risk Level assessment is deemed “No Risk.”
- 6) Any information that I provide will be held in strict confidence. At no time will my name be reported along with my responses. The data gathered for this research is confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent, unless otherwise required by law. Audiotapes or videotapes of

interviews will be erased following the completion of the dissertation. By my signature, I am giving informed consent for the use of my responses in this research project.

- 7) Limits of Privacy: I understand that, by law, the researcher cannot keep information confidential if it involves abuse of a child or vulnerable adult or plans for a person to harm themselves or to hurt someone else.
- 8) The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the study.

Eowyn Stoddard_____

Printed Name and Signature of Researcher

Date

Printed Name and Signature of Participant

Date

Research at Covenant Theological Seminary which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to: Director, Doctor of Ministry; Covenant Theological Seminary.
12330 Conway Road; St. Louis, MO 63141; Phone (314) 434-4044.

Please sign both copies. Keep one. Return the other to the researcher. Thank you.

Each participant completed a one-page demographic questionnaire before the interview in line with the selection criteria above. It also requested information of particular interest in this study. Participant variables of interest included (1) length of time in women's ministry, (2) different denominational affiliations, (3) size of their church and (4) number of women involved at their church. The analysis in Chapter 4 described the relevance of the demographic data.

Data Collection

This study utilized semi-structured interviews for primary data gathering. The open-ended nature of interview questions facilitates the ability to build upon participant responses to complex issues to explore them more thoroughly. “Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate.”²⁹⁷

These methods looked for common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting views across the variation of participants. A semi-structured interview provided uniformity and flexibility to make room for a diversity of experiences and opinions as well as space for WMLs to reflect creatively.

Usually, specific information is desired from all the respondents, in which case there is a more structured section to the interview. But most of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic.²⁹⁸

The researcher interviewed eleven WML via Zoom or in person for one hour to one and half hours each. The researcher recorded the interviews with a digital recorder. By conducting two interviews in a week, the researcher completed the data gathering over four weeks. Directly after each interview, the researcher wrote field notes with descriptive and reflective observations on the interview time. The interview protocol contained the following questions.

²⁹⁷ Merriam and Tisdell, 108.

²⁹⁸ Merriam and Tisdell, 110–11.

1. Current Teaching

What models do women's ministry leaders in the church currently use to teach women about biblical womanhood?

- Tell me about what motivates you to teach women about womanhood from the Bible?
- Can you tell me about how you teach women about biblical womanhood in your context?

2. Challenges

What challenges do women's ministry leaders encounter when they teach biblical womanhood to younger women?

- Tell me about the various kinds of challenges you encounter among younger women when you teach them about biblical womanhood.
- Is using the phrase "biblical womanhood" helpful or unhelpful? Explain.
- Are there specific objections they have to the biblical womanhood teaching?
 - a. If so, are these objections theological or practical in nature?
 - b. Are these objections external (cultural pressures, worldview differences) or internal in nature (self-understanding, calling, identity, body image)?
- How would you describe the strengths and weaknesses of the biblical womanhood model and resources of the past?

3. Adaptive Teaching

What changes to their teaching on biblical womanhood have women's ministry leaders already undertaken to disciple the next generation of women?

- Do you have any fears or concerns about changing how you communicate God's unchanging truth about womanhood to the next generation?
- Can you give me specific examples of how young women responded when you implemented creative ways of teaching on womanhood from the Bible?
 - a. If positive, what specific aspects of your teaching did they say helped or encouraged them?
 - b. If positive, were there particular "a-ha" moments they experienced?
 - c. If negative, would you be willing to share specific ways in which women struggled with or objected to your teaching on biblical womanhood?
- Do you have any unimplemented thoughts on creative ways of teaching on biblical womanhood? Explain.

4. Specific Resources Needed

What resources for teaching biblical womanhood do ministry leaders in the church say they will need to disciple women in the future?

- Can you identify current cultural issues you felt you needed to address in your teaching on womanhood that older resources failed to mention?
 - a. What elements from that teaching would you want to maintain?
 - b. What aspects would you want to see changed in how biblical womanhood is taught for the benefit of the next generation of women?
- Based on your previous answers, what teaching resources on biblical womanhood do you think you will be needing in the future to disciple the next generation of women?

Data Analysis

As soon as possible and always within one week of each meeting, the researcher personally transcribed each interview by using computer software to play back the digital recording on a computer and transcribing, using the “transcribe” function of Microsoft Office 365. This study utilized the constant comparison method of routinely analyzing the data throughout the interview process. This method provided for the ongoing revision, clarification, and evaluation of the resultant data categories. For example, certain questions had two versions to accommodate WML who had taught on biblical womanhood in the past but were not currently doing so. The researcher would hence ask, “How are you teaching or how did you teach ...?” Questions had a subset of follow-up questions if the researcher felt the subject would have more to say prompted by a more specific question.

Once the interviews and observation notes were transcribed into computer files, they were coded and analyzed using a table which sorted answers by question and participant. The analysis focused on discovering and identifying (1) common themes, patterns, and recurring observations across the variation of participants; and (2) congruence or discrepancy between the participants, as well as identifying creative ideas for future resourcing.

Researcher Position

The researcher has lived most of her life in multi-cultural environments in France and Germany and has been involved in women’s ministries formally and informally for the last twenty-three years as a Christian missionary. She is of the Reformed, complementarian conviction, which may create a bias toward complementarian subjects,

but she has experienced broadly evangelical, charismatic, and egalitarian churches and understands well their arguments and fervent desire for women to be fully engaged in ministry and the life of the church. “Since the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, data have been filtered through his or her particular theoretical position and biases.”²⁹⁹ The researcher believes in the goodness of binary sex as created by God and reflective of his nature and that the redemptive storyline of the Bible utilizes binary sex as an illustrative picture of God’s relationship with his Bride, his people. The researcher derives her understanding of biblical womanhood from the unfolding story of redemption found in God’s infallible, unchanging Word. She believes the church should address the issues of the day in a way that is winsome and intelligible.

Study Limitations

As stated in the previous section, participants were limited to those serving in the United States because teaching materials about biblical womanhood produced in the English language end up being influential on Christian markets everywhere. Therefore, the results will be primarily taken out of the American church’s context. The study’s findings may be generalized for other Western environments but will have to be abstracted or redone for non-Western situations. Readers who generalize aspects of these conclusions should evaluate those aspects in their context.

Another limitation are the theological parameters applied. All subjects were part of conservative, evangelical and Reformed churches, or denominations. Other church

²⁹⁹ Merriam and Tisdell, 264.

traditions have insights into the topic from their perspective, but subjects were selected from groups currently working through the debates surrounding biblical womanhood.

As with all qualitative studies, readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context. The results may also have implications for the writing of future training resources on biblical womanhood, both in a U.S. and other international contexts, taking cultural differences into consideration.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how women's ministry leaders in the church (WML) are adapting their teaching on biblical womanhood to disciple the next generation of women effectively. This chapter provides the findings of the eleven WML's interviews and reports on common themes and relevant insights pertaining to the research questions. To address the purpose of this study, the following research questions guided the qualitative research.

1. What models do WML in the church currently use to teach women about biblical womanhood?
2. What challenges do WML encounter when they teach biblical womanhood to younger women?
3. What changes to their teaching on biblical womanhood have WML already undertaken to disciple the next generation of women?
4. What resources for teaching biblical womanhood do WML in the church say they will need to disciple women in the future?

Introduction to Participants and Context

The researcher selected eleven women's ministry leaders (WML) to participate. All names and identifiable participant information have been changed to protect identity. They represent churches from the South, the Southwest, Southeast, the West Coast, the East Coast, and the Northeast of the United States. They are involved as WML in

evangelical, Reformed conservative churches. Most are paid staff, and some are volunteers.

Claire serves in the women's ministry of her church and is a Senior Fellow for an Institute for Faith and Culture. She holds a Ph.D. in Old Testament. Her church has a Sunday attendance of 1500 with 150 women at weekly Bible study. She writes her own curriculum for the Bible studies and teaches classes.

Amber holds a master's in biblical studies and was a missionary before she became a WML at her church of 820, with about 300 women involved in various small groups. One of her church's main emphases is small group discipleship.

Heather is the Women's Education Coordinator at her midsize church of 300. She oversees the women's ministry, selecting the teaching materials for the Bible studies. Over ninety women attend the weekly Bible studies and small groups. She is pursuing a Master of Arts in Ministry degree with a focus on educational ministries.

Katherine has not only been involved in teaching women in her own church, but she also has been a national women's ministry trainer in her denomination of 1500 churches for the last thirty years. In this role, she has seen multiple churches and how they teach biblical womanhood. Beyond that, she is a writer, blogger, and podcast host.

Rachel has been instructing women formally and informally for decades. She has a graduate degree in Christian Studies and is also a writer. Her church has between 30 to 40 women involved in Bible study. She has also been a retreat speaker and coach.

Amy is a former missionary and holds a master's in theological studies. She is an involved pastor's wife at her multi-cultural church where forty to fifty women attend

Bible study or small groups. She also works at a college and is commissioned to disciple the female students.

Ellie holds an MDiv and was ordained in a mainline denomination, but her church of 130 left it when they felt it no longer was faithful to the Scriptures. She functions in a diaconal role, teaches, and disciples women, authors articles, and is a regular contributor to a podcast which analyzes culturally relevant topics from a Christian perspective.

Sophia is a pastor's wife who holds a D.Min. in women's ministries and has taught women's Bible study for twenty years, children's Sunday school for twelve years, and was on staff at a large church for eight years. She teaches women's Bible study at her current church of 150.

Sandy has been involved in women's ministries for thirty-five years. Her church serves 500-600 women. Besides leading local church Bible studies and helping her pastor with the new members class, she also holds a regional role equipping women in her denomination and a cross-cultural role, training women internationally.

Lisa was a missionary for eighteen years and has taught women's Bibles studies for as long as she can remember. She is a writer and contributes to an apologetic ministry which resources churches worldwide. She has been a teacher at her midsize church since 2011 and is also a retreat speaker in her denomination.

Doris is the current Director of Adult Ministries at her church of 600. Before that she was Director of Women's Ministry for six years. She currently has 120 women involved in Bible study. She is advisor to her presbytery's women's ministry executive council which equips women's ministries in local churches.

The Models

The first research question sought to determine what models WML use to teach women about biblical womanhood. Before delving into the core of the research questions, the researcher asked a personal question about what motivated the interviewees to teach women about biblical womanhood.

Motivation

All WML spoke passionately about teaching the word of God to women, loving them well, and helping them understand who they are in Christ. Claire summarized the sentiment when she said, “I just love God. I love his Word. I love women.” Heather explained her passion this way:

I think what motivates me is more the Bible, if that makes sense. It's not that I'm necessarily passionate about teaching women about womanhood, but specifically what does God's word say about us as disciples of Christ first and foremost, and then how does that apply to our understanding of what it means to be a woman?

Lisa answered in an analogous way. “I love teaching women, but in the structure of what I do for the church, I simply want to explore the Scriptures to apply them in our lives. If the topic arises in any text, I might focus on aspects of our service *as* women, but we don't tend to do a series on this topic.” “Nonetheless,” she continued, “since we are all women, the ethos of the lecture and its reception, including the discussion times after the lecture, are soaked in application to our own womanly lives.” Sandy elaborated and urged Christians “not to separate womanhood from the other realities of covenant theology, because to isolate womanhood just makes it become about roles and what we can and can't do.” For Amy, the confusion about gender she sees in younger women motivates her and leads them to ask, “What does it even mean to be a woman?” Others stressed their

desire for women to understand their value and uniqueness. Doris wanted “women to understand that they have something very beautiful to offer the rest of the church, the Lord, and the whole world.” She continued, “I want them to know that they've been created by God in a unique way to be able to use their gifts.” Another important sentiment was for women to be able to see their lives as part of God’s big story, not in isolation from it. Rachel asked, “How are we going to live as women if we don't know what the Bible says about who we are? We need to know our story, and our story starts with what the Bible says about our story.”

Their answers established their passionate, sincere motivation to teach women about womanhood from a love of God’s truth and how it is applied to the lives of women.

Definitions of Biblical Womanhood

To define terminology, the researcher asked the WML to define the term “biblical womanhood.” As referenced previously, the researcher maintains a distinction between a general definition of biblical womanhood as seeing womanhood through the lens of the Bible and a narrower, more specific definition of biblical womanhood, a kind of Biblical Womanhood™ trademark that was born as a response to evangelical feminism in the 1990s.

