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THE ROLE OF FEMALE BIBLICAL COUNSELORS IN
COMPLEMENTARIAN CHURCHES

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APPROVAL SHEET

THE ROLE OF FEMALE BIBLICAL COUNSELORS IN
COMPLEMENTARIAN CHURCHES

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May You be glorified, and the church edified.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	vii
PREFACE.....	viii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Thesis	3
Methodology	3
Overview of the Literature.....	5
Biblical Counseling in Complementarian Literature.....	6
Complementarianism in Biblical Counseling Literature	15
Conclusion	25
2. EXEGETICAL STUDY: SELECTED TEXTS LIMITING THE ROLE OF WOMEN	26
Complementarian Spectrum.....	26
ACBC Standards of Conduct on Humanity	32
Exegetical Study	34
Sin and Temptation.....	35
Gender Distinction and Roles.....	37
Conclusion	64
3. BIBLICAL COUNSELING AS THE COALESCENCE OF ONE-ANOTHER COMMANDS GIVEN WITHOUT GENDER RESTRICTION	66
Definitions and Limitations	66
Complementarian Church.....	66

Chapter	Page
Biblical Counseling Defined.....	68
Biblical Counseling Characteristics.....	73
The Intersection of One-Another Commands with Biblical Counseling	77
Mutual Care Expressed in Words	80
Mutual Care Expressed in Actions	102
Mutual Care Expressed by Presence.....	105
Conclusion	108
4. PERSPECTIVALISM APPLIED: EIGHT BIBLICAL THEMES RELEVANT TO FEMALE COUNSELORS.....	112
Perspective 1: Interdependence and Co-counselors.....	116
Perspective 2: Gender Complementarity	121
Perspective 3: The Authority Exclusive to Elders	129
Surveying Elders’ Authority.....	130
Defining Elders’ Exclusive Authority	135
Implications for Counseling Ministry.....	137
Perspective 4: Spiritual Abuse	137
Perspective 5: Family Relationship.....	141
Biblical Theme of Family Relationships	142
Implications for Counseling Ministry.....	145
Perspective 6: Wisdom as Learned Skill.....	147
Perspective 7: Spiritual Gifts	151
Biblical Teaching on Spiritual Gifts	152
Spiritual Gifts and Biblical Counseling.....	155
Perspective 8: Christian Liberty.....	157
1 Corinthians 10:23–31.....	160
Romans 14:1–15:6.....	161

Chapter	Page
Conclusion	163
5. BIBLICAL PRECEDENTS OF WOMEN COUNSELING MEN	165
Deborah	166
Lexical Considerations	167
Deborah’s Multifaceted Role.....	170
Complementarian Analysis for Counseling.....	174
Huldah	176
Abigail.....	179
Priscilla.....	182
Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos.....	182
Lexical Considerations	184
Complementarian Analysis for Counseling.....	186
Conclusion	191
6. CONCLUSION	194
Chapter Review	194
Research Implications	202
Areas of Future Research.....	205
Final Thoughts	206
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	208

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
BCNT	Black's New Testament Commentary
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>EFBT</i>	<i>Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions</i> . Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004
<i>JBC</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Counseling</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
K&D	Keil, Carl Friedrich, and Franz Delitzsch. <i>Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament</i> . Translated by James Martin et al. 25 vols. Edinburgh, 1857–1878. Repr., 10 vols., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996. Logos
NAC	New American Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
OTL	Old Testament Library
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentaries
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry. Translated by David E. Green. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
<i>RBMW</i>	<i>Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood</i> . Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

PREFACE

During my years at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, my Greek and Hebrew classes consisted of dozens of men and no other female students. In contrast, my counseling courses consisted of mostly younger female students and a few men. I had an established financial consulting career and never expected an opportunity to leverage my theological education vocationally, but my sisters—many of them unmarried—did not enjoy that luxury. They would need to use their education to earn a living—but how many of them would be able to do so? These women entered seminary because they wanted to know God more deeply and serve the church. But how should women trained in biblical counseling best use such education?

Sometimes casual statements and observations prompt profound chain reactions. I no longer remember verbatim what he said. However, I still remember my shock when my professor, Robert Jones, matter-of-factly described his practice of having a female co-counselor with him when counseling couples in the church. Rather than the expected emphasis on pastoral propriety and protecting his reputation, he emphasized that women contributed value to the actual practice of biblical counseling. Questions flooded my mind—could a woman teach a man biblical truth without violating 1 Timothy 2:12? Could a woman be trained to serve alongside elders to equip the saints to resolve conflict, walk through grief, and work through anxiety and other common counseling issues? Could a woman do so in a way that accords with Hebrews 13:17? If these questions were answered affirmatively, what would that look like in practice?

I searched in vain for answers to these questions in biblical counseling resources and the “blue book,” otherwise known as *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. I asked random people seated next to me at Christian Counseling Education

Foundation national conferences and received responses that validated the questions without providing satisfactory answers. I observed a vast continuum of practice that underscored the need for exegetical evaluation. The work that follows is my attempt to understand how to wed my passion for biblical counseling in the church with my complementarian convictions.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As evangelical seminaries continue to equip women through biblical counseling training and confer on them masters and doctoral degrees in biblical counseling, we—biblical counselors with complementarian convictions—need to consider how these ladies should best steward this educational gift for the benefit of the church. What are women’s employment prospects in the church, and how do those prospects correlate with their permission to counsel men and couples in addition to other women and children? The largest, most well-known certifying organization for biblical counselors takes the position that female counselors should not regularly counsel men, although not all the vanguards of complementarianism have echoed a similar sentiment.¹ How should we navigate the difficulty arising from this dissonance? More importantly, how does Scripture instruct us in these matters? Scripture contains the prohibition of women teaching and exercising authority in the gathered assembly but also dozens of gender-inclusive one-another commands that overlap with biblical counseling. How do we faithfully harmonize these directives?

The foment within evangelical circles regarding the role of women in the church intensifies the urgency of these questions. Unfortunately, avoiding the slippery slope of egalitarianism on one side frequently propels us into the ditch on the other side—inhibiting women from obeying all that God has commanded. We should not

¹ As more fully discussed below, the Association of Certified Biblical Counselor’s standards of conduct include a provision that “women will strive to avoid formally counseling men.” The full “Standards of Conduct” can be found on their web page, with this prohibition in the standard labeled “The Commitment to Humanity.” Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, “Standards of Conduct: V. The Commitment to Humanity,” accessed December 1, 2022, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/about/beliefs/positions/standards-of-conduct/#humanity>.

conflate the role of the counselor with the role of the pastor—counseling is a component of pastoring, but counseling is also distinct from pastoring. In 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul prohibits women from a certain kind of teaching: “I do not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to remain quiet.”² However, this command does not apply to every setting or situation in which a woman might teach.

Evangelicals must exegete the relevant texts in light of the whole canon and respond winsomely to those who challenge our interpretation. As Jonathan Leeman notes, much of the controversy erupting around these issues in the Christian spheres of social media evidences “more heat than light.”³ At the same time, many have cogently identified misuses and misapplications of complementarianism.⁴ Another has challenged the value of biblical counseling.⁵ While it is outside the scope of this dissertation to defend complementarianism or biblical counseling, I necessarily evaluate support for and critiques of both as I propose the appropriate role for female biblical counselors in complementarian churches.

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the Christian Standard Bible. Further, any italics in Bible quotations are my own additions.

³ Jonathan Leeman, “On 1 Timothy 2:12 and Recent Complementarian Kerfuffles,” Pastors’ Talk, June 25, 2019, podcast, 31:29, <https://www.9marks.org/pastors-talk/episode-93-on-1-timothy-212-and-recent-complementarian-kerfuffles/>.

⁴ See Aimee Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Her Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020); Rachel Green Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission: Women and Men in Marriage, Church, and Society* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2019); Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2021); Rebecca Davis, *Untwisting Scriptures: That Were Used to Tie You Up, Gag You, and Tangle Your Mind* (Greenville, SC: Pennycress, 2021); and Tiffany Bluhm, *Prey Tell: Why We Silence Women Who Tell the Truth and How Everyone Can Speak Up* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2021). In my opinion, none of these books provide exegetical reasons to reject complementarianism. However, each author makes valid observations of some complementarians going beyond Scripture in practice or ideal.

⁵ Sheila Wray Gregoire, “Biblical Counseling and Horrid Perspectives on Abuse: How Did Things Go So Wrong?,” *Bare Marriage* (blog), April 11, 2022, <https://baremarriage.com/2022/04/biblical-counseling-and-abuse/>. Gregoire’s interlocutors on social media reveal rising influence and a significant contingent of individuals citing great harm wrought through biblical counseling.

Thesis

This dissertation will argue from a complementarian perspective that Scripture permits women to biblically counsel men because biblical counseling is a form of one-another ministry commanded of believers without gender restriction and that this ministry does not violate 1 Timothy 2:12. Eight additional biblical themes and the examples of Deborah, Huldah, Abigail, and Priscilla further support this assertion.

Methodology

A survey of the scholarly literature reveals a lack of work devoted to the intersection of complementarianism and biblical counseling. Therefore, the heart of this dissertation consists of a text-based, exegetical study. Since neither complementarianism nor biblical counseling are monolithic movements, these terms must be defined. I employ Robert Jones's definition for biblical counseling: "It is the Christlike, caring, person-to-person ministry of God's Word to people struggling with personal and interpersonal problems to help them know and follow Jesus Christ in heart and behavior amid their struggles."⁶ I use the Danvers Statement published by the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) to frame what I mean by complementarianism.⁷ While I embrace God's good design in placing restrictions on women in the home and church, I am unconvinced by some complementarian arguments that expand those restrictions beyond what is explicitly stated in the biblical text.

In chapter 2, I explore the passages cited by the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC) Standards of Conduct to support their restrictive assertions.

⁶ Robert D. Jones, "What Is Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling?," in *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, by Robert D. Jones, Kristin L. Kellen, and Rob Green (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2021), 20.

⁷ The Danvers Statement can be found on the CBMW's website. Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, "The Danvers Statement," June 26, 2007, <https://cbmw.org/2007/06/26/the-danvers-statement/>. While the website does not offer a revision date, it does note that the statement was created by the organization in Danvers, Massachusetts, in December 1987, and published in final form in 1988. For historical background and names of participants, see Denny Burk, "Mere Complementarianism," *Eikon* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 28–42, <https://cbmw.org/2019/11/20/mere-complementarianism/>.