Some WML found this task difficult and were not able to state a succinct definition. Rachel said, “The overarching definition is what the Bible tells us and shows us about who women are.” Claire’s definition was succinct, but she elaborated, “I would say that it is what the Bible is teaching on what it means to be a woman, God's unique design for her within the created order, family, church and society.” Lisa explained why it is difficult to come up with one definition because women were obviously created by

God to be a part of his plan, and “therefore anything that we learn about a woman in the Bible is biblical womanhood. So, in that sense it's a very broad category.” She also added that “because of a whole variety of cultural issues that come up in various contexts, there is no simplistic model for what it means to be a biblical woman.”

Katherine said it meant “to get up every day to operate out of the creation design God has given you and to glorify him in everything that you do and see in the Word.” Amy felt it is important to explain biblical womanhood to her Gen Z students in a way that ties it to their female biology, “I think a biblical woman is a disciple of Jesus in an embodied female body. So, it’s following Jesus faithfully as we lean into our female body, and it has something to do with children and life.”

Ellie did not want to remove too much of the mystery of being a woman and agreed with Amy that we are embodied creatures:

I would say that God created gendered and sexed people and so women are not foils for men. Their relationship to men is really mysterious, and who they are is something that only God can apprehend. A man cannot understand a woman and her roles, and her personhood are something that she just embodies. She's either going to be a bad woman or a good woman, biblically. It's not something that you can put on like a garment. It's something that you are.

It was clear that Sandy was used to speaking on this topic:

I would say biblical womanhood is about what was stamped upon us at creation. The helper design was given to us before the fall. In our mission as women, we are life-givers. Whether we're giving life in a biological sense or spiritual sense, we're life-givers wherever we go. We can either breathe life into situations, or we can suck the life right out of relationships, and so not only are we a helper by design, but we are life givers in our mission.

After giving a more general definition, Lisa expounded:

God made Adam first, and he gave Eve to him as his help. And this is not a second-class citizenship. This is an honored and beloved position that we hold as women. And in general, God intended men and women to be married, but that's not always the case. So, you have women who are single and serving the Lord,

and singleness is not a breaking of the mold. There's nothing wrong with being single.

Katherine wanted to guard against biblical womanhood being equated with only one thing. “I will say complementarian circles tend to focus too much on one season of life to equal biblical womanhood. But that's not what it is.” She meant that biblical womanhood is often defined as being a wife and mother. Amber understood from her experience as a single woman: “I'm a single, unmarried, childless woman and being a woman is not wife and mother to me, so those two gigantic things that we often throw in there as the essence of womanhood don't apply to me. But I was created as a woman. I'm still contributing as a woman.”

Doris kept it positive. “I think biblical womanhood is understanding who God created you to be and to be able to embrace the roles that he's given us in a way that brings glory to him and brings others in. It's going to be attractive, positive, and inviting. Let's celebrate that and move out in a way that brings God glory!”

Core Elements of Biblical Womanhood

When asked about core elements that WML stress in their teaching (or would stress in their teaching if they are not currently teaching biblical womanhood directly), distinct aspects came to the fore. The majority stressed the creation design or the woman and the creation order. Half mentioned the helper role and the life-giving calling, one third mentioned the call to dominion and women as image-bearers of God. In terms of teaching methods, Bible study was the number one method all mentioned. Two mentioned viewing womanhood as part of God's story, three used a biblical theological and typological approach. Four used biblical women characters, and a couple mentioned

studying the lives of women in church history. Included in this question was an inquiry about the types of materials WML use, other than the Bible.

Materials Used

WML were asked what kind of materials they have used when they teach about biblical womanhood. They explained which books or thinkers had shaped their views on biblical womanhood. Even though they may not be using them currently, these books provided a scaffolding for their thinking on the topic. Here is a summary list.

Half of the WML mentioned Susan Hunt's materials: *By Design*,³⁰⁰ *Spiritual Mothering*,³⁰¹ *The Legacy of Biblical Womanhood*,³⁰² and *Life-Giving Leadership*.³⁰³ All spoke respectfully of Hunt as an influence in the PCA denomination, but a few had mixed feelings. Amy explained,

The True Woman— I don't actually love that book— but it's part of my archive because it's formed the way that I think, whether it's in reaction to or an embracing of biblical womanhood. So, I think that's an important one for Christian women to be exposed to because it provides a common platform to interact with biblical womanhood.

Four WML mentioned Elizabeth Elliott. For example, Sophia said, “I love Elizabeth Elliott; she's so great, and she's very archaic at the same time. I just love her no-nonsense grip on Scripture and her view of what our role is as women.” Ellie mentioned her too. “I loved Elizabeth Elliott, for example, but appealing to her doesn't really help at

³⁰⁰ Hunt, *By Design*.

³⁰¹ Hunt, *Spiritual Mothering*.

³⁰² Hunt, Thompson, and Dunahoo, *The Legacy of Biblical Womanhood*.

³⁰³ Susan Hunt and Karen Hodge, *Life-Giving Leadership* (PCA CDM, 2018).

this point.” Claire concurs, “I drew a lot from Elizabeth Elliott.” Other resources that were only mentioned once included:

- *Adorned*,³⁰⁴ by Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth
- Various Bible studies by Jen Wilkin, Nancy Guthrie, Courtney Doctor, Kathleen Nielsen, Sarah Ivill, and Karen Hodge
- *Freedom to Flourish*,³⁰⁵ by Elizabeth Garn
- *God’s Good Design*,³⁰⁶ by Claire Smith
- *Jesus, Justice, and Gender Roles*,³⁰⁷ by Kathy Keller
- *Women and the Word of God*,³⁰⁸ by Susan Foh
- *Word-filled Women’s Ministry*, edited by Kathleen Nielsen
- *Worthy*, by Elise Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher

Books not specific to the teaching of biblical womanhood nor written by women but informed the way WML taught were:

- *Gender*,³⁰⁹ by Ivan Illich.
- *Love thy Body*³¹⁰, by Nancy Pearcey.

³⁰⁴ Wolgemuth, *Adorned*.

³⁰⁵ Elizabeth Garn, *Freedom to Flourish: The Rest God Offers in the Purpose He Gives You* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R, 2021).

³⁰⁶ Smith, *God’s Good Design*.

³⁰⁷ Keller, *Jesus, Justice, and Gender Roles*.

³⁰⁸ Foh, *Women and the Word of God*.

³⁰⁹ Ivan Illich, *Gender* (London; New York: Marion Boyars, 1983).

- *Men and Women in the Church*,³¹¹ by Kevin de Young.
- *The Beauty of the Binary*,³¹² by Luke Griffo.
- *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution*,³¹³ by Louise Perry.
- *The Genesis of Gender*,³¹⁴ by Abigail Favale.
- *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*,³¹⁵ by Carl Trueman.
- *The Toxic War against Masculinity*,³¹⁶ by Nancy Pearcey.

One surprise was finding several WML who did not teach biblical womanhood head-on. For example, Heather said, “So that concept of biblical womanhood—I don’t necessarily search out materials on ‘how can I be a better woman?’” She would favor discipleship terminology of identity in Christ over biblical womanhood. “I wouldn’t ever have a Bible study that was just on biblical womanhood.” Amy shared Heather’s concern that discipleship should not start with womanhood. “I think biblical womanhood needs to start within the conversation about discipleship in general, less like pink verses of the Bible and blue verses of the Bible. There are very few places where it’s gender specific, though there are a few. The fruit of the Spirit is for all believers.” Sophia also never

³¹⁰ Nancy R. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019).

³¹¹ Kevin DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church: A Short, Biblical, Practical Introduction* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

³¹² Luke Griffo and Mark Coppenger, *The Beauty of the Binary: Male and Female He Created Them* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2023).

³¹³ Louise Perry, *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution* (Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA, USA: Polity Press, 2022).

³¹⁴ Abigail Favale, *The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2022).

³¹⁵ Carl R. Trueman and Rod Dreher, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

³¹⁶ Pearcey, *The Toxic War on Masculinity*.

taught Bible studies on womanhood. “I never taught on womanhood. Really the only way that I have ever taught on womanhood was when we studied different women in Scripture.” Lisa said of her WML team, “We don’t tend to do a series on this topic. My teaching now is not specifically geared to the issue of womanhood. In my own discussion group, we don’t get many questions about this. It may be a weakness.”

Summary of Current Models Used to Teach Biblical Womanhood

No one-size-fits-all approach to teaching on biblical womanhood was found. All WML started with the Bible. Two distinctions were found in how WML approach teaching biblical womanhood: directly and indirectly. Most WML preferred to teach it indirectly, as they encountered it in their Bible studies, meaning they did not seek out or create specific talks or Bible studies to teach on the topic directly. Dealing with issues surrounding womanhood flowed from the topics encountered in Scripture and as a subcategory of discipleship. Some did choose to focus on the topic directly either because they are specifically commissioned to teach it and equip women in their denomination or because their demographic is asking direct questions about gender. These women, though they do not always find it easy, are teaching other women directly. Though most WML expressed being indebted to older resources they felt these older resources would not connect well with the next generation of women. Several expressed that they are trying to read more broadly to inform how they teach or plan to teach in the future.

The Challenges

The second research question sought to determine what challenges WML encounter when they teach biblical womanhood to younger women. All participants were

asked about challenges and objections they find when teaching biblical womanhood to younger women, defined as women under 25.

The challenges encountered were logistical, communal, and relational. Others had to do with the specific content of the teaching or the existential realities and perceptions of the young women.

Logistical and Relational Challenges

The Absence of Younger Women

The first challenge was that younger women are not coming to the women's Bible study. Heather said, "It's been a constant challenge, particularly from a women's ministry perspective: 'How do we engage that younger generation in what we're doing?'" Even when her church offers childcare, the younger women aren't coming. Rachel shared a similar concern. "I think part of the challenge is many of the younger women are working and are not coming to Bible study. Many of them must work outside the home." Doris has put some serious thought into this problem.

It's a big struggle even getting some of them to come to a Bible Study or to just be a part of the kinds of ministries that we might be structuring in a church like ours. Eighty percent or more in the studies are women in their 50s and above. The 25- to 35-year-old group is really small, just a couple percent, and then the rest is between 35 to 50. That group is a little bit larger, but yeah, so they're not coming to Bible study, and I'm trying to figure out why.

She answered her own questions soon after, stating, "I think we don't have as many younger women in our Bible study because they're working." Furthermore, multiple WML mentioned that younger women prefer one-on-one interactions rather than group settings.

Intergenerational Struggles

The second challenge was that the older women struggle relationally with younger women. Heather said, “I think that the challenge that I had was the older women did not feel like they knew how to connect or be interested in their lives.” Sandy observed a certain level of insecurity in the older women, “We need an apologetic for womanhood. I think one of the challenges that we face as older women is that we don't know ourselves. When I think of that older woman/younger woman dynamic, we have so many women who are very well equipped, trained, and knowledgeable, but they just don't see themselves as disciplers.”

Anxiety

Ellie has noticed that younger women are extremely anxious, “with very high levels of anxiety about ordinary life, which I think previous generations have just not experienced in the same way.” Sophia also reported this trend. “It's fascinating because biblical womanhood doesn't seem to be an interesting touch point right now.” She continued, “Everybody wants to do a Bible study on anxiety. Women need teaching on womanhood, but they are hyper-focused on issues of anxiety.” Rachel commented, “After COVID we've had a lot of social anxiety as well,” which was why younger women were not coming or connecting.

These challenges did not focus on the teaching of biblical womanhood, per se, but they were interconnected, as the researcher later found.

Biblical Womanhood— Not a Helpful Term Anymore

When asked about whether WML used the term “biblical womanhood,” Claire answered, “I’m not sure it’s that helpful anymore. It was good at the time. I think it was very needed, and it’s established itself. Those of us who’ve been around for a while know what it means, but it’s kind of archaic.” Amber noted, “Biblical womanhood is a little bit of an afterthought. It’s the term—It’s probably an antiquated term.” Heather reflected on her use of terminology in the following way, “This whole biblical womanhood concept really hasn’t entered my vocabulary until recent years, honestly.” Rachel expressed doubt about using the phrase, “I think it would be unhelpful for the younger women of my daughter’s age and younger. I think they want to know what it means to be a woman, but there is something about that phrase that I’m questioning because it’s my hunch that they would be put off by it.” She expanded, “If there were a Bible study advertised at the church with that title, they would automatically think, ‘I don’t want to be a part of that.’” Amy used stronger language: “I hate that term. I don’t like the term ‘biblical womanhood.’ To be honest, I don’t think it’s helpful because of all the historical language around it. I don’t see that in Scripture.” Ellie said, “I know in my church if I said I was going to do something like that, the women in my church would shudder, and they would not sign up. They wouldn’t be there. There’s not a market for that in my local context.” Sophia said, “Yeah, I never use it.” Sandy, who often teaches internationally mentioned, “In Africa, there’s a hunger to know, they want to know. But biblical womanhood in the US? It’s like, whatever ... Don’t give me that!” Lisa answered, “I never use this phrase ... just realizing this. Oh, I might if someone were to ask me about books.” She continued, “I think that the term tends to set you up for a very limited structure, a very top-down structure, a kind of authoritarian ‘this is what you have to be,’ so it doesn’t flow out of my

mouth very easily.” Doris has also moved away from this language. “When I say ‘biblical womanhood’ in my world, the walls go up. They don’t want to hear or talk about it because biblical womanhood also has male headship attached to it, and male headship in many of our contexts has been a pushing down of women, and because of that it has a negative connotation.”

Katherine has mixed feelings about it, stating, “Unfortunately, because of poor applications, abuse, or the demeaning of women, it has created a lot of cultural baggage, but I don’t think we shouldn’t use a phrase just because some people have poured other meanings into it.” The vast majority don’t use it or feel they can’t use it anymore because of its connotations. Two WML called the perception of the term biblical womanhood “archaic,” three WML used the word “antiquated,” and two described the term as “old fashioned.” This finding indicates that the term is loaded with negativity and irrelevance for the next generation.

Negative Connotations of Biblical Womanhood

Katherine believed that “the biggest issue is what I would call perception.” Claire observed that many young women believe that “it’s a set of things you can and can’t do. The focus on what women can or can’t do is a reaction coming out of feminism. So that was more of an emotional objection.” Rachel shares a concern with this perception. “I think that’s where those types of teaching can be really detrimental to allowing women to flourish in the way the Lord has called them. They are pressing them down saying ‘no, that’s not biblical. You can’t be that way.’” In talking to her daughter, she sees that “she just wants her freedom and I think that she might find books about biblical womanhood

limiting. I do sense that for her and many of her friends who are Christians, they wouldn't think that the historical, biblical womanhood books and topics are very relevant to them.”

Amber mentioned that “if anyone who has been brought up in a conservative, complementarian and evangelical world, they've probably heard something detrimental to their value.”

Katherine thought that young women perceive the teaching of biblical womanhood as limiting but “there are so many opportunities to disciple women, and that's what we're called to. But I feel like some of the younger generation want something more. They want a title, or they want a seat at the table somehow and I find it fascinating.”

Further objections to the teaching of biblical womanhood fell under various categories: theological, experiential, or a lack of education or understanding.

Theological Objections

The following theological objections to biblical womanhood were noted.

Katherine said, “They'd say the patriarchy. A narrow view of women.” Sophia also said something similar, “submission.” Sandy felt like “all that they had ever heard was they heard biblical womanhood from the approach of submission versus creation design.” She added, “This is coming from male hierarchy. Women are free now. We're all equal. And yes, we are equal. But we are still designed very differently in our function.”

Lisa was aware of the issue of ESS (Eternal Subordination of the Son) and has interacted with it but is not sure it is a widespread concern. “Then there is the issue of the eternal submission of the Son, which I find difficult.” She mentioned that “the books are quite big and intellectual in a way. They're quite deep. And I don't think there are many women

in our church who would want to tackle a book like that and read through it. So, I don't think our women are at all familiar with the name of Wayne Grudem.” Claire described a situation in which a younger theology student disagreed with Susan Foh’s interpretation of the woman’s desire in Genesis 3:16.

The seminary student’s objection was theological, I think. She didn’t want to see women viewed in that way, negatively. Because, according to Foh, women have a tendency to take authority over men, men keep them away or are suspect of women in ministry. That was her objection and that's more theological, although I think it may also have been her experience.

Doris reported with deep sadness, “I have a lot of younger friends that have either been part of ministry here with me—and some are still here, but some have left our church because they don't agree with complementarianism.” She reported that after a book critical of biblical womanhood came out, a group of their young women in the 20–25-year-old age bracket read it and “that was the last straw for them. They said, ‘See, we told you, that’s what's going on,’ and now they're in different churches. We lost a lot of young women.”

Sandy saw that young women are now being shaped by secular thought which makes it difficult for them. “On the college campuses, they're being indoctrinated with godlessness and humanism, secularism, paganism, existentialism, and feminism. So, there's a lot of confusion and distortion of what is true, and you make your own truth. Your truth is relative.” Beyond that, she observed the influence of “transgenderism, homosexuality, the whole gender chaotic voice that we hear that's so prevalent.”

Experiential Objections

Amy reported the Christian cultural baggage carried by some of her students. “They were a part of a very conservative evangelical church, and biblical womanhood

meant the only women they saw were working in the nursery or in the kitchen, and they never heard a woman's voice reading Scripture.”

Three WML mentioned the issue of the aftermath of the purity culture. Amber called it the “burden of purity:”

Women are holding the burden of purity because girls are made of sugar, spice, and everything nice. What are boys made of? Snakes and snails and puppy dog’s tails. They’re wicked. They’re evil. They burp and fart and can’t control themselves. So, we wear clothes that cover us and all of that. Women are viewed as the controllers of the purity, and it’s so degrading to them and men.

Amy mentioned something similar and called it the “purity paradigm.” “There’s a reaction to that happening right now too, seeing the need for the church to address abuse and all that stuff.” Sophia decries a focus on purity “with lack of positive living it out.”

Experiential objections came from an insensitivity to the struggles of women in the church. Amber mentioned singleness and infertility among her congregants:

If we’ve been told “your identity as a woman comes from motherhood,” then if you struggle with infertility, you can’t be a true woman. I don’t know if it’s theological as much as experiential. So often, the idea of womanhood feels like marriage. I’ve read books that say that motherhood is the highest and holiest calling.

Sophia said something similar:

We struggled with infertility for a little bit. As a woman you struggle and think, “I should be able to have a child, raise children and stay at home and support.” I feel like it can make someone who doesn’t see the broader understanding of Scripture feel like they are disappointing God because they can’t do exactly what these books say about our womanhood.

Katherine believed that older biblical womanhood books have not all been helpful and that unbiblical teaching about womanhood has caused real life damage. “Some of those books are still around and what has happened with those teachings is it’s actually narrowed what a woman is inside of the church. We believe the highest and best for any

woman is to be married with a lot of children kind of a thing.” She included negative messages for singles or same-sex-attracted women. “That has also been very hurtful and damaging to women who God's called to be single or who struggle with same-sex attraction. There's just no option for them, even if they are not going to pursue a same-sex lifestyle. So, there has been very real damage by bad teaching.”

Rachel saw a negative impact from the misuse of certain biblical womanhood books. “I think that part of the ugliness that I saw in our church and the frightening kinds of things happening were just the restrictions imposed on women due to that book.³¹⁷ I do think there was a lack of nuance in the interpretation of some of the passages.”

Amber felt that unintentional negative messaging towards women happens in churches, and younger women are noticing it. “I've heard tragic sermons and negativity. I've heard a condescending apologetic coming from leaders saying things like, ‘I don't know why God has made it this way, I'm in charge, and you're not. And that's it.’” For her, the posture was not helpful. “I'm a seminary graduate woman, and I'm complementarian through and through, so I don't know if it's theological as much as experiential.” Katherine observed, “There is a lot of demeaning, sexist commentary toward women who are involved in ministry by other men who are involved in ministry.”

The experience of being a working woman also figured prominently. Amy said, “I don't even think that's a conversation these girls are having anymore (whether to work or not). I think the line in the sand has moved. But I think a lot of times biblical womanhood feels like we're going back to talking about whether or not women can work. It feels antiquated maybe?” Heather noted that the biblical womanhood resources “tend more

³¹⁷ Grudem and Piper, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.

towards women who are in the home primarily having children, her husband's helper, which I think are all beautiful things. But I think some women might ask, 'What if I am a career woman? What does that look like? Am I less of a woman? Am I less biblical?'"

Sophia sees discouragement in younger women. "I see discouragement when a young woman says, 'I haven't seen a woman up on stage for the past eight months, either being able to pray, give an announcement, or lead in worship' and that's when they ask, 'Is all we're good for making casseroles?'" And that's when she says, "No, look at what women have done in the Bible. Look at how they've been used like you too."

Lack of Understanding

Young women's objections against biblical womanhood were coming from a lack of understanding, knowledge, and modeling. Rachel said, "I don't think that their objections are theological. If they truly knew what biblical womanhood is, they would not have as much of a problem with it. I think that it's an uneducated understanding."

Ellie agreed:

I think it's a lack of knowledge. I don't think any of the women in our church have any objection to the Scripture. They would like to live in a world where they didn't have to work because they needed two incomes. They would like to not have to work as hard as they do. They work very hard. It's just that they've been trained, they're all college educated. Their parents are upset that some of them decide to get married without living together. They lack knowledge and relational support from their family and often, church of origin. There's no theological objection whatsoever.

She expressed those younger women lacked real mothering. "The millennial women have not been disciplined by their mothers nor women in the church, so they are really motherless." Part of her job was "trying to do recovery work to help millennials and the women under them, and it's really been a basic thing."

Sophia believed the issue was a lack of good modeling. Her manager in women's ministry once said, “‘Sophia, I am a complementarian, but I've never seen it done well.’ I'm excited to see it done well at some point. I see it done well in so many ways, but it does look like a lot of mutual respect, more than what I feel like was sometimes depicted in the 1980s complementarian movement, you know?” Doris felt that younger women do not understand the importance of single-gender discipleship. “Female to female, a gender specific discipleship, is not appealing to them. They want small groups to have both men and women.”

Summary of the Challenges Encountered when Teaching Biblical Womanhood to Younger Women

The types of challenges WML encountered when teaching biblical womanhood were varied in nature and scope. Challenges were practical, logistical, and/or relational. The biggest surprise was that women under 25 were often not coming to the church Bible studies offered for women. The reasons were work related, lack of connection with the older women in attendance, and post-Covid social anxiety. Younger women did not value women-only groups, and preferred one-on-one interactions or mixed groups. Most WML stated that the objections to the teaching of biblical womanhood were more experiential than theological. Negative perceptions of the teaching and misogyny tainted their ability to engage with the content. Many younger women had never read the older materials, and, hence, had little understanding of them, and lacked good modeling and mothering. Reticence to engage was due to the influence of secular thinking, making them resistant to the Bible's teaching; for others, they believed churches did not value women. WML listed the influence of bad teachings, the aftermath of the purity culture, the hyperfocus

on motherhood and women not working outside the home, and a lack of visible representation of women at church, all leaving a bad taste in their mouths.

Adaptive Teaching

The third research question addressed adaptive teaching and asked: What changes to their teaching on biblical womanhood have WML already undertaken to disciple the next generation of women? Having seen the objections and issues that need to be addressed, the WML were first asked if they had any fears or concerns about changing how they taught or might teach on biblical womanhood for the benefit of the next generation of women.

Fear of Change

Amy's biggest fear was being misunderstood. "The minute I start pushing against some of this stuff, they're going to think I'm dangerous. I do feel I need to reassure them that I'm not this crazy feminist pushing for ordination. But I feel like sometimes I can get labeled that way quickly if they don't listen carefully."

Lisa wondered if her church and others might be conflict-avoidant on this issue. "Many churches have stopped talking about this altogether—perhaps fearing conflict or else simply moving forward as a unified church body without giving too much thought to instructing women about the issues involved." Lisa also mentioned the fear of rocking the proverbial boat by tackling issues deemed political instead of theological.

Doris, who has had the sad experience of young women leaving her church over complementarianism, has real fears. "My big fear is that somehow this would be the thing that would push them out or would be the last straw for them. But I feel very compelled

to address it because I feel like it's important in my role.” She continued, “The reason why it has been such a sticky thing is because we haven't addressed it well. We should take the time to do that and be very explicit about it, and maybe that would make a difference. It could obviously be challenging and cause tension, but those are good things to work through.”