I demonstrate that those biblical passages do not forbid women from biblically counseling men since the restrictions are given in the context of the gathered assembly rather than the private ministry of the Word. As a matter of intellectual integrity, I consult theological resources advocating for egalitarianism as well as complementarianism. My goal is a fuller comprehension of these oft-cited biblical texts in their context. As I make applications to biblical counseling, I explore and evaluate the arguments, primarily from complementarian and biblical counseling writers, for what women may and may not do in the church.

Building on this foundation, the third chapter correlates biblical counseling to the New Testament commands given to all believers. The chapter begins with a broad survey of biblical counseling definitions to demonstrate a more thorough representation of biblical counseling concepts and the absence of authoritative teaching in those definitions. Dozens of imperatives shape the interaction of New Testament saints: pursue peace, edify, serve, speak truth, welcome, greet, accept, confess sin, pray, encourage, forgive, instruct, live in harmony with, comfort, weep with, and rejoice with one another. I demonstrate that these commands are given to believers without gender restriction and are intended to function in the normal flow of life in the covenant community. I contend that biblical counseling constitutes one way of fulfilling many of the commands rather than transgressing the restrictions on women teaching in the gathered assembly or exercising ruling authority over men in the church. Pastors and elders should not neglect biblical counseling but instead graft male and female members into this ministry for the spiritual flourishing of the body.

The fourth chapter goes beyond what women are prohibited from doing by the gender-restrictive texts and required to do vis-à-vis the “one-another” commands. In order to develop a more robust view of the role of female biblical counselors, I draw on John Frame’s multi-perspectival approach to consider (1) interdependence, (2) gender complementarity, (3) exclusive elder authority, (4) spiritual abuse, (5) family relationship,

(6) wisdom as learned skill, (7) spiritual gifts, and (8) Christian liberty. Each of these themes supports women’s scriptural freedom to counsel men and couples in addition to women and children.

In the fifth chapter, I explore biblical narratives of women instructing men and compare them to biblical counseling in the church today. Deborah, Huldah, Abigail, and especially Priscilla exemplify women involved in the private ministry of the Word to men and women, including male leaders, with approbation from the authors of Scripture.⁸

In the final chapter, I summarize the preceding chapters, draw some initial practical implications for complementarian churches, and suggest areas for further research.

Overview of the Literature

A survey of the academic literature examining the intersection of biblical counseling with complementarianism reveals a significant gap.⁹ The complementarian literature regarding the roles of women in the church primarily focuses on the pastorate rather than counseling. Biblical counseling literature underscores the importance of the private ministry of the Word in addition to public proclamation. With the notable exception of the ACBC Standards of Conduct, this literature speaks little about complementarianism or female counselors in the church. I begin this section with the references to biblical counseling in complementarian literature and then the references to complementarianism in biblical counseling literature. The scarcity of literature highlights the need for this dissertation.

⁸ This summary is inspired by Thomas R. Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching,” in *RBMW*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, 209–24.

⁹ Cheryl Adams, the chief research librarian for religious studies at the Library of Congress corroborated this assertion on August 16, 2019, during a research appointment in the library.

Biblical Counseling in Complementarian Literature

Since creating the Danvers Statement, CBMW describes itself as the primary organization representing and advocating for complementarianism.¹⁰ CBMW has produced 48 journal volumes over a span of 25 years; however, no articles have been devoted to biblical counseling in the church.¹¹ Likewise, the books produced and promoted by CBMW barely mention counseling.¹² However, where counseling is discussed in these resources, women are not forbidden from counseling men.

Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth

The most robust resource designed to answer complementarian application questions is Grudem's *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions*. Grudem served as co-editor of *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, president and co-founder of the CBMW, president of the Evangelical Theological Society, and general editor of the English Standard Version Bible; he still serves as a research professor at Phoenix Seminary. He opens his volume by identifying six "key issues" before dedicating the majority of the text to refuting claims made by opponents responding to the earlier release of *RBMW*.¹³

¹⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism: Biblical Responses to the Key Questions* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2006), 19.

¹¹ The journals began as the quarterly *CBMW News*, morphed into the semi-annual *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, and more recently became *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology*. The issues available at CBMW.org/journal begin with the August 1995 edition of the *CBMW News* and contain the Spring 1998 through Fall 2016 editions of the *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, as well as the Spring 2019 through Fall 2022 editions of *Eikon*.

¹² See Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*; Wayne Grudem, *EFBT*; and Andreas Köstenberger and Thomas Schreiner, eds., *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016). Of these three volumes, the most thorough treatment of counseling is in *EFBT*, discussed in detail below.

¹³ Grudem, *EFBT*, 25–56. He identifies six key issues: first: "Men and women are equal in value and dignity" (25); second: "Men and women have different roles in marriage as part of the created order" (29); third: "The equality and differences between men and women reflect the equality and differences in the Trinity" (45); fourth: "The equality and differences between men and women are very good" (49); fifth: "This is a matter of obedience to the Bible" (50); and sixth: "The controversy is much bigger than we realize, because it touches all of life" (56).

Grudem devotes the second chapter to considering gender roles in the church. After quoting Acts 2:17–18, 1 Corinthians 12:7 and 11, 1 Peter 4:10, Acts 8:12, and Galatians 3:28, he concludes, “These passages should cause us to ask whether our churches have rightly and fully utilized the gifts and ministries of women in the past. I hope that many church leaders reading this chapter will decide that they have not done enough to encourage various kinds of ministries by women.”¹⁴ He acknowledges that churches have a responsibility to encourage women to exercise their gifts. Grudem includes counseling in his list of opportunities for women in the church:

There is nothing in Scripture that prohibits a woman from being a paid full-time staff member in a church. Many churches that restrict the office of pastor and elder are still willing to have a woman in a paid staff position, such as a director of educational ministries, or a women’s ministry director, or a youth ministry position, or in a role as a part-time or full-time counselor. *We should not make rules that the Bible does not support, and we should not add restrictions to ministry positions when the Bible does not justify these restrictions.* Where the Bible allows freedom, we should encourage ministries by women as well as men.¹⁵

Grudem commends efforts to expand ministry opportunities for women, including counseling, in the church.

Of particular interest for this study is the section titled “But What *Should* Women Do in the Church?,” where Grudem provides three lists to help churches evaluate what is biblically appropriate for women to do. He includes “formally counseling one man” as item 24, “formally counseling a couple together” as item 25, and “formally counseling one woman” as item 26. He also indicates that anything after the ninth item on the list “should be open to both men and women.”¹⁶ The same counseling opportunities also appear on the teaching lists. Grudem comments in a footnote,

¹⁴ Grudem, *EFBT*, 63.

¹⁵ Grudem, *EFBT*, 64, (italics original).

¹⁶ Grudem, *EFBT*, 93–100. The three lists are as follows: “Areas of Governing Authority” (93–95), “Areas of Bible Teaching” (95–100), and “Areas of Public Visibility or Recognition” (100).

I put items 24, 25, and 26 in this “Governing authority” column (List 1) and also in the “Bible Teaching” column (List 2) because there is some amount of authority and some amount of Bible teaching involved in these counseling activities. I am not here commenting on whether it is ordinarily wise or most effective for one woman to counsel one man: I am just listing these activities according to the degree of governing or teaching authority they exhibit over the congregation of a church. I also realize that others may decide to put these activities at different places on these lists, depending on the style of counseling and the degree of authority they think attaches to it. It seems to me that these three items are quite similar to the positive example of Priscilla and Aquila together explaining to Apollos the way of God more accurately in a private setting in Acts 18:26.¹⁷

This footnote is the most thorough treatment regarding a woman counseling a couple or a man in complementarian literature. In subsequent chapters, I return to Grudem’s observations about governing and teaching authority as well as the example of Priscilla and Aquila with Apollos, which provides the best biblical comparison with the practice of biblical counseling today.

As Grudem works through challenges to complementarianism, he engages Linda Belleville’s and Gilbert Bilezikian’s assertion that Deborah’s role shows that God can call women to leadership roles.¹⁸ Grudem responds, “The text does not say that Deborah ruled over God’s people or taught them publicly. . . . This is not a picture of public leadership . . . but private settling of disputes through both arbitration and judicial decisions. If we decide to take this example for today, we might see it as justification for women to serve as counselors or civil judges.”¹⁹ Other complementarians likewise often draw a significant distinction regarding the permissibility of a woman instructing a man

¹⁷ Grudem, *EFTB*, 87n37. Similar references to women in counseling ministry without specifying the gender of the counselee are included in section 5.9, “Gifts to All” (176–77), and 10.8, “Society Today Rejects Gender Restrictions” (448).

¹⁸ Grudem, *EFTB*, 131. Grudem also engages and counters several authors: Linda Belleville, *Women Leaders and the Church: Three Crucial Questions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 44; Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman’s Place in Church and Family*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1985), 70–71; Stanley Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry*, 7th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1995); Judy L. Brown, *Women Ministers According to Scripture* (Kearney, NE: Morris, 1996); J. Lee Grady, *10 Lies the Church Tells Women: How the Bible Has Been Misused to Keep Women in Spiritual Bondage* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2000); and Sarah Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church: Building Consensus on Christian Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

¹⁹ Grudem, *EFTB*, 133.

based on whether the setting is public or private. I return to Deborah’s settling disputes and how it comports with modern biblical counseling in more detail in chapter 5.

Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

Though the Danvers Statement often serves as the official delimiter of complementarianism, *RBMW* serves as an unofficial guide for interpreting and applying the Danvers Statement.²⁰ For this reason, I focus here on *RBMW* as representative of the complementarian corpus. The editors of *RBMW* chose the term “complementarian” with great care to reduce negative connotations. They describe their view as follows:

If one word must be used to describe our position, we prefer the term complementarian, since it suggests both equality and beneficial differences between men and women. We are uncomfortable with the term “traditionalist” because it implies an unwillingness to let Scripture challenge traditional patterns of behavior, and we certainly reject the term “hierarchicalist” because it overemphasizes structured authority while giving no suggestion of equality or the beauty of mutual interdependence.²¹

John Piper’s vision of complementarity includes criteria to evaluate the appropriateness of activities and roles for women to pursue. He suggests, “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, and thus controvert God’s created order.”²² He later explains, “Non-directive influence proceeds with petition and persuasion instead of directives.”²³ Biblical counselors differ in their use of direct instruction, persuasion, provocative questions, reasoning together, and a host of other approaches, yet they are

²⁰ Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*. References to this work in this dissertation are from the 2006 edition published by Crossway, which includes an additional preface to the original version released in 1991, unless otherwise noted. Keyword searches were enabled by the Kindle edition. In 2021, CBMW released an updated version in PDF format on their website, omitting chapters by Paige Patterson and Dorothy Patterson, George Alan Rekers, and a preface by J. Ligon Duncan and Randy Stinson.