Amy knows that women fear being branded “liberal” when they want to discuss biblical womanhood. “I think people need the freedom to work that out without the specter of Beth Allison Bar over their shoulder, as if now we're about to become liberal.”

With that question out of the way, the researcher asked the WML about the changes they have already made and how young women responded.

Changes Made

The Use of Biblical Theology

Claire, talking about some of the older resources on biblical womanhood said, “I would still want to incorporate some of it, but I would probably do it differently. I would want to develop a class that would be more oriented towards biblical theology.” She continued:

I think biblical theology offers a fresh way of looking at God's design for both men and women within the whole context of Scripture. We need to see ourselves there in that story. That's the true story of the world. I think biblical theology offers us a creative way of being able to do that while also utilizing insights that we've already gleaned from systematic theology that are rooted in exegesis.

She gave one example: “You have the whole beautiful thing of marriage as a type of Christ and his church. Probably Adam's patterned off Jesus. But anyway, those are

some of my ideas of creative ways of approaching both biblical theology and systematic theology.” Amber likes to talk about adoption and inheritance.

He adopts us as sons, so we have the inheritance. There's something here we need to wrestle through. I don't know what it's like to be a son who inherits. But I need to wrestle through how that feels. Just as much as men need to wrestle through what it feels like to be the bride. He's our bridegroom, and he comes after us. Not just males get to be sons. And we don't just get to be brides. It's an insane thought that women are understood as adopted sons. If men understood their being purchased and married and won like a bride, I think we would both understand our relationship a little bit more.

Rachel has used the concept of story because she felt it connected in a universal kind of way. “I like that idea that there are all these other women in the Bible that we never really talk about, and I just love looking at the story and a character in that story. And I feel like that's something that's universal, that works at any time.”

Amy has employed a similar approach and has seen positive responses when she used the approach of God's big story.

When those conversations have happened, they walked away saying, “I've never heard that before.” We just need to focus on following Jesus in the particular stories that he's writing in our lives, in the particular callings he's giving us. And then the masculine and feminine, woman and man—they kind of pan out, instead of putting that cart in front of that horse.

Flourishing as Women

Ellie believes that there is a growing desire for more current resources. “Women are hungry for other resources. That's probably true for me. I am reading other stuff, and I'm trying to articulate things in a fresh way. I feel an urgency to articulate what the Bible says freshly and clearly, so a lot of my blogging that I do I am writing with particular women in mind, hoping that they'll read what I'm saying.”

Lisa shared how she had started to teach about the glory God has given to women. Her list was extensive:

The privilege of bearing children—which shows in its greatest glory in the birth of Christ; women made fully in God’s image; God loves women and has not abandoned them; God has fulfilled his promise of salvation through the birth of a child, carried in the womb of a woman; Jesus’ constant friendship/love for and by women; Jesus’ tender care for women; their dedicated service to Jesus when he was on earth and also in the early church; Jesus teaches women, honoring their desire to know and love the Father; the honor given to women throughout the Scripture; the beauty of marriage; radical positive obedience; sexual identity and its aspects as women try to consider the culture around them.

But she still feels like the culture is developing at such a rapid pace, it is hard to stay ahead. “I took it up to a certain point but have been surpassed in terms of today’s issues.”

Lisa reported that the most positive responses to her teachings were overseas. “I did have a marvelous reception in Columbia and Costa Rica. Several young women were so relieved that they didn’t necessarily have to get a good job or a new business going before they could feel they were truly serving the Lord.”

Doris has started using the perspective of flourishing. “I would address it from that perspective of what it looks like to flourish in the body of Christ. How do we thrive as a community and what have we been designed to do? So, making it very positive about what we’ve been designed to do and how we’ve been designed to work.” Younger women responded well to the idea of being a co-heir. “I remember that several of the women were captured by the idea of being co-heirs.” She also loves “looking at the women in the Bible, what they are doing, how they’re walking and living, and what they’re called to do.”

Two WML said they would approach the topic through the lens of the Trinity.

Making Use of the Trinity

This is not a new and creative concept, as the Trinity was used by complementarians to explain the structure of man and woman's relationship, but it was mentioned only by Claire and Doris. Claire explained:

I particularly think that using the Trinity is helpful. To really look at the analogy between man and the image, male and female. I know it's nothing new, but the idea of ontological equality with economical differences. You've got ontological equality and the economic Trinity. I don't think there's subordination in the ontological Trinity. But I just think that was very helpful, this idea of equality of being with ordered relationships that include the concepts of authority and obedience.

Making use of the Trinity, however, was not a primary tool used and certain WML were aware of the potential theological errors involved.

Concepts of Gender

Ellie noted that young women are trying to read the Bible through the wrong lenses, and hence, they miss where concepts of gender have come from, biblically speaking. She explained that she would do a historical analysis. "I'd start with a discussion on what pre-enlightenment Christianity would have looked like, what the concept of gender and sexuality was before, and what it is now." And then she explained she would "try to show that the Bible is really a pre-enlightenment text, so people who think the way they do now are handicapped in understanding themselves." Ellie used her public voice to discuss these issues, not necessarily in her women's Bible study.

Podcasting, Blogging, and Writing

WML like Ellie have found it easier to address the topics surrounding biblical womanhood outside the purview of their church, so that women in their church,

denominations, or at large can follow from a distance and learn indirectly. Four WML either blog, podcast or write books to get their ideas out. These platforms, though not directly connected to a local church, are used to foster creative thinking, engage cultural topics, and reach people on the fringes of church.

Summary of the Changes Made

Though many WML voiced how they wished they could or would teach differently, most were not teaching biblical womanhood in new and fresh ways. The fear factor was bigger than anticipated. WML did not want to appear as if they were dismissing scriptural truths or following the feminist *Zeitgeist*. Bringing up the topic directly might cause young women to leave the church. The most observable changes made to how WML taught on biblical womanhood had to do with shedding fresh light on womanhood by using biblical theology and typology, focusing on the end goal of women flourishing, and using intra-trinitarian relations as a model. The paucity of answers revealed that WML had not adapted their teaching with younger women in mind.

Katherine was forthright and summarized findings related to changes made. “It’s kind of hard to answer that in one respect because honestly, I don’t think most churches have thought about it (how to adapt the teaching of biblical womanhood to be attractive to the next generation).” There were notable side comments, such as, “This conversation has made me realize that it is important,” and that they needed to start doing it.

Needed Resources

The final research question posed was: “What resources for teaching biblical womanhood do WML in the church say they will need in order to disciple women in the

future?” The researcher asked a subset of questions about what they believed should be retained from older resources, what should be expounded upon, added to, or changed as well as what sort of resources are needed for the future. Here, the answers flowed freely, and the brainstorming was fruitful. The first finding related to the content of the biblical womanhood teaching needed; the second had to do with the way the teaching should be conducted. There were core elements from older biblical womanhood resources that WML wanted to see maintained and integrated into any new resource created.

The Content

Creation Structure and Design

The majority of the WML interviewed mentioned the importance of maintaining this aspect of a teaching on biblical womanhood. Claire affirmed the goodness of biblical womanhood materials that grounded womanhood in creation. “The arguments are always grounded in creation. It’s about understanding who we are as a woman, with identity and purpose. It’s being made in the image of God. What can be more positive than being made in the image of God?” Rachel echoed this sentiment when she said, “We definitely need to maintain the centrality of male and female created equal but with differing roles and only male headship and submission to authority.” Another point emphasized was being created in the image of God. “It’s about dignity and dominion. I would stress the dignity of being created in the image of God. I would stress the calling to reign in God’s Kingdom. And certainly, the calling to be fruitful and multiply disciples.” Amy agreed with the older resources’ focus on distinctions. “Talking about distinctions is important. All through the creation account, God names and then creates distinction, so that when

we read the creation narrative of humans, that just fits this pattern. You lose beauty, and you lose effectiveness when you remove distinctions.” Sandy wanted to maintain the concept of design, in particular. “We need to know biblical womanhood to be able to share with the younger generation the beauty of our design.”

Katherine defined and summarized the need for “having a good theology of anthropology,” meaning, how we function as individuals, as men and women, in community, and in church.

Secondly, WML expressed the need to include the progression of revelation, biblical theology, and typology.

Biblical Theology, Typology, and Covenant Theology

WML stressed the importance of the overarching story of Scripture, the biblical theological lens needed to discuss biblical womanhood, and the use of typology to avoid legalism. Heather felt like women have a need to talk about the progression of revelation. “When we were talking about the challenges with biblical womanhood—and a lot of it is grounded in the Old Testament—I feel like there is a shift in the New Testament with the language that Jesus uses.” She felt like “maybe that's one of the corrections that needs to be made based on what Christ instituted in the new covenant for us as believers.”

Rachel explains that her “leaning,” if she were to create a new resource, would be more “towards redemptive, biblical theology.” Claire was of the same mindset, in terms of a novel approach. She would love to see women “creating a resource surrounding creation, fall, redemption, consummation, and dealing with the concept of companion/helper within a model that projects it from creation to new creation.”

Ellie, discussing typology as a theological tool, stated that biblical womanhood is about our relationship with God.

It is not one of the tools that people have in their boxes, and I think part of it is because they don't read it (the Bible) typologically. They don't look for clues about the nature of God. They don't know how it fits together. They don't understand the overall story... the mystery of God and the mystery of personhood, of being a man or woman, that is found in the mystical union that you have with Christ.

She advocated for less explanation of certain things. "Protestants don't have a great enough sense of mystery, and a lot of people use the word 'enchantment' now or the sacramental nature of the union between God and his people." She believes that it would be healing and fortifying for women. "Everybody's trying to demystify things to understand them more. The more that has happened, the worse it has become for women. Women's lives get worse when they become demystified."

Sandy and Katherine urged that leaders never teach biblical womanhood in a vacuum but rather integrate it with covenant theology. Sandy said, "I would like to see more and more resources incorporate biblical womanhood within those core biblical values of covenant and the doctrine of the church."

Theology of the Body

Rachel, who had just taken a doctoral class at a seminary, felt like a theology of the body was a *sine qua non* for future conversations and resources on the teaching of biblical womanhood. "It's a very important way to talk about biblical womanhood that really has not yet been utilized. In many of the Reformed congregations and denominations, we're not talking about the body and that is a big oversight. How can you talk about 'who a woman is' without having a theology of the body?"

It was important to Amy to formulate what it means to be a biblical woman as “a disciple of Jesus in an embodied female body.” She expounded more on the need to teach of the physical realities of a woman’s existence in relation to her discipleship. For her it meant “an embracing of the female body and our monthly cycle. There are times when our capacity is more limited than men’s, and yet we live in a society that is trying to erase those differences and pretend it’s a reality we don’t have to face. Following Jesus as a woman includes our hormones.” Lisa favored backing up the discussions and resources surrounding the human body to a much earlier age. “Instruction on how the female body works and its amazing structure would also be a great subject for a series of books for girls.” Heather added that the fallenness of the body is also a topic that women struggle with as they try to define what a biblical woman is. How does one wrestle with those fallen realities as a female disciple of Christ? “What do I do when my body doesn't work the way it should?”

A strong theology of the body was also seen as necessary to face the topic of transgenderism, especially for younger women and their friends struggling to understand their identity as women.

Transgenderism

Older resources on biblical womanhood could not anticipate the need to address the topic of transgenderism. Most WML mentioned the need to address it in any future resources.

Sophia thought that although this topic should primarily be addressed in the youth ministry, it should not stop there. “The whole topic of transgender and gender fluidity is not addressed in older resources, so that's going to be something that definitely needs to

be addressed.” Lisa concurred, “The kids and the teenagers are being exposed to things that we had never dreamed about and really have little understanding of what to do about it. Now it's up to the 30-year-olds raising kids. But we need to be giving them the tools that they need to try and talk about transgenderism to their daughters.”

Other topics of human sexuality were brought up as well: forms of LGBTQ+, divorce, abortion, and pornography, but none matched the trans issue because of its tie to identity. Lisa said, “Obviously, the identity issues involved in transgender and the huge, lengthy list of perverted sexuality need to be addressed. How to explain to young children all the ins and outs of this? When do we start preparing them and how? We need some excellent books for little girls.”

The biggest area of need expressed by WML could be summarized as a need for a theology of human identity.

Identity

The word “identity” was mentioned thirty-five times during the interviews with the WML. The word came up when discussing struggles but also when discussing needs. Heather’s statement, “We need to talk about identity!” could be used as a header. Claire relayed the frustration she encounters when attempting to talk about truth and personhood. She wished there were more resources that addressed personhood. “It’s about your personhood—and I think that is maybe more what Carl Trueman is addressing when he uses the phrase ‘expressive individualism.’ There are no real grounds to talk about truth with a capital T anymore.” Lisa wondered if there could be a way to “work together on a presentation of identity” because:

that would be very good for the women. I think this needs to be done in relation to answering the question about identity. If we can show the hopelessness and paucity of the idea that we can define ourselves, then the door is open to ask how God has designed us and created us as unique individuals, with a fixed gender and a wide variety of gifts, talents, feelings, and physical uniqueness.

Doris echoed that need for equipping women as to their identity, giving them tools and resources “so that they can start to see the richness of who they are in Christ and understand male and female. I think there is such rich teaching on what both male and female have been created to do and to become able to embrace that.”

Feminism

Feminism was mentioned ten times and by half of the WML. Claire acknowledged, “We're influenced by feminism.” Doris stated, “Feminism needs to be addressed.” Multiple WML said similar things, “We need to talk about feminism!” “The feminist movement needs to be addressed.” “We need to educate our people about the history and philosophy of feminism.”

Ellie stated the obvious for all the participants, that feminism is here to stay and that any resource created to teach about womanhood would have to address it in a new way.

We need resources that integrate feminism, or, I should say, the after-effects of feminism, into a new view. Because I am not seeing anybody not sending their young women to university. Women are higher educated; their assumptions about the world are radically different than they were at the beginning of the last century, and we cannot put it back in the bottle. So there needs to be some integrative work that happens so that women don't feel like they are the problem because of feminism or because they got an education. They also need a place in the church: They need to be able to do work in the church without constantly being tripped up and being anxious about doing the wrong thing.

All these aspects could be summarized as a need for integrative content at the intersection of biblical womanhood teachings and cultural influences on women's self-

perception. Other answers given related to the way truths about womanhood should be communicated.

The Approach

Woman-to-Woman

Because discipleship is not a unisex endeavor, Katherine asserted, “We are disciples of Christ, yet we do have a gender. It's not irrelevant!” As previously indicated, some of the younger women struggled with the concept of woman-to-woman discipleship and wanted mixed groups of men and women. There was a lack of understanding of the benefit of same-sex discipleship. Heather had expressed the need as a question: “How do we train them to equip the next generation and help women understand why they even need it? Why is it important to be discipled by other women?” Sophia answered that the most positive reactions to her teaching on biblical womanhood came from women teaching other women. “I feel as though women teach women best.” It has to do with credibility. She continued, “I honestly believe that women relate to women better than men relate to women on certain things. I believe that there's a unique sisterhood in womanhood and to be able to use that to build and grow the church is pretty amazing.” These statements were not made at the exclusion of mixed-gender settings in the church; they expressed the need for balance between same-sex spaces and mixed-gender spaces for learning and growth. Tied to this point, most WML asserted the importance of resources written by women on the topic of biblical womanhood.

Resources by Women

“When it comes to biblical womanhood,” Rachel explained, “women need to be able to speak into that topic and need to be reading and studying and doing the exegesis as well.” Amber shared the concern. “I think a healthy view of the value of both male and female is necessary, and I think we're missing having both male and female voices speaking into that theology.” Rachel found that one of the weaknesses of old models was that good theology was mostly done by men. “What was written and communicated, and a lot of the biblical exegesis and interpretation was done by men. I think that's a very significant failure.”

Doris expressed the desire for “a book that is able to define what biblical womanhood is, a guide that would call women to look at Scripture and to go back and ask, ‘what does the Bible say about womanhood?’ to help show what it is that women have been created to do and why it is important, along with examples of women in Scripture.” She envisioned a fresh take on biblical womanhood that would engage young women with questions that arise out of their current context.

Beyond the need for fresh, updated resources on biblical womanhood written by women who are models in writing about theology, there was 100% agreement that teaching that comes from books was not enough. Significant modeling was needed to turn information into formation.

The Importance of Modeling

Sandy put it this way. “It's not just information, it's transformation. When you think about all the books that we read, they do inform us. Then there are voices that conform us, but what is really that which will transform us?”

Both Amber and Amy used the exact same phrase to describe modeling. “It’s more caught than taught.” “You have to have it modeled,” said Claire. The genuineness and authenticity of biblical womanhood can be exemplified only in real life situations. Heather expressed how the discipleship of a woman must have a whole person approach. “Not just caring for her head and her understanding of God’s word, but her practical day-to-day life. We need a more holistic, whole person approach to discipleship.” Rachel also mentioned the need for models. “I would want them to see models. People willing to walk alongside them and disciple them and show them what it means to live as a woman who follows Christ.” Rachel thinks the best apologetic for younger women to understand biblical womanhood is seeing it lived out positively. “Where I see that happening is when they know somebody personally, who is living out this biblical view of womanhood and they’re drawn to that. The burden is on us to live it out in a way that it’s compelling.”

Sandy stressed the importance of older women as encouragers for younger women, “to have real flesh and blood putting her arm around her saying, ‘You can do this!’ The Lord uses people in our lives to direct our paths, and so I think the encouragement of an older, wiser, godly woman is needed. To come alongside someone who really wants to pour their lives out is one of the best books they can read.”

Lisa echoed this sentiment. “I’m not sure you learn this (biblical womanhood) as much from teaching as from being incorporated into the church early on by older saints.” Three WML mentioned one-on-one relationships as being key to discipling younger women into their womanhood. Sandy named a particular struggle in attempting to model womanhood. “It seems like women, and more younger women, are getting their

information from the internet versus an older woman.” She explained how the internet has become a “discipler” instead of the church community.

Holistic

The researcher asked what sort of models and resources WML would need to successfully disciple the next generation of women. About one third mentioned something akin to what Sophia said was needed, namely, a “bigger, holistic approach.” Lisa said, “I’ve read Grudem and a couple other books. We may not need a tightly exegeted argumentation, but rather a wider approach. Do most Christian women have a sense of what the Scripture requires? Where are the pain points?”

Katherine, though she has taught directly on biblical womanhood, desired an expansion of resources, since not many WML or church leaders are thinking about what sorts of resources will be needed in the future. “They’re not thinking about it. I mean, they should be, really. I’m not seeing it. I think if you took everything that we have taught and updated and codified it—it’s been codified in different places—and gave additional resources around research from scholars like Carl Trueman and Nancy Pearcey, I think it would give people a more fully-orbed thing.”

Heather’s answer revealed a need to train WML before they would be able to train other women with a different approach.

I think one benefit would be resources that trained women's ministry leaders on how to do women's ministry holistically. I think there are some really great resources out there for word-based women’s ministry. But we need a larger approach because there are resources here and there. But the problem is it's hard to read all those resources. Maybe having resources that provided more of a thread?

She felt like “there is a lot more growth that we can do within that holistic view of how to care well for women. And some of that starts with how we structure our staff in order to care well for women.” In other words, a holistic approach to helping women in their discipleship is a responsibility for the entire church, not just the task of WML. Modeling was part of WML’s desire to see biblical womanhood taught, caught, and integrated into a full-orbed understanding of women’s discipleship within the context of a local church.

In summary, a new model would have to be a holistic, full-orbed, full-person approach to teaching and discipling women surrounding the topic of biblical womanhood.

Positive

Words such as “fresh,” “inspiring,” “creative,” “engaging,” “beautiful,” and “positive” were used by all the WML when asked about what sorts of resources would most help young women understand biblical womanhood. Rachel mentioned the need for “good, creative, engaging resources.” Ellie said, “I do think there just needs to be some fresh rearticulation in a way that younger women can hear. And I think that's a huge job that people need to knuckle under and do.”

The angle of beauty was mentioned thirteen times. Sophia exclaimed, “It is absolutely exciting and wonderful to be a woman!” Heather concurred, “We have this ability that he's given us to have children. What a beautiful gift it is to be a woman!” Amy suggested that we need “piercing clarity, but not just clarity, beauty. When we peel it down to the core of what God's heart is for women, it's really beautiful. I think beauty is an important part for young women, specifically. If it's not attractive, they won’t want it.” Sandy resonated with the aspect of beauty as well. “In order to be able to share

biblical womanhood with the younger generation, we must stress the beauty of our design. You know there's the beauty of better," pointing out that God's design for women is more beautiful and better than what the world has on offer.

Instead of a negative or restrictive teaching on biblical womanhood that stressed the dos and don'ts of womanhood, the WML expressed a desire for a positive expression of it. The word "positive" was mentioned fourteen times. Amber desired to see "a positive view, a biblical view showing where womanhood shows up." Ellie describes such a resource thus: "We need more of that kind of healing content for women, young women. We're all soldiering on, but we need more people to write good, provocative, interesting, not pedantic, not preachy, not scolding resources that are interesting and that open this up in a fresh way that's not boring." Creativity was key, at times catering to younger women's preferences in style and method.

Integrated

Because men and women are working together for a healthy church, the teaching of biblical womanhood cannot be seen separately. "I don't know if symbiotic is the right word, but this is a beautiful working together." Sophia mentioned the joy of the collaboration that comes with working with a godly pastor in ministry." The word covenantal was mentioned at least ten times in the interviews. Sandy said that it was important to build "womanhood on the foundation of covenant because it's this vertical relationship that we have with God that affects our horizontal relationship with one another." She meant that views on womanhood have an impact on the entire covenant community, not just women. Biblical womanhood needs to be integrated into a church's entire ecclesiology. Katherine said, "You can be a complementarian and have a model for

what it looks like for men and women to work together.” Teaching and modeling biblical womanhood with the blessing and collaboration of the male leaders was considered key for the integration of the women’s ministry.

Creative

Ellie mentioned the fact that WML need to get creative in how they present biblical womanhood to the next generation of women. “I think there does need to be creative work done around that.”

Rachel desired a variety of ways to tell the same story. “I also believe that we need to be creative and use audio and visual and all of the different means of expression. God created us to be creative and so we should use beauty and lots of different tools that are available to us.” She felt strongly that WML ought to ask young women about the questions they have, rather than assume they know. She would want a “really good, creative, engaging study that is very easy to enter into because a lot of the younger women don’t have biblical literacy, and so it would need to be a resource that starts with the sorts of questions they actually have rather than start with the answers we want to give.”

Claire added ideas of ways to communicate the truths of biblical womanhood to the next generation of women. They included conferences, podcasts, articles, and think tanks. “I think it would be great to maybe even start a podcast where like-minded women could discuss these things.” Some of the WML are already supplementing their local church work with these broader external endeavors, but they expressed the longing for greater collaboration for the sake of creative content.

Summary of Needed Resources

This section examined what resources WML said they would need for the future to disciple the next generation of women effectively. Two primary areas emerged. In the first, WML discussed the kind of content to be addressed. In the second, they discussed the approaches these resources would need to embody. Because the end goal was stated as “effective discipleship,” the answers sometimes straddled the theoretical and the practical nature of such an approach.

Content-wise, six main foci emerged. The majority mentioned that the creation structure and design of older resources on biblical womanhood needed to be a part of a future resource. They maintained a high commitment to sharing God’s vision for men and women in their distinction and complementarity. The second area was focusing on biblical theology to elucidate the big story of the Bible and to show how gender is a part of how God structured his covenant dealings with his people. WML mentioned a third need, namely an approach that would include the nature of the female body. This topic was clearly tied to the fifth: the need for addressing a transgender, genderfluid mentality. The last topic WML said they needed to integrate was an interaction with feminism and its aftermath, while, at the same time not making women feel guilty for having been its beneficiaries.