²¹ Piper and Grudem, preface to *RBMW*, xv.

²² John Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible,” in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 51.

²³ Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” 51.

united in encouraging what Scripture encourages, forbidding what Scripture forbids, confronting sin, and providing biblical answers. Although Piper does not specifically address biblical counseling, it seems unlikely that he would support women counseling men based on his criteria that women should avoid personal and direct influence over men.

Since only a few of the two dozen contributors to *RBMW* mention counseling in a manner relevant to this dissertation, I survey each one in the order it appears in the volume. In the second chapter devoted to addressing concerns raised regarding complementarianism, Piper and Grudem write, “We admit that there are ambiguities in applying Paul’s instructions about an established church to an emerging church. We admit there are ambiguities in separating the Priscilla-type counsel from the official teaching role of 1 Timothy 2:12.”²⁴ This critical distinction between counseling and official teaching in biblical examples receives further examination in chapters 2 and 5 of this dissertation.

Douglas Moo asserts, “In the Pastoral Epistles, teaching always has this restricted sense of authoritative doctrinal instruction.”²⁵ He argues that authority resides within Scripture and thus the teaching action carries a derivative authority. Moo concludes,

In light of these considerations, we argue that the teaching prohibited to women here includes what we would call preaching (note 2 Timothy 4:2 “Preach the word . . . with careful instruction” [teaching, *didachē*]), and the teaching of Bible and doctrine in the church, in colleges and in seminaries. Other activities—leading Bible studies, for instance—may be included, depending on how they are done. Still others—evangelistic witnessing, counseling, teaching subjects other than the Bible or doctrine—are not, in our opinion, teaching in the sense Paul intends here.²⁶

²⁴ Piper and Grudem, “An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers,” in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 76.

²⁵ Douglas Moo, “What Does it Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority over Men? 1 Timothy 2:11–15,” in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 176.

²⁶ Moo, “What Does it Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority over Men?,” 186.

Ultimately, though, Moo is not entirely clear in this essay whether he would condone women’s biblically counseling men since that would include an element of teaching Scripture, including doctrine. Despite listing counseling as a permitted activity, the inclusion of doctrinal content or the perceived authority of the counselor could jeopardize the permissibility of biblical counseling compared to less instructive types of therapy in the counseling realm. He states that Scripture “prohibits them [women] to teach men” and forbids “the woman’s exercising authority in the church over *any man*.”²⁷

Thomas Schreiner’s chapter emphasizes the number of people involved, the setting, and the demeanor of the women providing instruction. He notes the Old Testament examples of Deborah, Abigail, and Huldah, who advised men outside the public purview without asserting inappropriate leadership over them, as well as Miriam, who led the women in triumphant praise.²⁸ Considering a New Testament example, Schreiner adds, “Even if Priscilla did all the teaching, this is not the same thing as teaching publicly in an authoritative position of leadership.”²⁹ He anticipates possible objections that women with appropriate head coverings are permitted to prophesy in the gathered assembly (1 Cor 11:2–16), acknowledging, “One of the strongest arguments for full inclusion of women in authoritative positions of leadership stems from the prophetic role women played in the Scriptures.”³⁰ However, he shows that the passage permits women to do so as they adorn themselves with the head coverings denoting submission.³¹ Schreiner further differentiates between teaching and prophesying: “Teaching involves a sustained and orderly exposition of divine revelation already given, while prophecy in the

²⁷ Moo, “What Does it Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority over Men?,” 186–87 (italics original).

²⁸ Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership,” 215–17.

²⁹ Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership,” 218.

³⁰ Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership,” 215.

³¹ Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership,” 215–16.

New Testament occurs when someone has a spontaneous revelation or impression, the whole or parts of which may or may not be from the Lord.”³² His chapter underscores the need for church leaders to carefully consider the restrictions that Scripture places on women while simultaneously encouraging women to exercise their God-given gifts in service to the kingdom.

H. Wayne House affirms the Spirit’s gifting of men and women, creating a responsibility for church leaders to steward and develop these gifts. He recommends, “In view of this, local churches must provide ways in which women along with men can exercise their spiritual gifts. Women may be leaders in visitation to the sick, counseling other women and men, and leading Christian education programs, missionary programs, and evangelistic efforts.”³³ He does not consider a woman counseling a man to be in violation of Scripture’s restrictions, and he laments the tendency to assign all leadership roles to men and neglect the gifts of spiritually mature women in the congregation.

In summary, while none of the volume’s contributors devote substantive attention to the role of female biblical counselors, several authors approvingly mention women counseling in the church. Piper, Grudem, and Schreiner consider the type of instruction given by Priscilla to Apollos privately to be in accord with, rather than in violation of, Paul’s instructions in 1 Timothy (at least in some instances). Piper presents a conundrum: on the one hand, his “Overview” chapter co-authored with Grudem affirms that Priscilla did not transgress 1 Timothy 2:12; on the other hand, his “Vision” chapter limits women to indirect instruction to avoid transgression.³⁴ Schreiner includes women in counseling ministry without specifying the gender of counselees while Moo and House

³² Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership,” 217.

³³ H. Wayne House, “Principles to Use in Establishing Women in Ministry,” in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 362. This essay is adapted from House’s previous work, *The Role of Women in Ministry Today* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990).

³⁴ Piper and Grudem, “An Overview of Central Concerns,” 76; Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” 51.

indicate that women may counsel men. Each of the authors understands 1 Timothy 2:12 to preclude women from teaching in the gathered assembly and exercising elder-like governing authority. None of the authors specifically forbid women from counseling men.

Women in the Church

Arguably, the most academically rigorous complementarian study of 1 Timothy 2:9–15, *Women in the Church*, addresses the Ephesian context, the syntax, interpretation, hermeneutics, translation, and application of the passage.³⁵ The contributors do not directly address the role of female biblical counselors in the church, but Andreas Köstenberger and Schreiner clarify crucial elements of the discussion. For instance, Köstenberger adduces, “We have shown that Paul prohibits women’s exercise of ultimate authority in the church and, more specifically, that he prohibits teaching that would serve as a specific instance of that sort of exercise of authority Thus, women should not serve in positions of ultimate teaching or ruling authority in the church.”³⁶ His assessment confirms a distinction between a general use of the term *authority* and the type prohibited to women: *ultimate authority*.

Schreiner carefully distinguishes the type of teaching prohibited to women from the type of teaching commanded of all believers:

Neither does Priscilla and Aquila’s private teaching of Apollos contradict Paul’s teaching here, for that is profoundly different from the public and authoritative teaching in view of the Pastoral Epistles. Furthermore, Colossians 3:16 (cf. 1 Cor. 14:26) does not refer to authoritative public teaching but to the informal mutual instruction that occurs among all the members of the body. Unfortunately, some churches ban women from doing even this, although it is plainly in accord with Scripture. Yet this mutual instruction differs significantly from the authoritative

³⁵ Köstenberger and Schreiner, *Women in the Church*.

³⁶ Andreas J. Köstenberger, “A Complex Sentence: The Syntax of 1 Timothy 2:12,” in Köstenberger and Schreiner, *Women in the Church*, 160, Kindle.

transmission of tradition that Paul has in mind in the Pastoral Epistles. Such authoritative teaching is typically a function of the elders/overseers.³⁷

Schreiner's insight regarding the private nature of Priscilla's instruction and the general command to teach one another serves as a foundation for this dissertation.

Less Significant Mentions of Counseling in Complementarian Literature

James Hamilton contributes two additional facets. First, he suggests that it is unwise for pastors or other men to mentor younger women.³⁸ Second, Hamilton proposes that a woman may, with her husband, instruct men privately as demonstrated in the Priscilla and Aquila narrative.³⁹ He does not address whether an unmarried woman or a woman whose husband is unconverted, immature, or unwilling is precluded from participating. Beyond "instructing," Hamilton does not delineate the specific functions or roles permissible to a wife when counseling with her husband.

Kevin DeYoung, pastor of Christ Covenant Church and frequent contributor to The Gospel Coalition blogs and the larger conversation in social media, advocates for applying complementarian convictions broadly within society.⁴⁰ However, he cautions, "In general, I see two bad approaches to applying complementarian principles. The first is too restrictive, defaulting to 'traditional' roles that may or may not be rooted in Scripture."⁴¹ The second approach DeYoung notes is the loosening of restrictions. He acknowledges the appropriateness of Priscilla's private instruction of Apollos while

³⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9–15: A Dialogue with Scholarship," in Köstenberger and Schreiner, *Women in the Church*, 191, Kindle.

³⁸ James M. Hamilton Jr., "What Women Can Do in Ministry: Full Participation within Biblical Boundaries," in *Women, Ministry and the Gospel: Exploring New Paradigms*, ed. Mark Husbands and Timothy Larsen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 36.

³⁹ Hamilton, "What Women Can Do in Ministry," 36–43.

⁴⁰ Kevin DeYoung, "The Beauty of Biblically Broad Complementarianism," The Gospel Coalition 2019, April 4, 2019, CBMW video, 40:37, <https://cbmw.org/2019/04/04/the-beauty-of-biblically-broad-complementarianism-tgc19/>.

⁴¹ Kevin DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church: A Short, Biblical, Practical Introduction* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 79, Kindle.

cautioning against assuming that Priscilla’s example means that all teaching roles are open to women.⁴² DeYoung includes counseling as a ministry open to women, and yet his examples are limited to women who “counsel almost-divorced wives and mentor young ladies and teach the Bible and good doctrine to other women (oh, how we need women who love the Bible and good doctrine!).”⁴³

A few recurrent themes can be recognized thus far in the literature review. Complementarians routinely affirm that Priscilla, with Aquila, privately instructing Apollos does not transgress Paul’s later restrictions on women teaching or exercising authority. Likewise, they recognize that some churches’ restrictions on women’s ministry opportunities exceed scriptural warrants.⁴⁴

Complementarianism in Biblical Counseling Literature

Biblical counseling is a relatively young academic discipline and, as such, has less scholarly literature compared to other theological disciplines.⁴⁵ Jay Adams’s

⁴² DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church*, 93, 120.

⁴³ DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church*, 95.

⁴⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, “Women in Ministry: Another Complementarian Perspective,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2010), Kindle. Schreiner’s response to Linda Belleville’s chapter likewise draws distinctions between the public and private ministry of the Word as well as acknowledging that undue limitations on women in ministry are unfortunate (280–84). Several authors point to unintended consequences of some complementarian praxis. For example, Aimee Byrd laments, “We say we are being complementary because we have designated a separate wing for women to do their thing in the church. It has the appearance of valuing women and giving them a place to serve under male headship.” Aimee Byrd, *No Little Women: Equipping All Women in the Household of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2016), 96. Her book, *No Little Women*, expresses the frustration of many regarding the role of women in the church. She pleads for churches to invest in discipling women and deploying their gifts for the good of the church rather than confining women to serve only other women or children. Graham Beynon and Jane Tooher express a similar concern: “Women’s ministry tends to get separated from other, general ministry . . . if ministries become mainly separate, there isn’t much complementing going on.” Graham Beynon and Jane Tooher, *Embracing Complementarianism: Turning Biblical Convictions into Positive Church Culture* (Epsom, England: Good Book Company, 2022), 8, Kindle. Their concern receives more attention in chapter 4.

⁴⁵ A search of the ProQuest database yields less than two hundred dissertations and theses with biblical counseling as the main subject (February 27, 2021). Most of these works deal with the incorporation of biblical counseling into a particular church setting rather than advancing academic scholarship. Heath Lambert warned a decade ago that academically-minded biblical counselors needed to fill the literature gap and engage with other counseling perspectives. Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 117.

publication of *Competent to Counsel* in 1970 launched the modern biblical counseling movement.⁴⁶ Responding to a crisis of pastoral care, he emphasizes the call to pastors, deemphasizing the role of women and other non-pastors, especially in the early decades. Adams coined the term “nouthetic counseling” and argued that “qualified Christian counselors properly trained in the Scriptures are competent to counsel—more competent than psychiatrists or anyone else.”⁴⁷ Adams formed the Christian Counseling Education Foundation (CCEF) in 1968 with John Bettler.⁴⁸ The need for a certifying agency grew with the burgeoning movement, so in 1976, Adams founded what became the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC).⁴⁹

Adams’s initial efforts developed into a movement with international reach as seminaries and related colleges began conferring undergraduate, graduate, and advanced degrees in biblical counseling.⁵⁰ In 2011, a diverse group of biblical counseling advocates and practitioners established the Biblical Counseling Coalition, an umbrella organization formed to pursue fellowship, share information and resources, and “articulate a clear and winsome standard of biblical counseling beliefs and best practices.”⁵¹ As the movement matured, different philosophies of ministry and practice emerged among groups

⁴⁶ David Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 1.

⁴⁷ Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 18. While Adams references “qualified Christian counselors” without gender, closer examination of his writings suggest he had only or primarily men in mind.

⁴⁸ For a concise history of this organization, see Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation, “Beliefs & History,” accessed March 20, 2023, <https://www.ccef.org/about/mission-beliefs-history/beliefs-history-model-of-care/>.

⁴⁹ The organization was originally named the National Association for Nouthetic Counselors (NANC). For a concise history of this organization, see Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, “History,” accessed December 31, 2022, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/about/history/>.

⁵⁰ Bob Kellemen, “20 US Schools Where You Can Earn a Degree in Biblical Counseling,” *Resurrection Power Multipliers Ministries* (blog), January 13, 2019, <https://rpmministries.org/2019/01/13-us-schools-where-you-can-earn-a-degree-in-biblical-counseling/>.

⁵¹ David Powlison, “A Coalescing of Various Counseling Ministries,” *JBC* 32, no. 1 (2018): 89–90.

identifying as nouthetic counselors and later as biblical counselors. Though taking different positions on female counselors now, they share a common origin in the ministry and writings of Adams. Therefore, this section appropriately begins with his work.

Despite primarily addressing pastors, Adams insists, based on Colossians 3:16, “First, whatever nouthetic activity may be, it is clear that the New Testament assumes that all Christians, not simply ministers of the Gospel, should engage in it.”⁵² Adams considers team counseling, preferably with the pastor and an elder or perhaps a deacon, to provide immense value for training, improving the effectiveness of counseling, safeguarding the pastor’s reputation, and providing constructive feedback for the counselors themselves.⁵³ He summarizes, “The work of counseling should be carried on preeminently by ministers and other Christians whose gifts, training and calling especially qualify and require them to pursue the work.”⁵⁴ In the foreword to *Your Place in the Counseling Revolution*, Adams appeals to the average church member to join the counseling revolution.⁵⁵ In the concluding chapter, he opines, “God has obligated Christians to minister to one another both formally and informally as each other’s counselors” before encouraging those men who wish to counsel to go to seminary and enter the pastorate.⁵⁶

In a subsequent work, Adams endorses grafting others, including women, into counseling ministry. However, his example for the incorporation of women is as follows:

Suppose, in the course of counseling a woman who has been suffering from depression, the pastor discovers that she (1) neglects unpleasant chores like ironing

⁵² Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 41.

⁵³ Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 204–5. Contrasting the more positive perspective of women offered by Jones, Adams adds that team counseling “precludes almost all of the provocative conversation and action which is the stock-in-trade of some female clients” (205). I return to this in chapter 4.

⁵⁴ Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 268.

⁵⁵ Jay E. Adams, *Your Place in the Counseling Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), vii.

⁵⁶ Adams, *Your Place in the Counseling Revolution*, 54.

and that (2) even when she attempts to do her ironing *against* her feelings, her mind wanders to thoughts of self-pity, jealousy and envy. He may suggest to her that she find a friend who (1) will iron with her every Tuesday morning, thus routinizing the process (a necessity for those who tend to be “undisciplined” [Cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:14], and as a result have become depressed) according to schedule, and (2) who will talk to her about uplifting topics consonant with the standard given in Philippians 4 (thus training her how to use her mind fruitfully). The counselee may not know of such a person. But if a woman in the congregation, possessing the gifts to minister in these ways, is “on call,” the pastor may be able to engage her help in this or other creative ways.⁵⁷

While biblical counselors often assign homework and include other members of the body, Adams’s example above seems nearsighted and shallow. Counselors may ask a woman skilled in domestic duties or parenting to come alongside a woman who is less skilled, yet the acquisition of such skills is not the primary purpose. Adams does not detail examples of women leading the counseling or biblical teaching. While it is encouraging to note his willingness to recognize the gifting and training available to non-ministerial members of the flock, it seems unlikely that he would support a theologically-trained woman biblically counseling a man.

Heath Lambert, former executive director of ACBC, delineates “generations” in biblical counseling.⁵⁸ He adduces, “Adams’s methodological work was characterized by an authoritative style. The last two decades have seen a shift from this approach to more mutuality in counseling.”⁵⁹ Cameron Fraser cites the formation of the Institute of Nouthetic Studies to promote Adams’s work as indicative “that differences between the first and second generation of biblical counselors were over more than just nomenclature.”⁶⁰ Within the biblical counseling movement, a generational shift and a

⁵⁷ Jay E. Adams, *Shepherding God’s Flock: A Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling and Leadership* (1975; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 191 (italics original).

⁵⁸ Heath Lambert, “The Theological Development of the Biblical Counseling Movement from 1988” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 41.

⁵⁹ Lambert, “The Theological Development of the Biblical Counseling Movement from 1988,” 39.

⁶⁰ J. Cameron Fraser, *Developments in Biblical Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2015), chap. 3, “The Sufficiency of Nouthetic Counseling,” para. 7, Kindle.

multiplication of philosophical streams occurred over time.

In his historical work, Powlison articulates Adams's practice regarding women in biblical counseling. Many professionals who responded negatively to nouthetic counseling rejected Adams's insistence on ministerial competency to counsel.⁶¹ Powlison summarizes, "Adams's view barred women from careers in counseling because they could not generally be ordained in evangelical denominations. Adams's writing portrayed women frequently but always as the recipients of counseling, never as those doing counseling."⁶² "Fault lines" formed within the movement, including the degree to which Adams was embraced, the merit of certification, funding and publishing priorities, and relationships with academic institutions and scholars.⁶³ CCEF cofounders, Adams and John Bettler, differed in their perspective of the role of female biblical counselors.

Powlison summarizes,

The professional identity of the CCEF staff, male and female, centered in the counseling role. Adams's argument for the pastor as God's professional had excluded women from playing a professional counseling role. But when Adams wrote that "the work of counseling should be carried on preeminently by ministers and other Christians whose gifts, training and calling especially qualify and require them to pursue the work" [*Competent to Counsel*, 268], Bettler included women among those "other Christians."⁶⁴

During Powlison's leadership of CCEF from 2014 to 2019, and subsequently under Alasdair Grove's leadership, female faculty members addressed plenary sessions as well as breakout sessions open to male and female attendees at national conferences.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 181.

⁶² Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 181.

⁶³ Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 209–13.

⁶⁴ Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 214.

⁶⁵ See www.ccef.org for annual conference schedules including speakers. In contrast, the ACBC national conference in 2021 in Charlotte, North Carolina, indicated at the time of registration that sessions led by women were intended for women attendees only. See Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, "2021 ACBC Annual Conference: O Church, Arise: Reclaiming a Culture of Care," accessed August 29, 2023, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/about/events/2021-annual-conference/>; Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation, "The Way of Wisdom (National Conference 2022)," accessed August 29, 2023, <https://www.ccef.org/shop/category/audio/the-way-of-wisdom-national-conference->

Powlison echoes Adams's call for pastors to restore counseling to the church: "Counseling is connected both structurally and in content to other aspects of the pastoral task: teaching, preaching, prayer, church discipline, use of gifts, missions, worship and so forth. Counseling is the private ministry of the Word of God, tailored specifically to the individuals involved."⁶⁶ In one of the earliest multi-authored volumes devoted to biblical counseling, Powlison remains silent about the role of women in counseling. Elsewhere in the volume, John MacArthur and William Goode advocate for the inclusion of all members in the counseling ministry, but they do not delineate the people whom women may counsel.⁶⁷ In another volume, MacArthur explains, "Women can proclaim the Word of God except when the church meets for corporate worship. . . . The New Testament gives examples of Mary, Anna, and Priscilla declaring God's truth to men and women."⁶⁸ Likewise, in a short article a few years later, Powlison indicates the need for additional counselors serving under the authority of pastors and elders to do most of the counseling.⁶⁹

Reflecting on two dozen years of teaching at Westminster Seminary, Powlison conveys that complementary perspectives enhance counseling wisdom and performance in team counseling.⁷⁰ Powlison further observes, "The vast majority of promises, commands, stories, and revelations of God in the Bible are not gender-specific," and

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⁶⁶ David Powlison, "Biblical Counseling in the Twentieth Century," in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, by John F. MacArthur Jr., Wayne Mack, and The Master's College Faculty (Dallas: Word, 1994), 58–59.