The second main area that emerged was less about content and more about the approach that such a resource would provide. WML emphasized encouragement for younger women and woman-to-woman discipleship. WML were concerned that younger women do not often seem to value single-sex teaching and discipleship, compared to older women. The first desire was for a reinforcement of why a woman-to-woman

approach is valuable. Secondly, WML expressed the need for women to be engaged with the writing of good theology for women, as an example to younger women and for the creation of content that can connect better with them. Thirdly, WML highlighted that no book could replace the value of modeling what biblical womanhood looks like in the lives of godly women. Points 4-7 brought out that any resource created would have to be holistic, positive, integrated, and creative. Because the older biblical womanhood resources were viewed with varying degrees of skepticism and negativity by the WML and the younger generation, the WML interviewed said that they needed a fresh iteration of positive resources, authentic modeling, and inspiring representation. None of these emphases should be disconnected from the life of the church nor at the expense of men and women working and functioning as co-laborers in the church; hence, the approach should be integrated. Though some WML shared with the researcher that they do attempt to gain broader influence by using other means, they do it for the edification of the church at large.

All these aspects call for greater creativity and courage. A few WML noted that creative people sometimes get labeled unorthodox for offering different perspectives, approaches, methods, or means. Some said, however, that creativity and fresh innovative approaches were going to be required to break through with the next generation.

Summary of Findings

This chapter examined how WML are currently teaching biblical womanhood, what challenges they face when they teach it to the younger generation (the under 25-year-olds), and what changes they have implemented to engage them. The researcher was

furthermore interested in finding out whether the WML felt that the resources they use will be sufficient for the task.

The researcher found that the majority of WML used the Bible as their main textbook, addressing the topic of biblical womanhood as it was encountered. The minority of WML taught on the topic directly. Most of them did not like using the expression “biblical womanhood” because of its negative connotations in their own experience, and how they had heard younger women respond to it. The objections to the teaching were experiential more than theological. Because the majority of the WML interviewed did not teach on biblical womanhood directly, they had not adapted how they taught on it, though comments revealed that they believed they should. Those who did teach on it directly preferred to use a biblical theological and a typological approach, as well as teaching on the changes in gender theory affecting how readers can interpret a pre-enlightenment, pre-feministic text. Some studied the lives of women in the Bible based on where they were situated in redemptive history; others employed trinitarian ideas to explain gender.

WML expressed the need for the church to think about resources that would be positive, holistic, integrated, and would deal with the topics of binary creation design, biblical and covenant theology, the integration of the aftermath of feminism, a response to transgenderism, a theology of the female body, and human identity.

However, discernable fears also emerged. WML expressed the difficulty of trying to think creatively in certain conservative circles, especially when critiquing older resources, or working on new models which might approach the issues from a different

angle—even when WML are committed to the authority of the Bible and a complementarian frame of reference.

All agreed that the church will need a whole-person model of discipleship. The model should demonstrate a balance between single-sex discipleship and mixed-gendered spaces and provide opportunities for younger women to develop and be fully integrated into a life of service as well as find representation in non-ordained leadership structures.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore how women's ministry leaders in the church (WML) are adapting their teaching on biblical womanhood to disciple the next generation of women effectively. This chapter summarizes the findings of the literature review (Chapter 2) and the interviews (Chapter 4), analyzes them with reference to each other, and makes suggestions pertaining to the resources needed for teaching and discipling women in the future.

Summary of the Study and Findings

Three groupings of literature were examined: first, a biblical theology of womanhood; second, books labelled Biblical Womanhood™ written in response to evangelical feminism; and third, the critiques of these writings.

The researcher formulated a brief biblical theology of womanhood for the first category by placing mostly pre-feministic authors in dialogue. Resources written by women on the biblical theology of womanhood were scarce, and few met the academic standard required for this study. It became apparent that Biblical Womanhood™ books defined womanhood from the Bible, but there was no single reference work among these that the researcher could find that formulated a full-orbed biblical theology of womanhood. The subsequent negative reactions to the content of Biblical Womanhood™ books revealed how certain complementarian teachings were either overly stressed, or applied very narrowly, negatively impacting women.

To summarize and categorize the kinds of critiques of Biblical Womanhood™, the researcher assigned them to three broad categories. The normative perspective asked what does the Bible teach about the ontology of woman? The critiques focused primarily on a perceived ontology of inequality. Second, the situational perspective asked what is the woman's teleology? What are the woman's roles in her various contexts? What does it mean for women's status, whether married or single, their work, and their broader influence in the world? Here, an over-emphasis on rigid roles led to legalism or undervaluing of women who did not fit the mold. Some critiques came from a third perspective, namely, an existential perspective. Have these teachings produced good fruit in the lives of individual women, safe church and home environments which include, value, promote and celebrate the contributions of women? The overarching, underlying critique was questioning whether the complementarian view was being lived out positively or in an inherently demeaning manner.

The literature review provided a contextual backdrop for the qualitative research. The researcher posed questions to experts in their field, namely WML in their local churches, to see how they dealt with these challenges and to explore how they have taught and were thinking about teaching on the topic of biblical womanhood to younger women in the future. The following research questions guided the research.

1. What models do WML in the church currently use to teach women about biblical womanhood?
2. What challenges do WML encounter when they teach biblical womanhood to younger women?

3. What changes to their teaching on biblical womanhood have WML already undertaken to disciple the next generation of women?
4. What resources for teaching biblical womanhood do WML in the church say they will need to disciple women in the future?

The researcher will present a summary of the interview findings in two categories: the expected and the surprising findings.

Expected Findings

The Challenges

The fact that WML faced challenges and objections to their teaching on biblical womanhood was not surprising. WML faced the challenge of younger women's poor perceptions of biblical womanhood. The latter often understood the teaching to be antiquated, restrictive, or irrelevant. However, WML did not believe that these perceptions were always justified, nor that they were always based on their experience.

Shifting cultural norms concerning the topics of women's work, raising children, a woman's broader influence in the culture, and the expectation of having a seat at the table in the church have changed how younger women interact with older women. Logistically, they often did not attend the weekly women's Bible studies offered by the church. Younger women were not seeking out older women for advice and wisdom and tended to go to the internet instead. Post-Covid anxiety added to the isolation of young women who were not joining church social gatherings or small group Bible studies.

The objections WML mentioned were mostly experiential. Examples of this were: not feeling respected or valued by pastors, feeling judged by older women for working,

not seeing women's gifts being utilized, a lack of visible representation in leadership, the burden of purity placed on women in the aftermath of the purity movement, or wanting freedom in lifestyle choice. WML expressed that if young women understood God's love and plan for women, they would not have so many objections, while, at the same time describing them as spiritually motherless and biblically illiterate—things WML felt needed to be remedied. However, where there was one-on-one interaction with younger women, regular discipleship, inclusion in the life of the church, visual representation of women in active leadership roles, and genuine modeling, they tended to be quite receptive.

The Commitment

The majority of WML expressed a clear commitment to working through these challenges and finding ways to overcome them, even though the answers were not yet clear to them. Certain relevant comments indicated that WML felt convicted about not doing more or realized that something needed to change if their church was going to disciple the next generation effectively. This was a secondary finding as questions about commitment were not a part of the interview protocol. It was the nature of the questions posed that triggered these sentiments.

The Need for New Resources

All WML interviewed affirmed the need for fresh, new, positive resources written by women that would engage the next generation of women by reinforcing God's binary creation design, explaining how womanhood fits into God's story by utilizing biblical theology and typology, and steering away from legalism. They desired resources that

would teach a biblical theological view of the female sexed body, the nature of human personhood and identity for the sake of countering the feminist, trans- and genderfluid teachings young women are exposed to outside the church.

Unexpected Findings

Discomfort with the Term “Biblical Womanhood”

The biggest surprise the researcher encountered was to find out that almost all the WML took an ambivalent, if not oppositional, stance toward using the classic phrase “biblical womanhood.” It was the assumption of the researcher that WML who are a part of conservative, Reformed, evangelical churches and consider themselves complementarian, would not hesitate to utilize the term “biblical womanhood” in their teaching. Two reasons emerged as to why they did not use it. First, some WML had negative experiences of their own with abuses of male headship in churches where Biblical Womanhood™ resources were used. Secondly, they assumed that the women in their ministry contexts would not identify with it because of its negative connotations of being too restrictive and antiquated. The majority felt the phrase was too negatively loaded to be used constructively. Only a minority thought that the negative connotations associated with the phrase in the past should not determine its present use.

Few Theological Objections

Very few WML mentioned serious theological objections brought up against the teaching of biblical womanhood. Though there was one mention of an objection to the theology of ESS, and one to Susan Foh’s interpretation of the woman’s desire in Genesis

3:16, which became the standard complementarian interpretation, most younger women had not thought through the theology of womanhood and therefore were unable to engage it critically, other than a few mentioned instances. This was a surprising finding as the researcher expected more theological push-back from younger women based on the recent critiques of Biblical Womanhood™, popularized by critical scholars.

Lack of Direct and Adaptive Teaching

A second unexpected finding was that the majority of the WML interviewed did not teach on biblical womanhood directly due to the issues mentioned above. Most WML said they taught through the Bible and addressed certain aspects surrounding the topic of womanhood as encountered. Because of this finding, the researcher had to adapt the question about how WML taught on biblical womanhood to a more hypothetical one, namely, “If you were asked to teach a class on biblical womanhood, what elements would you stress in your teaching?”

Part of this finding was the implication for adaptive teaching. If WML were not teaching it directly in the first place, they were not thinking much of how they would adapt it to reach younger women. The most revealing aspect of this finding was that the answers were mostly in the conditional mode. “If I were to teach it ...” Despite this potential research flaw, the answers did reveal what sort of approach they would want to take and there was overlap between these answers and the answers to the question of future resources needed to disciple the next generation of women. The exercise of having to think through how to answer the questions appeared to be fruitful for the WML as they brainstormed ideas, figured out what elements of older resources they might want to maintain, and how they would adapt them to make their teaching more accessible and

relevant to younger women. The process of answering the questions, a few WML said, made them more aware that they might need to start thinking about adaptations and teach on it more directly. But there were hesitations too.

Fears

WML mentioned three types of fears when answering the question about whether they had any concerns about changing how they are currently teaching biblical womanhood. The first fear was of the potential fallout of teaching it. One WML had a considerable number of younger women leave the church because of a book critical of Biblical Womanhood™, so her fear was that if she were to teach on this directly and using this terminology, it might set in motion another exodus from her church. The second fear was causing conflict in the church. A couple of WML mentioned that their church does not deal with the subject of biblical womanhood (or manhood) because it is too controversial in the current sociopolitical environment. The third fear was quite personal for WML. They feared being misunderstood if they tried to teach on the topic creatively, or from any perspective that deviated even slightly from standard Biblical Womanhood™ materials.

Results Interpreted Through Personal Experience

This study focused on the experience of WML who are teaching other women in the church, and it became clear that not only were some of the subjects ambivalent about “biblical womanhood” as a concept, but some of them had also had negative experiences of their own which influenced their willingness, readiness, or even desire to teach the topic to younger women. This was an unexpected finding. It was the researcher’s

observation that WML sometimes answered the questions related to younger women's responses making assumptions about how younger women would respond if they were to teach the topic. The answers WML provided may not accurately reflect younger women's actual responses or objections, and these would have to be researched independently. Conversely, the same was true of the WML who were positive about teaching biblical womanhood to the next generation of young women because their personal experience of it in churches had been mostly positive.

Discussion of Findings

In this section, the literature review and interview findings were compared to discover what kinds of resources would be needed in the future to assist WML in their teaching and discipling of the next generation of women. The researcher's specific interest was on the teaching of biblical womanhood. My underlying assumption about the teaching of biblical womanhood was twofold. First, past Biblical Womanhood™ resources might not be sufficient to address contemporary questions and concerns about womanhood.

Second, a solid teaching on biblical womanhood would yet again become indispensable and need to be adapted to the gender confusion in the culture at large. I wanted to find out from experts, commissioned by their churches to teach other women, whether they shared these assumptions, how they experienced teaching the younger generation of women in the church, and what they recommended for the creation of new resources. The topics the WML brought out overlapped with those that emerged in the literature review.

Teaching That Deals with Feminism

Biblical Womanhood and Feminism

Pertaining to the first assumption, WML drew attention to select resources that had been helpful in shaping their thinking. They mentioned the most influential women writers of the Biblical Womanhood™ genre with respect and admiration. They appreciated their clarity, focus on God's creation design for humanity, and desire to teach the Bible faithfully. And yet, due to the over-emphasis on certain themes at the exclusion of others—even abuses in their application—the majority of WML were reluctant to continue to use these resources and were thinking of adapting them or creating their own.