⁶⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., "Rediscovering Biblical Counseling," and William W. Goode, "Biblical Counseling and the Local Church," in MacArthur, Mack, and The Master's College Faculty, *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, 18–19, 313–14.

⁶⁸ John MacArthur Jr., *Different by Design: Discovering God's Will for Today's Man and Woman* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1994), 141.

⁶⁹ David Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love: Counsel in Community* (Winston-Salem, NC: New Growth Press, 2005), 114.

⁷⁰ David Powlison, "Counseling under the Influence (of the X-Chromosome!)," *JBC* 21, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 3.

“Your sex neither privileges you nor disadvantages you.”⁷¹ However, Powlison also recognizes the need for more theological reflection and articulation about women in biblical counseling. He summarizes,

Finally, biblical counseling as a social movement over the past thirty years or so has had a strongly “masculine” feel. That’s understandable for a number of good reasons. First, the original impetus was to call biblically-oriented pastors to step up to their counseling responsibilities, rather than deferring and referring to professionals in the mental health system. Second, a commitment to Scripture usually correlates with a desire to raise up men after God’s own heart, teachable and loving. Third, when counseling is committed to church discipline for intransigent, high-handed sin, it puts a certain spotlight on those situations where love must speak bluntly and take decisive, authoritative action.

But some reasons for the masculine feel to the biblical counseling movement call for mid-course corrections. Good things need to be complemented by other good things for the sake of breadth, balance, and beauty. Good pastoral theology is always a work in progress, never finished, both a product and a producer of the endless conversation by which we the church grow up.⁷²

Contra Powlison and in accord with Adams, Lambert takes a different stance than Grudem or Schreiner regarding women counseling men. He argues,

First, Paul’s prohibition against women teaching doctrine to men applies equally to counseling and preaching. Counseling is ministry of the Word of God, just as preaching is. The only difference is that counseling is the personal ministry of the Word in a conversation, and preaching is a public ministry of the Word in proclamation. Because biblical counselors believe in the sufficiency of Scripture, we believe that a substantial portion of counseling consists in teaching the Bible to counselees. Because women are not to teach men the Bible, they should not counsel married couples alone.⁷³

He indicates that a male pastor or counselor could involve a woman while counseling a couple so long as the female counselor does not “engage in biblical instruction to the man.”⁷⁴ Interestingly, Lambert does not discuss the Priscilla pericope. His second line of

⁷¹ Powlison, “Counseling under the Influence,” 4.

⁷² Powlison, “Counseling under the Influence,” 5.

⁷³ Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 208. Heath Lambert served as the executive director of ACBC when the Standards of Conduct were adopted. Heath Lambert, “A Crucial Step in Biblical Counseling Ethics,” ACBC (blog), October 18, 2016, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/a-crucial-step-in-biblical-counseling-ethics/>.

⁷⁴ Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 208.

reasoning involves avoiding the temptation or even the appearance of evil: “It does not require recent statistics to demonstrate that many pastors fail in ministry because of sexual sin that begins in counseling.”⁷⁵ While Lambert cautions against “ongoing” counseling of the opposite gender, he permits private meetings with precautions such as maintaining visibility and the proximal presence of other staff members, and encourages quickly transitioning to a female counselor.⁷⁶ To summarize, Lambert forbids women from counseling men and discourages men from counseling women on a long-term basis, even with safety measures in place, largely because of the risk of sexual misconduct.

Carol Cornish shares Lambert’s concern of mixed gendered counseling leading to sexual impropriety but widens the focus of her concern to include future turmoil and power dynamics in addition to temptation for the counselee.⁷⁷ Unlike Lambert, she makes no reference to 1 Timothy 2:12 nor any prohibition regarding a woman teaching a man biblical doctrine as she advocates for same gendered counseling: “These long-term counseling relationships should be gender-specific (man to man and woman to woman).”⁷⁸ However, she also admits, “I realize that it is not possible to point to passages that absolutely forbid us from counseling members of the opposite sex. In fact, Jesus counseled the woman at the well (John 4), a woman who had a history of sexual problems. And Abigail spoke to David to counsel him against acting in a rash manner (1 Samuel 25).”⁷⁹ She grounds her argument in the fact that biblical examples are presented as single events rather than multiple session counseling. To determine the wisdom of solo

⁷⁵ Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 209. Lambert does not cite sources for his assertion relating pastoral counseling to sexual sin.

⁷⁶ Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 209.

⁷⁷ Carol Cornish, “Why Women Should Counsel Women,” in *Women Helping Women: A Biblical Guide to Major Issues Women Face*, ed. Elyse Fitzpatrick and Carol Cornish (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1997), 85–105.

⁷⁸ Cornish, “Why Women Should Counsel Women,” 86.

⁷⁹ Cornish, “Why Women Should Counsel Women,” 87.

mixed-gender counseling, Cornish recommends considering the nature of the counseling issue, the number of sessions required, the participation of parties involved, policy, and the advantage of a team counseling approach.⁸⁰ She deems it a matter of wisdom but not necessarily of biblical permission versus prohibition.

In *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, Jones categorizes counseling ministry levels as personal care between members, formative care with group leaders and mentors, designated counselors, and pastors/elders, with only the role of pastor/elder restricted to men.⁸¹ He explains, “Based on varying interpretations and applications of 1 Tim 2:12, varying views exist among biblical counselors on whether God permits women to counsel men or couples. Yet all biblical counselors encourage women to actively minister to at least other women (Titus 2:3–4).”⁸² Jones affirms the practice of male and female co-counseling to enhance marriage counseling while also providing a training opportunity. Despite his practice of permitting and training women to counsel couples, in this introductory textbook, Jones simply acknowledges the differences in interpretation and leaves the decision in the realm of Christian liberty.

Kristin Kellen divides her work into two sections: “A Framework for Understanding Women” and “A Woman’s Life Stages,” with the second part addressing common counseling issues.⁸³ She asserts biblical parameters for counseling ministry:

God has established within the church a unique structure for leading and teaching. Titus 2:1–6 gives us a helpful model for leadership roles of men and women. The passage encourages older men to lead and teach younger men, while it directs older women to lead and teach younger women. This model is just that: a model. It does not exclude women counseling men or men counseling women. Instead, it is conveying that older women are to *at least* counsel or lead younger women,

⁸⁰ Cornish, “Why Women Should Counsel Women,” 106–7.

⁸¹ Robert Jones, “Who Can and Should Do Biblical Counseling?,” in Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 24.

⁸² Jones, “Who Can and Should Do Biblical Counseling?,” 24n2.

⁸³ Kristin L. Kellen, *Counseling Women: Biblical Wisdom for Life’s Battles* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2022).

particularly in the areas noted (in their roles as wives and mothers, to be self-controlled and pure so as not to slander God's Word).⁸⁴

She advocates for counseling in the church when available and recommends seeking care in a specialized parachurch ministry or clinical setting for moderate to complex issues.⁸⁵

Though not specifically addressing the role of female biblical counselors, Kevin Carson and Paul Tautges speak to the crucial distinction of counseling as private and personal ministry. This private versus public teaching distinction receives far more attention in the complementarian literature, with complementarians generally permitting women to teach in private settings but not in public settings that include men. Carson and Tautges describe the difference between the public and private Word ministry:

Private ministry of the Word, in contrast with corporate ministry, has a person's name attached to it, an address, a specific situation, a particular set of pressures, a real concern with a real situation. Whereas preaching is planned and controlled by the teacher, one-to-one ministry calls for a readiness to apply wisdom "on the fly." Public ministry of the Word, when applied accurately and creatively, speaks generally into life in a broken world; private ministry of the Word speaks specifically into this life, into this part of the fallen world. Private ministry is the specific voice of the broader public ministry.⁸⁶

The public and private ministry of the Word have continuity and discontinuity in the healthy local church—biblical counselors flesh out the truths and applications of expository passages in preached sermons; such personal specificity would not be possible in the gathered assembly.

Jeremy Lelek, president of the Association of Biblical Counselors (ABC), considers soul care to encompass more than the work of licensed counselors.⁸⁷ He observes that the locus of authority does not transfer from the church to the individual

⁸⁴ Kellen, *Counseling Women*, 53–54, (italics original).

⁸⁵ Kellen, *Counseling Women*, 54.

⁸⁶ Kevin Carson and Paul Tautges, "Uniting the Public Ministry of the Word and the Private Ministry of the Word," in *Biblical Counseling and the Church: God's Care through God's People*, ed. Bob Kellemen and Kevin Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 83.

⁸⁷ Jeremy Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics: Roots, Beliefs, and Future* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018), 169.

counselor during counseling. Lelek writes, “First, professional counselors need to possess a genuine, functional respect for the authority of the church as it regards the believer. When pastors refer someone from their flock to a professional counselor, the counselor is not the counselee’s spiritual authority.”⁸⁸ However, he does not specify the gender of the counselor or counselee.

Biblical counselors reach different conclusions about the appropriateness of women counseling men and cite different passages or accord passages different weight when providing their reasoning.

Conclusion

The literature overlap between biblical counseling and complementarianism is miniscule, bringing the task into view. I will begin with the core data—an analysis of Scripture relevant to the ministry of female biblical counselors in complementarian churches.

⁸⁸ Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics*, 172.

CHAPTER 2
EXEGETICAL STUDY: SELECTED TEXTS LIMITING
THE ROLE OF WOMEN

Complementarians limit the role of women in the church based on their understanding of relatively few verses in Scripture, and some even preclude women from counseling men as one application of those texts. Since some of the underlying reasons are as much, if not more, theologically driven as biblically driven, a more nuanced exegetical study will result from surveying the theological landscape before reviewing the relevant portions of the ACBC Standards of Conduct and delving into the individual passages. This chapter begins with a discussion of the portions of the Danvers Statement that pertain to complementarian churches. Complementarians do not necessarily agree on the extent of equality of the genders nor on the boundaries of role distinctions; therefore, second, I describe the varied expressions of complementarian theological convictions. After surveying the complementarian landscape, I analyze the citations provided by ACBC in support of their position limiting women from counseling men.

Complementarian Spectrum

Complementarians hold a vast array of differences of opinion regarding what women are permitted or forbidden to do in the church. In the prior chapter, I established the foundational nature of the Danvers Statement for defining what constitutes a complementarian church. Danvers begins with the rationale and purposes before listing affirmations that emphasize the family of origin or life in the church family. The following affirmations from the Danvers Statement relate directly to the role of female biblical counselors in complementarian churches:

2. 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 2:28, 21–24; 1 Cor 11:7–9; 1 Tim 2:12–14).

4. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Gen 3:1–7, 12, 16) In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.

5. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women (Gen 1:26–27, 2:18; Gal 3:28). Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (Gen 2:18; Eph 5:21–33; Col 3:18–19; 1 Tim 2:11–15).

6. Redemption in Christ aims at removing distortions introduced by the curse. . . . 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).

8. In both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside Biblical criteria for particular ministries (1 Tim 2:11–15, 3:1–13; Tit 1:5–9). Rather, Biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God’s will.¹

God ordained equality with distinction in roles; in a fallen world, this design has perils on both sides, for both genders. Since humans are prone to err in either permitting what God prohibits or prohibiting what God permits, Scripture must inform whatever gender-related roles we permit or restrict rather than our relying on changing cultural expressions of gender or extrapolations from theological positions.

As noted previously, the various journals produced by CBMW do not include an issue or an article devoted to counseling, but they do provide relevant insight regarding what it means to adopt the complementarian label. Denny Burk, current president of CBMW, contends for unifying around what he calls “mere” complementarianism, and he defines this as alignment with the Danvers Statement and historic understandings.² He argues, “The Danvers Statement is admittedly general as far as complementarian statements go. It allows for differences of opinion about who teaches in Sunday school

¹ Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, “The Danvers Statement,” June 26, 2007, <https://cbmw.org/2007/06/26/the-danvers-statement/>.

² Denny Burk, “Mere Complementarianism,” *Eikon* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 28–42, <https://cbmw.org/2019/11/20/mere-complementarianism/>.

and other contexts. Nevertheless, Danvers does say that *some* teaching roles are restricted to men, and it makes this assertion in connection with 1 Timothy 2:12.”³ Burk acknowledges at the beginning of the article that he is in part responding to assertions from individuals uncomfortable with continuing to use “complementarian” to describe their convictions because of some unhelpful association with the term—including “the prohibition of women teaching in informal settings.”⁴ Burk elaborates on the minimum standard to be considered complementarian:

So what is common to all complementarians at all times? If complementarianism refers to the Danvers Statement, then Danvers itself is *mere complementarianism*. The mere complementarianism of Danvers is simply a recognition that there is a discernible theological core to the complementarian position. Mere complementarianism does not deny that the teaching has been developed in different directions—some helpful and perhaps others not so helpful. Nevertheless, there have always been differences among complementarians over issues not covered in Danvers—differences which do not define complementarianism but which are nevertheless important.⁵

The framers of the Danvers Statement intentionally left room for differing conclusions regarding which governing and teaching roles are restricted to men in the church.⁶

Following the release of the Danvers Statement, distinct complementarian subcultures emerged which may, in turn, impact views on the ministry of biblical counseling in the local church. Jonathan Leeman explains the development:

Complementarians unite around the idea that God created men and women equal in dignity and worth but that he also assigned different roles in the church and home. Over the last few years, however, we’ve been having more and more in-house conversations about what exactly that requires. And complementarians are dividing between what Kevin DeYoung calls “broad” and “narrow” versions.⁷

³ Burk, “Mere Complementarianism,” 41 (*italics original*).

⁴ Burk, “Mere Complementarianism,” 29.

⁵ Burk, “Mere Complementarianism,” 33 (*italics original*).

⁶ Burk, “Mere Complementarianism,” 33.

⁷ Jonathan Leeman, “A Word of Empathy, Warning, and Counsel for ‘Narrow’ Complementarians,” 9Marks, February 8, 2018, <https://www.9marks.org/article/a-word-of-empathy-warning-and-counsel-for-narrow-complementarians/>. In personal conversation, Leeman attributed Kevin DeYoung with the broad and narrow language from an oral address to the CBMW. For the speech in

These “in-house conversations” often arise in blogs, social media posts, and conferences rather than in books, dissertations, or academic journals, hindering a comprehensive presentation of the continuum from broad to narrow complementarianism. Burk elaborates upon the distinctions: “‘Narrow Complementarianism’ teaches that headship applies *narrowly* to ordination and marriage. ‘Broad Complementarianism’ teaches that headship reflects a comprehensive set of differences between male and female that have *broad* implications for our lives together in the church, in the home, and in society at large.”⁸ The inclusion of “society” in addition to home and church often points toward a form of complementarianism that goes beyond restrictions explicitly stated in Scripture, as well as beyond the Danvers Statement.

The *narrow* versus *broad* terminology lends itself to misunderstanding by equating expansion with restriction and narrowing with removing boundaries. One could argue that the term *broad* should imply more freedom for women to serve in the church, not less. For example, when Leeman writes about theories of government he explains, “The narrow constrains, the broad commissions. The narrow emphasizes accountability, the broad emphasizes authorization. The narrow says don’t, the broad says do.”⁹ However the terms “broad” and “narrow” applied to complementarianism reverse this logical meaning.

Counterintuitively, the more narrow or thin a person’s view is on the complementarian spectrum, the wider the range of activities, functions, and roles one permits women to perform. Conversely, the more broad or thick a person’s view is on the

context, see Kevin DeYoung, “The Beauty of Biblically Broad Complementarianism,” TGC19, April 4, 2019, CBMW video, 40:37, <https://cbmw.org/2019/04/04/the-beauty-of-biblically-broad-complementarianism-tgc19/>.

⁸ Denny Burk, “Can Broad and Narrow Complementarians Coexist in the SBC?,” *Denny Burk* (blog), June 4, 2019, <https://www.dennyburk.com/can-broad-and-narrow-complementarians-coexist-in-the-sbc/>. Italics are in the original.

⁹ Jonathan Leeman, *Don’t Fire Your Church Members: The Case for Congregationalism* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 13.

complementarian spectrum, the fewer the activities, functions, and roles one allows women to perform. While complementarians across the spectrum affirm the equality, dignity, and worth of women, they distinguish their position on the spectrum primarily by the limitations placed on women. Despite the awkwardness of the descriptors *broad* and *narrow*, these terms categorize complementarianism most frequently in the literature. Occasionally, *broad* is replaced with *thick*, *hard*, or *full*; and *narrow* may be exchanged for *thin*, *soft*, or *partial*. For the sake of clarity in this discussion, I will primarily use the terms *broad* and *narrow*, while my interlocutors at times use the other descriptors.

The narrow end of the complementarian spectrum is home to those who only constrict women's activities based upon explicit biblical commands and apply those restrictions to the spheres specifically addressed by Paul: the home and the church. Leeman elaborates, "Their [narrow complementarians'] aim is (i) to teach what the Bible teaches; (ii) to avoid mistaking our cultural preconceptions of manhood and womanhood as 'biblical'; and (iii) to avoid wrongly binding men and women's consciences but instead to affirm Christian freedom."¹⁰ Leeman's summary raises a legitimate concern: prohibiting women from counseling couples or binding the conscience of believers where Scripture does not. In contrast to DeYoung and Burk at the broader end of the complementarian spectrum, Kathy Keller represents the narrower end: "Anything an unordained man is allowed to do, a woman is also allowed to do."¹¹ Differing denominational perspectives about the significance and function of ordination further complicate the larger discussion regarding the roles of women in the church, but the ordination element is outside the scope of this dissertation. In sum, narrow complementarians place fewer restrictions on women's roles with a more direct

¹⁰ Leeman, "A Word of Empathy."

¹¹ Kathy Keller, *Jesus, Justice, and Gender Roles: A Case for Gender Roles in Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 17, Kindle.

correlation to explicit biblical commands than do broader complementarians, yet narrow complementarians differ in which activities they restrict.

Leeman attributes the motivation of the narrow complementarian camp to a reluctance to speak more broadly than the biblical text. He adduces, “The ‘broad’ camp is driven by a theological impulse. They place these Pauline precepts inside of a larger theological ‘vision’ or ‘definition’ of manhood and womanhood that applies to all of life.”¹² Likewise, broad complementarians, arguing from divine design, extrapolate both explicit and implicit principles from Scripture and regulate practices much more broadly than their narrow complementarian counterparts.¹³

Within evangelical circles, different approaches to exegesis and hermeneutics yield different conclusions. As noted in the literature review in the preceding chapter, Grudem’s complementarian response to feminist arguments in *EFTB* supplies a broader range of more specific complementarian application examples than other resources. His rebuttal to Sarah Sumner in the section subtitled, “Egalitarian Claim 9:14: Male Headship Must Apply Everywhere or Nowhere: It Is Inconsistent for Complementarians to Apply the Principles of Male Headship Only to the Home and the Church,” will serve as a guide to my exegetical approach and therefore merits lengthy quotation for contextual accuracy:

Sumner’s argument is based on a classic mistake in biblical interpretation, a mistake that takes one principle found in the Bible and attempts to maximize it above other things the Bible teaches, with the result that those other things are ultimately denied. The problem is that the principle of male headship is not the only principle in the Bible. There is another principle, and that is the principle of male-female equality in the image of God. . . .

. . . What is wrong with both the principle of “always follow male headship” and the principle of “always follow male-female equality” is that it is not up to us to decide in what ways these major principles in Scripture should be combined and applied in various situations. It is up to God, who has His own purposes and whose wisdom is infinitely greater than ours.

¹² Leeman, “A Word of Empathy.”

¹³ Leeman, “A Word of Empathy.”

So how do we know which principles to apply? We are simply to obey the Bible in the specific application of these principles. What we find in the Bible is that God has given commands that establish male leadership in the *home* and in the *church*, but that other teachings in His Word give considerable freedom in other areas of life. We should not try to require either more or less than Scripture itself requires.¹⁴

Grudem's argument is persuasive because he considers and harmonizes Scripture's restrictions and freedoms without neglecting either the restrictions or the freedoms. In chapter 4, I explore eight additional biblical themes that relate to this study, including Christian liberty. Grudem's hermeneutic above supports a complementarian application narrower than the approach taken by the current leaders of the CBMW, which he co-founded.¹⁵ With this framework of terminology in place, I turn to the ACBC Standards of Conduct and related citations.

ACBC Standards of Conduct on Humanity

As the largest certifying organization for biblical counselors, ACBC regulates the role and practice of more female biblical counselors than any other organization. The ACBC Standards of Conduct addresses women's role in its section on "The Commitment to Humanity." This section begins by referencing creation followed by single paragraphs devoted to protecting life, the importance of the heart, care for the physical body, and lastly, matters of gender.¹⁶ The document offers supporting texts only for the section, not for individual statements. This layout somewhat hinders exegetical specificity, though improving the readability of the document. In this section, I will quote the ACBC

¹⁴ Wayne Grudem, *EFBT*, 392 (italics original). Following the release of *RBMW*, Sarah Sumner advanced a counter position in her work *Men and Women in the Church*. *EFBT* responds to Sumner and supplements the previous collaborated volume with an increased treatment of the more controversial stances taken by the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. See Wayne Grudem and John Piper, eds., *RBMW*; also Sarah Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church: Building Consensus on Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

¹⁵ See Kevin DeYoung, "The Beauty of Biblically Broad Complementarianism."