In hindsight, Biblical Womanhood™ resource authors were responding to the feminist threat to women's unique contribution in the world: the calling of wife and mother. Their writings were a counter-offensive to reclaim territory lost to an aggressive feminist movement. The epitome of female rebellion and ungodliness looked like an independent career woman who needed a man as much as a fish needed a bicycle, choosing work over family, sexual and reproductive freedom over a committed, fruitful marriage, and competing successfully in a man's world over managing a household. Biblical Womanhood™ books countered these trends with an emphasis on embracing marriage and motherhood as the prime way of expressing a woman's godliness and service. They refused to view a woman's bodily realities as shackles and the home as a prison.

The concept of biblical womanhood, however, came to be associated with a limited, two-fold emphasis: the challenge to women to be faithful wives and fruitful mothers along with a clear affirmation of authority structures in the home and church. As

women's roles and responsibilities in society expanded, the omissions in biblical womanhood interpretations became unavoidably apparent. It could not address the growing realities of singleness, childlessness, or women with a university education or professional expertise. The interviews confirmed that these teachings encouraged the women who fit the previous mold, but discouraged those who did not. When the message of biblical womanhood was equated with being a "married-stay-at-home-mother-of-multiple children," single women (for any reason), working women (in any field), or childless women (in any stage) wondered if they could be considered a true woman.

Few of the WML criticized the authors of Biblical Womanhood™ resources directly, as most agreed with the need to deal with the claims of feminism. However, they were described, in retrospect, as overly restrictive, lacking depth and compassion, nuance, and inspiration. To be fair, my observation is that while feminists were pursuing careers in academics, their conservative counterparts were focusing on their marriage, home, and children as their primary calling. The latter weren't writing academic theological articles and books, in spite of the church's great need for their voices to be heard in the discussions about biblical womanhood. Overall, WML were not critical of the Biblical Womanhood™ movement for taking on feminism, but for the unintended and short-sighted after-effects of its limited applications. All WML were united in expressing the need to include the ongoing influence of feminism as well as its aftermath in future resources on biblical womanhood.

Taking Stock of Feminism's Influence

It is not just Christians who are looking back on the promises of feminism with a degree of skepticism. Even secular authors have disparaged feminism's toxic aftermath in

the lives of women. For example, UK journalist Louise Perry, in her book *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution*, argued that feminism and the sexual revolution abused women through further objectification and that women are happiest in monogamous, committed relationships, not when they are encouraged to act like promiscuous men.³¹⁸

WML agreed that feminism “cannot be put back in the bottle,” and its aftermath poses mixed results for women. One WML expressed sadness about younger women pushing off marriage for the sake of education or having doubts about whether they should have children at all. WML realized that they must deal with the situation at hand, not live in a nostalgic reality of what used to be. They accepted the affirming results of feminism while being critical of the uncoupling of biological sex from gender which left women devoid of a true female identity or genuine womanly contribution based in biological realities. Little did they know that this great decoupling simultaneously laid the groundwork for a transsexual worldview built on subjective self-definition and chosen, performative gender. This development leaves biological womanhood a superfluous factor in the feminists’ case for defending womanhood as a valid category of fixed identity worthy of any sort of protection.

The Biblical Womanhood™ movement, desirous to reclaim specific gender roles to salvage the woman’s unique contribution, was tempted to present its own version of exclusive, performative gender. Extra-biblical, legalistic gender stereotyping caused damage of its own. Examples of this include messaging such as “a godly woman shouldn’t work outside the home, should be married, should homeschool, or should wear certain clothing.” WML had doubts of their own concerning the future usefulness of

³¹⁸ Perry, *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution*.

Biblical Womanhood™ resources, based on their negative connotations of being legalistic, antiquated, or worse, used by men to micromanage, dismiss, or abuse women.

Almost all WML wanted future resources to focus on the beautiful big picture of sex and gender in the Bible, not to the exclusion of specific application, but for the benefit of non-legalistic applications.

The Story of Gendered Identity

Maintaining Distinctions

Creation Identity

When asked about the strengths of older resources on womanhood, WML confirmed that their teachings were firmly anchored in the creation account which is the only way humans can know where they came from and for what purpose they were made. Human identity is first shaped by God's intent for his creatures. Both men and women are made in God's image as his vice-regents to reflect his power, authority, and presence in the world. Reality, described by God in his word, is binary, in terms of the Creator-creature distinction, and in the male-female distinction at the climax of all other distinctions and used throughout the rest of Scripture to describe the relationship between God and his people. This theology of the binaries stands in stark contrast with monistic, non-binary theories of existence and sexuality at the core of the postmodern understanding of sex and gender. When the creator's definition of his creatures is replaced with their own self-definition, they will inevitably shipwreck their identity

because they are worshipping something in creation, rather than the creator.³¹⁹ Because God reveals himself through these binaries, WML will need to explain the shift in understanding of manhood and womanhood in these terms, not purely based on cultural expressions thereof. The binary expression of God's image in man and woman will also need to be taught and explained.

The Body

WML stressed the need to talk about the body more. How does God reveal and image himself through the female body? What is the intended purpose, or teleology, of the female body? What happens when the female body does not function the way it should? Is there any "oughtness" to be derived from the fact that men and women have different sexed bodies for the way they lead their embodied lives to glorify God? Even for a woman whose body cannot bear a child because of circumstances or physical brokenness, the potentiality of her bearing a child still defines her as a woman imaging God and called to live as a woman bringing life into the world. The Scriptures offer hints on how women's bodies reflect God's image. Biblical anthropomorphisms reveal God's care, his feeding and nurture, his bearing of his people and his deep compassion in feminine terms.³²⁰ This view of God is vastly different from the feminist reinterpretation of God as mother. The gift of the female body as image of God is what women tend to struggle with the most when they think of their body image. How would this teaching change how women viewed their bodies, if instead of pursuing an elusive, culturally

³¹⁹ Romans 1: 21-25.

³²⁰ Deuteronomy 32:11-12; Deuteronomy 32:18; Psalm 123:2-3; Psalm 131:2; Isaiah 66:13; Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34; Job 38:29; Numbers 11:12; Isaiah 49:15; 1 Thessalonians 2:7.

manufactured, ever-changing image of femininity, they accepted themselves, including their bodies, as full-orbed images of a life-giving God? These issues need to be addressed in any teaching on womanhood and help women accept and understand the beauty of their female body given to them by God which reflects his own life-giving purpose.

Complementarity Without Inferiority

The main struggle WML had with complementarian doctrine was not the doctrine itself, but how it was lived out in practice and in focus. Poor modeling in churches alienated WML and the younger women they were trying to reach. Oftentimes, Biblical Womanhood™ resources left the impression that the sole definition of biblical womanhood is the idea that the Bible teaches God-ordained female submission in the home and subordination in the church. Such a reductionistic understanding is drawn from the complementarian resources themselves:

At the heart of mature womanhood is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive, and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman's differing relationships.³²¹

I agree that the definition of womanhood provided by RBMW above is not a positive, full, or active view of the contribution of women, but rather, only how she is to respond to men. WML must teach a robust, positive definition and view of women so as not to communicate an ontology of inferiority, whether grounded in concepts like ESS, or simply lived out in a manner that makes women feel like second class citizens of God's kingdom. Of course, egalitarians also struggle to fill the definition of biblical womanhood. They fail to express what is at the core of the difference between men and

³²¹ Grudem and Piper, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 36.

women for fear of having that difference used against women to belittle, subordinate, or dismiss them. We need to regain an unobstructed vision for womanhood derived from God's vision of his bride. God does not denigrate his bride or give her an inferior identity and calling. Defining and living out the complementarity of men and women faithfully to display the glory of God to the world more fully will not be an easy task, but it must be attempted, as it has been before, even in the midst of maintaining the elements of mystery at the core of our differences.

Definitions are important and thinking about the language we use is paramount. In the interviews, WML urged the church to think about new ways to communicate positively about womanhood. I would add that serious thought needs to be put into how we use terminology such as “patriarchy,” “hierarchy,” “authority,” “submission,” or “subordination.” WML even felt uncomfortable employing the phrase “biblical womanhood” because they could not assume young women understand how they are using terminology. Do any of these terms need to be reexplained carefully and not just used without understanding of how they may be perceived by younger women in today's contentious culture? Furthermore, words sometimes evolve past their usefulness when original definitions and connotations are lost over time.³²² This factor overlapped with several of the criticisms surrounding language and Bible translations found in Chapter 2. WML did not want to be an unnecessary obstacle to younger women in the church.

³²² For example: “gay,” “awful,” “fantastic,” or “queer.”

The Story of Redemption

The Progression of Revelation

Just as one cannot open a book to any page and expect to follow its story, readers need to understand the story of womanhood in the Bible from start to finish and at each different stage of revelation. Though it may be tempting for the contemporary reader to view the Bible through modern lenses, these will only lead to a distorted picture. As much as possible, the student of Scripture will have to attempt to understand the Bible's internal framework to develop a coherent theology of womanhood. Most WML mentioned the necessity of the Bible being understood as one story, into which womanhood fits and finds its thematic place.

Unlike trajectory hermeneutics that takes a message of the Bible and extrapolates its meaning for today by reference to its general direction of liberation, Biblical theology uses the trajectory of Scripture itself to show the arc of its final fulfillment. It is much harder to become legalistic or expect women to comply with certain stereotypes within the whole story of womanhood. Certain themes cannot be overlooked: God's creation purpose for woman as a helper on his mission, her intended fruitfulness, her contribution to the glorification of creation, the feminine types used in Scripture to portray or foreshadow spiritual realities about God's covenant dealings with his own bride, the church, and her feminine calling. When we understand the place of feminine typology in the Scripture, and how individual women are demonstrative types of the overarching typology we can avoid one-to-one simplistic or legalistic applications. Because most stories of women in the Bible are descriptive rather than prescriptive, all conclusions

need to be run through the grid of Christological fulfilment. John McKinley encourages churches to:

Emphasize the way God has revealed himself by many feminine types and women in the Bible. Complementarian practice gives the impression to many people that God is more aligned with the masculine form than the feminine, and some people directly limit God as being more like a man, according to the concepts of authority, protection, and provision. Instead, we should emphasize that God is above human gender and inclusive of both human genders. Both genders are expressive of God and reflect him in creation. God's traits are not a more natural fit with male human beings.³²³

This understanding would promote a valuing of the woman's contribution as an equal image bearer, not only in word, but also in church practice. Furthermore, the progression and fulfilment of biblical typology has the potential to free women from general misapplications to them.

New Covenant Realities for Women

A few WML said that they had experienced complementarian circles that utilized old covenant standards for defining women's realities, instead of seeing how the woman's task in the Old Testament was proleptic and fulfilled in the coming of Christ and the creation of the church. The focus of the new covenant expands beyond the physical multiplying of biological offspring of the cultural mandate to include the multiplication of spiritual children through the mothering agency of the church in the great commission.³²⁴ Though childbearing continues as a womanly task in this already-not-yet phase of redemptive history, the promised Seed of the Woman has already come, and hence, the focus has shifted to the call of the church to be fruitful and multiply

³²³ McKinley, "The Need for a Third Way Between Egalitarianism and Complementarianism."

³²⁴ Galatians 4:26.

disciples to the ends of the earth. This is a task to which all believers are called and includes men, women, and children, married and single people.

Nevertheless, included in this is the picture of marriage, which is still how the Bible displays the gospel most beautifully and powerfully, with irreversible realities exhibited for the world to see.³²⁵ The accuracy with which a couple lives out a marriage to reflect Christ and his bride is therefore paramount to the witness of the gospel itself and will be until marriage is no longer a necessary signpost to the greater reality behind its institution.

In the new covenant, the partial fulfillment of the two greatest redemptive typologies in the Bible (that of the son and the bride) converge in the church, made up of men and women. Women are considered like first-born sons, fellow-heirs with Christ,³²⁶ and heirs of life alongside their brothers,³²⁷ and men are called to understand themselves as a part of the beloved, purchased bride for whom the Husband died.³²⁸ The intersection of the son and the bride typologies creates a community in which men and women are privileged to share and experience each other's realities in a deep and meaningful way that leads to unity, respect, and common hope for the eschatological fulfillment of the promises attached to each typological storyline.

³²⁵ Ephesians 5:22-33.

³²⁶ Galatians 3:26-28; Romans 8:14-17.

³²⁷ 1 Peter 3:7.

³²⁸ Ephesians 1:6; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:27.

Presenting a Convincing Eschatology of Gender

Whereas the partial fulfillment of female typologies are expressed in the identity and task of the church, the glorified vision of the eschatological bride of Christ is expressed in full in the book of Revelation.³²⁹ The church lives in the tension of the “already” and the “not yet” with potential pitfalls of both an under- and over-realized eschatology of gender. The following examples will help illustrate this point.

One of the main critiques of complementarianism has been the perception that it promotes an ontology of inferiority. A lack of eschatological vision in past interpretations of the order of the woman’s creation fuels assertions that Eve, created second in relation to Adam, must therefore be inferior and subservient.³³⁰ What these interpretations fail to consider is that the proleptic ordering of creation foreshadows the new creation order initiated in Christ and fulfilled in his bride, the church. For example, the creation of the body of Eve foreshadows the creation of the church, who is the body and bride of the last Adam. Each Eve, (the first and the second) is made in the image of her respective Adam,³³¹ from whom she is derived and with whom she is organically connected and united.³³² Each fulfills her life-giving task as she submits to God’s purpose: to fill and be filled, bearing fruit and glory into the world through her body, a sanctuary home.³³³ United to him, each is given a mission mandate at his side to be fruitful and multiply. Both Eves, in their being made second, show the order, structure, and progression of

³²⁹ Revelation 19:7-8; Revelation 21:2-3.

³³⁰ See interpretations in Chapter 2.

³³¹ 1 Corinthians 11:7-8; Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 15:49; 2 Corinthians 3:18.

³³² Genesis 2:23-24; Romans 6:5.

³³³ Genesis 4:1; Romans 7:4; Colossians 1:10; Colossians 1:24, 2:19.

creation and redemption. Both possess the ability to bear progeny. For Eve, the first woman, it is a future orientation toward the hope of new physical life,³³⁴ and ultimately, the birth of Christ, and for the second Eve, the redeemed church, it is the hope of eschatological physical resurrection life, eternal glory, and fruitfulness.³³⁵ The woman's organic connection and subsumption under her head is analogous, in order though different in kind, to the church's union with and subsumption under Christ for the purpose of fruitful union.³³⁶ The overlap of these realities in the age of the church open opportunities for women and men for fruitful, life-giving ministries beyond the bearing of physical children as the Great Commission³³⁷ is superimposed on the creation mandate.³³⁸

A second example is the notion that the woman is more naturally prone to deceit than the man, based on Eve's deception in Genesis 3.³³⁹ However, the apostle Paul places the ability to fall prey to the enemy's deceit upon the New Testament betrothed bride, the church: "For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ."³⁴⁰ The whole church, not just the women within it, is prone to deceit in this "already, not yet" stage of redemptive history. However, the church, portrayed as a wise,

³³⁴ Genesis 3:20.

³³⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:20-23.

³³⁶ Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18.

³³⁷ Matthew 28:16-20.

³³⁸ Genesis 1:28.

³³⁹ See pattern of reversal in subsequent Old Testament narratives, in which women deceive the serpent and his seed in Chapter 2.

³⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 11:2-3.

victorious woman in Revelation 12, one day becomes untouchable by the Serpent's deceit.³⁴¹ These limited examples show how the Bible's own trajectory for gender therefore needs to be considered in interpreting and teaching key passages. Other potential topics to be included in the eschatology of gender could be: the place of singleness in the New Testament church, the feminine identity and calling of the church as bride and mother (as well as the masculine identity of the church as son), the relationship between the cultural mandate and the Great Commission, etc.

At this point, the reader may be thinking, "Does the church really need more books on biblical womanhood?" The results of the literature review and the answers given by the WML pointed to the need for new teaching resources and models to integrate teaching into discipleship practice. Every generation is challenged with presenting the message of the Bible in fresh, creative, and intelligible ways, especially when cultural expressions of truth are incongruous with the Bible's plain teaching. The only way the church will be able to reengage the culture will be to present a vision of binary complementarity that is more life-giving, more satisfying, and more in line with how God made people to thrive. This vision can happen only with a sharp focus on humility, the dignity of human identity found in male and female and understanding the beauty of womanhood.

Recommendations for Practice

Considering the findings described above, those WML who have not yet will need to start adapting how they teach biblical womanhood to answer the critiques of older

³⁴¹ Revelation 12:4-6; 9-10.

teachings and respond to the cultural trends and challenges surrounding the topics of sex and gender. This daunting task should not fall on the shoulders of WML alone. The findings of this study indicated that not all churches are addressing the issues directly for fear of causing conflict or appearing too political, but the church must face these problems head-on and not leave their WML to do this alone. For this task, they will also be needing new teaching resources.

Assist Women's Ministry Leaders in Creating New Resources

Pastors Can Encourage WML

It would behoove male church leaders to recognize that WML might feel a degree of reticence, even fear, in adapting how they teach biblical womanhood. Pastors should support them in creating, writing, and promoting new teaching resources that would be positive, holistic, integrated, creative, and would include the following areas:

- A biblical theology of womanhood
- A theology of the body
- A theology of human identity
- Teaching on biblical sexuality
- A theology of work and calling
- An eschatology of gender

Start a Think Tank

No one person will be able to create such an extensive resource. Cooperation within churches and denominations would be valuable in thinking through, selecting,

writing, and producing resources to teach biblical womanhood in the church. Some WML recommended starting a think tank to initiate brainstorming, conversation, and writing on the topic. But none of this would be possible without the support of denominational leaders if the resources are to be used in the future for the equipping of congregants with trusted, vetted materials.

Furthermore, the study revealed that teaching alone will not be sufficient to disciple women in the future. Churches will need a robust system to disciple women and men with a biblical world view, in contrast with newer models of identity formation and their implications for sexuality and gender expression. What is true of ethics could well be applied to creating a tri-perspectival discipleship model.

Promote a Tri-perspectival Approach to Teaching and Discipling Women

The tri-perspectival challenge set forth in the introduction needs to be met with a tri-perspectival model of discipleship. Frame's tri-perspectival ethic applies to discipleship, as it reads:

A biblical ethic (or system of discipleship)³⁴² will include all three perspectives. Normatively, we seek to obey God's authoritative word, his law. Situationally, we seek to apply that law to situations (which are themselves revelation of a sort—general revelation) so as to maximize divine blessing, the highest happiness. Existentially, we seek the inner satisfaction of living as God designed us to live, in his presence. These are perspectives. Each involves the others. But each serves as a check and balance against our misunderstandings of the others.³⁴³

This system would be a combination of three things: teaching God's truth about womanhood (the normative), understanding how it applies to each woman's setting (the

³⁴² Parenthetical statement added.

³⁴³ Frame, "What Is Tri-Perspectivalism?"

situational), and what it means for her personal identity (the existential). Many of the old resources were strong on the normative perspective yet lacking sensitivity to women's situations and how identity is shaped by them. A simple, whole-person model could be summarized in three points:

- The Normative: Equipping her head about God's standards.
- The Situational: Strengthening her hands for fruitful service in each setting.
- The Existential: Shaping her heart for deep transformation of the self.

These simple categories are comprehensive and require a churchwide approach. Each perspective involves the other and should lead to a balanced approach that the church can replicate for all congregants. The teaching of the church on sex, gender, manhood, and womanhood needs to come from the leadership, be applied to the church as a community, and further, men and women will require same-sex discipleship to distill the specifics of following Christ in the physical realities entailed in being a man or a woman. It is not an either-or, but a both-and approach. Young women will need to see this lived out positively, in a safe church environment, with clear pathways for them to grow and serve.

Balance Titus 2 Ministries with General Teaching

Biblical WomanhoodTM resources often stressed the importance of Titus 2 ministries as a form of spiritual mothering, teaching younger women to love their husbands and their children and to be workers at home. However, the results of this study showed the importance of balancing teaching younger women about the important topics of womanhood, marriage, and motherhood with teaching the Bible more generally.

Biblical principles need to be applied to their sense of calling, their singleness, their mission, their work, their spheres of influence and culture. A woman-to-woman discipleship approach is an integral part of the woman's discipleship experience, as it pertains to the unique female embodied experience, but it cannot be the only form of discipleship and needs to be situated in the whole-person model presented above. Pastors should not distance themselves from the general responsibility discipling young women, but must find appropriate ways to do so, as these need spiritual fathers as well as mothers. Older women should not distance themselves from young men, as they need spiritual mothers in the church family to encourage them. An example of this is Paul's own experience in the church: "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well."³⁴⁴

My observation is that Titus 2 ministries have flourished, by default, in complementarian environments where women taught only other women. Large churches usually have highly functioning, separate women's ministries and not all churches incentivize leadership of these ministries with pay. Currently eighty three percent of WML are unremunerated for their work.³⁴⁵ In these cases, it would be highly recommended that pastors 1) integrate women's ministries into the life of the church, 2) that WML receive ongoing oversight, encouragement, and theological training, and 3) that WML receive remuneration if all other staff receive pay for their work. It will be

³⁴⁴ Romans 16:13.

³⁴⁵ Marissa Sullivan, "Churchgoers and Leaders Find Value in Ministry to Women," Lifeway Research, October 17, 2023, <https://research.lifeway.com/2023/10/17/churchgoers-and-leaders-find-value-in-ministry-to-women/>, <https://research.lifeway.com/2023/10/17/churchgoers-and-leaders-find-value-in-ministry-to-women/>.

important for younger women to see that older women are valued for their work, trained, and growing in their personal and situational circumstances.

Think About Representation

One of the problems uncovered in this study was one of perception, namely that complementarian teaching on biblical womanhood is intrinsically demeaning to women. Young women who regularly see women valued and included at the highest levels in society struggle in church spaces without visible contributions from women. Churches can visibly communicate their message without compromising their theological convictions about ordination. Since the Old Testament made room for women serving in the tabernacle,³⁴⁶ being prophetesses,³⁴⁷ or even being a judge in the case of Deborah, and since women in the New Testament were involved in public prayer and prophecy,³⁴⁸ mission,³⁴⁹ and diaconal activities,³⁵⁰ how much more should churches today be displaying the necessity of the woman's contribution to a watching world that believes the church oppresses women?

A church can simultaneously be a witness to two scriptural realities: First, visualize the representative role of the pastor, as he proclaims the Bridegroom's authoritative word, and second, display the representative role of the bride, as she

³⁴⁶ Exodus 38:8; 1 Samuel 2:22.

³⁴⁷ Exodus 15:20; Judges 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chronicles 34:22; Nehemiah 6:14.

³⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:5.

³⁴⁹ Philippians 4:2-3.

³⁵⁰ Romans 16:1-2.

engages in acts of love and service as her witness to the Bridegroom. Here, the church has substantial latitude in displaying how complementarity is lived out.

Summary

The teaching of biblical womanhood is neither obsolete nor irrelevant considering the challenges that have emerged in the church and the evolving views of the culture at large. WML, with the support of their churches, will be called upon to create fresh, positive resources that present a biblical theology of womanhood, tell the story of gendered identity in a way that will include the body, sexuality, and eschatology. Furthermore, these resources will need to be incorporated into a larger framework of discipleship that should equip women to think biblically, with hearts shaped to understand their identity, and hands strengthened for their tasks.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on how WML are adapting their teaching on biblical womanhood to disciple the next generation of women effectively. As with any study, there are limitations as to how extensive the research can be. This study focused on the experience of WML. All the results about younger women were filtered through their perceptions. Therefore, the following areas could be highly valuable to clarify how to teach biblical womanhood in the future.

First, develop an exploratory study to find out what young women in the church understand under the concept of biblical womanhood. What are their assumptions, experiences, and struggles? What sorts of resources do they say they need to understand their own female identity in light of the Bible?

Second, create a sociological study with under 25-year-old women to determine what positive factors contribute to successful integration into the life of the church since negative factors are usually better researched.

Third, develop a concise theology of the woman's body course as a pilot study for a women's Bible study group. Use this study across complementarian churches/denominations and survey the participants to find out whether they understand God's view of women better. Do the same with a pilot course on a biblical theology of womanhood, human identity formation, biblical sexuality, work and calling, and the eschatology of gender.

Fourth, a longitudinal study in a cross-section of complementarian churches should be conducted with the under 25-year-old women to see how they respond to the church's teaching on gender complementarity when female representation is visible in the life of the church.

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