¹⁶ Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, "Standards of Conduct: V. The Commitment to Humanity," accessed December 1, 2022, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/about/beliefs/positions/standards-of-conduct/#humanity>.

standard, compare the standard to the Danvers Statement, and evaluate the standard's underlying motives for the embedded restrictions.

Given the implications for women considering pursuing biblical counseling certification through ACBC, I will quote the most relevant paragraph concerning gender in its entirety:

Biblical counselors must do their work understanding the importance of gender. God created the human race to exist in two equal genders of male and female. God has also commanded that those genders are called to function in different capacities in the contexts of the home, church, and society. The biblical instruction on gender means that, while men and women should disciple one another as they live out their daily Christian lives, women will strive to avoid formally counseling men since this generally requires the task of teaching men with authority which is forbidden by Scripture. Men will likewise be committed to ministry to women, but will strive to avoid ongoing, one-to-one counsel with women because of the biblical admonitions to stay above reproach and to avoid any hint of sin. Biblical counselors embrace the entirety of Scripture's teaching on gender and so work to help troubled people embrace their physical gender revealed at birth, and to function in ways that accurately represent that gender in the world, the church, and in the Christian home.¹⁷

To locate the ACBC standard on the complementarian spectrum, I will observe how it aligns with and deviates from the Danvers Statement. While the Danvers Statement includes the detrimental impact of feminism on society at large, it omits reference to God-ordained limitations beyond the home and church.¹⁸ Likewise, the ACBC standard replaced the Danvers term for functioning in different "roles" with "capacities," without further description.¹⁹ Interestingly, the ACBC standard acknowledges the one-another aspect of discipleship without inserting a gender limitation, which invites other questions. Does this mean a woman can disciple a man? What does *discipling* mean? When is counseling discipling and when is it not? Most relevant to this dissertation, this standard clearly bars women from counseling men on the grounds that counseling involves

¹⁷ Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, "Standards of Conduct: V. The Commitment to Humanity," sec. D.

¹⁸ Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, "The Danvers Statement."

¹⁹ Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, "Standards of Conduct: V. The Commitment to Humanity," sec. D.

teaching with authority, which the ACBC standard deems biblically out of bounds—categorizing women’s counseling men in the realm of “some governing and teaching roles within the church” that the Danvers Statement restricts to men.²⁰

Lastly, the ACBC standard implies that a man’s ongoing counseling of a woman in a one-on-one setting endangers the ability to remain above reproach and avoid sin, for both the male counselor and the female counselee. This avoidance of one-to-one counsel by men to women echoes the “Billy Graham Rule.” Mary Jackson and Lynde Langdon concisely summarize this guideline as follows:

In 1948, Billy Graham recognized the temptation for ministerial leaders to succumb to sexual sin while traveling without their wives and families. His practice of not traveling, meeting, or eating alone with a woman other than his wife became the standard for ministers and leaders to protect themselves and others from sexual temptation and accusations of sexual impropriety.²¹

The rule seeks to provide reasonable guardrails to guard against sexual impropriety as a general practice. It also implies that in some sense, it is not safe or wise for a Christian brother to meet with his Christian sister. Sometimes, allegiance to this rule hinders rendering adequate care to fellow church members. The balancing act to both protect reputations and serve suffering sheep has further implications for the role of female biblical counselors in complementarian churches; therefore, I will consider this in chapter 4. Having quoted the relevant ACBC Standards of Conduct, analyzed its conformity with the Danvers Statement, and the standard’s underlying motive, I will devote the rest of this chapter to evaluating each of the biblical citations provided at the conclusion of the standard on humanity.

Exegetical Study

Given the influence of ACBC and its prohibitive position in the Standards of

²⁰ Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, “The Danvers Statement,” Affirmation 6.

²¹ Mary Jackson and Lynde Langdon, “Beyond the Billy Graham Rule,” *WORLD* 36, no. 24 (December 2021), <https://wng.org/articles/beyond-the-billy-graham-rule-1639026447>.

Conduct on the role of female biblical counselors, it is crucial for this study to determine the validity of their exegetical conclusions and resulting restrictions. Of the sixteen supporting texts listed, ten relate to the other paragraphs in the standard, two passages relate to the limitation on men counseling women to stay above reproach (Mark 7:14–23; Eph 5:3), and four address gender equality, distinction, or role (Gen 1:26–27; 1 Cor 11:2–16; Gal 3:28; 1 Tim 2:9–15).²² I will skim the verses that address sin and temptation and give extra attention to the meaning and application of the texts at the intersection of biblical counseling and complementarianism.²³

Sin and Temptation

Four of the cited passages deal with the heart, which is perhaps relevant to the importance of avoiding temptation; however, there is no direct connection to gender differentiation nor to the role of counselors. On the other hand, ACBC lists two passages that bear mentioning because of the assertion in the Standard of Conduct that ongoing mixed-gendered counseling may imperil the participants’ ability to avoid sin.

Mark 7:14–23

The first cited New Testament passage, Mark 7:14–23, focuses on the priority of the heart. The text begins, “Summoning the crowd again, he told them, ‘Listen to me, all of you, and understand: Nothing that goes into a person from outside can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him’” (Mark 7:14–15). Strikingly, in this passage, Jesus places the locus of evil thoughts, sexual immorality, adultery, and sensuality in the human heart versus circumstances or external environment. Without

²² The supporting texts omitted from exegetical study in this chapter include the following: two verses related to elders (1 Tim 5:22 and Tit 1:6, covered in chapter 4); two passages related to marriage (Eph 5:22–33; Col 3:18–19); four citations related to the heart generally (Prov 4:25; 20:5; Jas 1:19–27; 4:1–2); and two passages related to the body (1 Cor 6:19–20; 2 Cor 4:16–5:4).

²³ Like other statements of this sort, ACBC placed all their supporting Scripture citations under each multi-paragraph subsection rather than tying the citations to individual paragraphs.

diminishing other biblical warnings to pursue wisdom and flee temptation, this passage suggests purifying the heart as a more effective means of preventing reproach than creating a list of rules and boundaries such as men avoiding ongoing counseling of women.

Ephesians 5:3

The ACBC Standards of Conduct on humanity next moves on to Paul's epistle to the church in Ephesus. In Ephesians 5:3, Paul instructs, "But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints." This text indirectly correlates to the ACBC paragraph on cautions regarding men counseling women, specifically to "stay above reproach and to avoid any hint of sin."²⁴ We certainly want to always avoid sexual sin in the church, with even more fervency when we are attempting to apply the truths of Scripture to the realities of people's lives. Like the apostle Paul, counselors have the further responsibility to model living Christianly for counselees (1 Cor 11:1).

Concerning the Ephesians passage, John Stott explains, "These chapters [4 and 5] are a stirring summons to the unity and purity of the church; but they are more than that. Their theme is the integration of Christian experience (what we are), Christian theology (what we believe) and Christian ethics (how we behave)."²⁵ However, as we consider the current cultural climate in North America, forbidding a man from having an ongoing, one-on-one counseling relationship with a woman does not necessarily and sufficiently preclude sexual immorality or the appearance thereof.²⁶

²⁴ Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, "Standards of Conduct: V. The Commitment to Humanity," sec. D.

²⁵ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 193, Logos.

²⁶ I am personally acquainted with a female biblical counselor who unfortunately experienced an unwelcome sexual advance from a female counselee in the church. Her experience confirmed my suspicion that we dare not assume we or our reputations are "safe" if we meet one-on-one with same

Gender Distinction and Roles

The Genesis verses underscore the importance of gender, and the Galatians verse relativizes gender; both affirm the image-bearing dignity of all people. The two passages that explicitly limit the role of women in the church, 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and 1 Timothy 2:9–15, are set in the context of the gathered assembly and speak to the role of women in that context. These passages should not be used to prohibit women from counseling men.

Genesis 1:26–27

While equality in gender is implied in this first mention of humankind created as male and female in Scripture, differing functions and capacities are not. DeYoung concedes, “To be clear, Genesis does not give men and women their marching orders. There aren’t a lot of explicit oughts laid down for manhood and womanhood. What we have instead are a host of divine patterns and assumptions.”²⁷ Assumptions and perceived patterns detected in Scripture require more humility and less dogmatism than direct commands—especially when mandating rules that imperil other people’s Christian liberty. Grudem, however, contends that the hierarchical distinctions precede creation: “In fact, the idea of headship and submission did not even begin with the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1 and 2. No, the idea of headship and submission existed *before Creation*. It began in the relationship between the Father and Son in the Trinity.”²⁸ At the other end of the time continuum, Danylak asserts, “Marriage is for a season and time, until, the traditional marriage vow reads, ‘death us do part.’ It is as single and free

gender counselees, even in the church. I will explore safeguards in chapter 6.

²⁷ Kevin DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church: A Short, Biblical, Practical Introduction* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 29.

²⁸ Grudem, *EFTB*, 47 (italics original). While Grudem’s assertion is inextricably linked with his embrace of the Eternal Subordination of the Son (ESS), the analysis of that doctrinal position is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

individuals that we will stand before his throne and live for all eternity.”²⁹ Headship in marriage does not extend into eternity future since marriage itself does not—headship and submission constitute an important but temporary aspect of humanity’s gendered complementarity.

Genesis 1:26–27 highlights humankind’s shared divine image-bearing and genderedness, confirming that gender is important. These verses do not invoke distinctions by function, nor a limitation on roles, nor the proscription of women teaching men with authority at this juncture. When God introduced the concept of human rule in Scripture, it was not for men to rule over women—God gave the woman to the man to help him and gave both joint authority over creation. Genesis 1:26–27 describes humanity’s origination: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.’ So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.”

We first see a contrast of categories between the active Creator God and the passive created living beings, and we notice humankind in contradistinction from the rest of creation. In God’s prior creative acts, he simply spoke, and his works came into being. In the creation of man, the narrative slows down and the refrain changes: God forms man from the dust and breathes life into Adam. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch describe the difference: “The creation of man does not take place through a word addressed by God to the earth, but as the result of the divine decree, ‘We will make man in Our image, after our likeness,’ which proclaims at the very outset the distinction and pre-eminence of man above all the other creatures of the earth.”³⁰ These verses describe

²⁹ Barry Danylak, *Redeeming Singleness: How the Storyline of Scripture Affirms the Single Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 165–66.

³⁰ K&D, 1:38.

the pinnacle of creation and highlight humankind’s shared image-bearing expressed in two genders.

God created male and female human beings in his image. Bruce Waltke explains the importance of bearing God’s image: “Fundamental to Genesis and the entirety of Scripture is the creation of humanity in the image of God. The expression ‘image of God’ is used uniquely with reference to human beings and so sets them apart from other creatures. . . . Being made in God’s image establishes humanity’s role on earth and facilitates communication with the divine.”³¹ Both men and women were given the capacity for rational thought, moral agency, and social relationships. The triune God created humanity with immediate community and gave them the joint responsibility to reflect his glory and care for the rest of creation.

Referencing this text, the Danvers Statement affirms equality: “Both Adam and Eve were created in God’s image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood.”³² To better understand complementarity in the New Testament’s references to the creation narrative, one must also consider the more detailed description of Eve’s arrival in Eden (Gen 2:21–24). Derek Kidner indicates the situation after Adam names the animals, suggesting that the scene “poignantly reveals him as a social being, made for fellowship, not power: he will not live until he loves, giving himself away (24) to another on his own level. So the woman is presented wholly as his partner and counterpart; nothing is yet said of her as childbearer. She is valued for herself alone.”³³ Eve does receive her name as “mother of all living” after the Fall (Gen 3:20); however, her intrinsic value does not depend upon her ability to bear children. Adam and Eve’s gendered complementarity enables them to produce offspring necessary for their

³¹ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 65.

³² Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, “The Danvers Statement,” Affirmation 1.

³³ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 70, Logos.

shared responsibility in fulfilling the creation mandate. While acknowledging procreation as an implicit reason for marriage, Barry Danylak counters, “The explicit purpose the account gives is for companionship and assistance. Here we see emerging a seminal theology of marriage. The wife serves both as relational companion and as provider of material assistance for the husband. The husband in turn functions in a complementary role for the wife.”³⁴ Gender complementarity benefits humanity beyond reproductive capacities; these benefits will receive more attention in chapter 4.

God created men and women to function interdependently. Whimsically referring to Adam as a “dirtling,” Dru Johnson powerfully describes another perspective of the creation scene:

Remarkably, when it was just God and the dirtling, the dirtling was still considered alone. We could stand to think through the implications of this for a moment: he was still alone when he was with God and even when he was with the animals. First, being alone with God is “not good” according to God. He is creating community and not individual relationships connecting independently with himself. Second—sorry pet lovers—animals cannot be our mates or constitute our communities, at least not like humans must. When man was still with all the animals, it was still “not good.”

What solved man’s “not good” state of affairs? It was only the woman, taken from him, that solved the dirtling’s problem of aloneness. More remarkably, not only is the man alone, but he needs to know that he is alone. Part of the process is aimed at his discovery and helping him recognize that he is alone and that his isolation is “not good.”³⁵

God declares Adam and Eve’s status “very good” after their creation and prior to their procreation. Johnson homes in on the uniqueness of purpose for which “he created them male and female” (Gen 1:27). In some sense, Eve completed Adam by providing him with the necessary community he lacked prior to her formation. Allen Ross suggests, “When God helps people, it means he does for them what they cannot possibly do for themselves. In this context the word [helper] indicates that the woman would supply what

³⁴ Danylak, *Redeeming Singleness*, 29.

³⁵ Dru Johnson, *The Universal Story: Genesis 1–11*, Transformative Word (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018), 39, Logos.

man lacked and, by implication of the Hebrew behind the phrase, ‘just right for him,’ that he would provide what she lacked.”³⁶ God helped Adam by creating for Adam the precise helper Adam needed but could not fashion for himself.

Nothing in the creation account suggests that women are prohibited from counseling men. Rather, God designed humanity as male and female to complement each other and jointly rule over the rest of creation.

1 Corinthians 11:2–16

First Corinthians 11:2–16 supports a differentiation between men and women in church activities, but the passage does not support the prohibition of women counseling men nor the idea that all women should submit to all men in the church or society. Rather, the passage regulates apparel for men and women when praying and prophesying in the gathered assembly. Thomas Schreiner opens his essay on the passage with the understated observation, “First Corinthians 11:2–16 has some features that make it one of the most difficult and controversial passages in the Bible.”³⁷ However, despite the difficulty and variety of interpretations, our understanding of headship and gender differentiation derived from this text influences where we land on the spectrum of complementarianism and how we assess the appropriate role for female biblical counselors in complementarian churches.

Derek Brown and Tod Twist supply the following helpful structure that summarizes the content of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16:

1. Paul’s Commendation (1 Cor 11:2)
2. Headship (1 Cor 11:3–6)
 - a. The Headship of Christ and Man (1 Cor 11:3)

³⁶ Allen Ross, *Genesis*, in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1, *Genesis, Exodus*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 48, Logos.

³⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity: 1 Corinthians 11:2–16,” in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 124.

- b. Head Coverings for Men (1 Cor 11:4)
 - c. Head Coverings for Women (1 Cor 11:5–6)
3. Teaching from Creation (1 Cor 11:7–12)
- a. No Head Coverings for Men (1 Cor 11:7)
 - b. Creation and Genders (1 Cor 11:8–9)
 - c. The Reason for Female Head Coverings (1 Cor 11:10)
 - d. Creation and Genders (1 Cor 11:11–12)
4. Propriety in Worship (1 Cor 11:13–16)
- a. Paul’s Questions (1 Cor 11:13)
 - b. Lessons from Nature (1 Cor 11:14–15)
 - c. Propriety in Other Churches (1 Cor 11:16)³⁸

The Danvers Statement references this passage (among others) to assert, “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.” Further, “Adam’s headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin.” Presently, “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.”³⁹ The Danvers Statement recognizes distinctions in gender roles as part of created order, prescribes a wife’s submission to her husband, and limits some teaching roles to men. However, it does not advocate for all women to submit to all men.

On the other hand, the ACBC Standard and John MacArthur take a broader complementarian stance. MacArthur heavily influenced the modern biblical counseling

³⁸ Derek R. Brown, *I Corinthians*, Lexham Research Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), 1 Cor 11:2–16, Logos.

³⁹ Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, “The Danvers Statement,” Affirmations 2, 3, and 6.2. Affirmation 2 is also supported by Gen 2:18, 21–24; 1 Tim 2:12–14; Affirmation 3 is also supported by Gen 2:16–18, 21–24; 3:1–13; and Affirmation 6.2 is also supported by Gal 3:2 and 1 Tim 2:11–15.

movement through his active participation in teaching and authorship. He extends the principle of male authority and female submission beyond the home and church to all realms of society.⁴⁰ Regarding this passage, he adduces,

The principle of subordination and authority pervades the entire universe. Paul shows that woman's subordination to man is but a reflection of that greater general truth. . . . And if women do not submit to men, then the family and society as a whole are disrupted and destroyed. . . . The principle of subordination and authority applies to all men and all women, not just to husbands and wives. It extends beyond the family to all aspects of society.⁴¹

MacArthur's emphasis on women's submission in every realm of life leads him to conclude that head coverings are relatively unimportant; instead, he suggests that "it is the principle of women's subordination to men, not the particular mark or symbol of that subordination, that Paul is teaching in this passage."⁴² His interpretation downplays the gendered interdependence of verses 11 and 12.

Complementarian scholars tend to focus on headship and submission in the passage. For instance, Schreiner emphasizes gender roles more than proper apparel in worship. Contra MacArthur, Schreiner argues for male authority in home and church without extending it to all realms. He confirms that this text "indicates that different roles are intended for men and women. Men as the head exercise a loving authority (whether in the marriage or in church leadership), and the women, by veiling themselves, signified their adaptability to such leadership."⁴³ Schreiner's interpretation aligns more closely to the Danvers Statement than does MacArthur's regarding the extent of women's required submission.

⁴⁰ John MacArthur, *First Corinthians, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 252–63.

⁴¹ MacArthur, *First Corinthians*, 253.

⁴² MacArthur, *First Corinthians*, 256.

⁴³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 7 (London: InterVarsity, 2018), 238, Logos.

However, this is not the only way to understand the primary meaning and purpose of the passage. Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner make different observations regarding role assignments in this text. They assert,

Paul's language about the man being the head of the woman has often been used as part of an argument which limits the ministries in which women are allowed to engage. It is remarkable, however, that this passage makes no distinction between the ministries in which men and women may engage. Paul distinguishes not between their roles (both men and women are free to pray and prophesy), but between the proper attire expected for either of them to engage in those activities.⁴⁴

Similarly, Leon Morris notes, "This verse plainly indicates that some Corinthian women prayed or prophesied in public worship. That Paul does not criticize the practice, but on the contrary lays down the way women should be dressed when engaging in it, shows that he accepted it."⁴⁵ Paul's use of "head" denotes a designed structure to the relationships between men and women in some sense, regardless of whether the interpreter finds the argument for headship as authority, source, or prominence more compelling. However, as Ciampa and Rosner point out, this passage governs the apparel of each gender in worship rather than excluding women's participation in the activities of praying or prophesying.

The context of the passage is the gathered assembly. MacArthur's view of these instructions' context represents a minority perspective. He argues, "The mention here of women's praying or prophesying is sometimes used to prove that Paul acknowledged the right of their teaching, preaching, and leading in church worship. But he makes no mention here of the church at worship or in the time of formal teaching. Perhaps he has in view praying or prophesying in public places rather than in the worship of the congregation."⁴⁶ By contrast, Grudem writes, "In 1 Cor 11:5 Paul apparently assumes that women may pray and prophesy freely in the public assemblies of the

⁴⁴ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 504, Logos.

⁴⁵ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1985), 150, Logos.

⁴⁶ MacArthur, *First Corinthians*, 256.

church, for he does not forbid these activities but merely regulates them by stipulating the necessity of a head-covering.”⁴⁷ Paul’s immediate transition to instructions regarding the Lord’s Supper suggests that the context of these instructions is indeed the assembly gathered for worship (1 Cor 11:17–34). Furthermore, Schreiner argues,

The matter addressed here pertains to the public gathering of the church since Paul refers to women praying or prophesying, which are activities that would take place when the church was gathered. Some scholars, seeing a contrast with 14:33b–36, think that private home meetings are under consideration in 11:2–16 and formal church assemblies in 14:33b–36. We have no evidence, however, of separate private meetings, especially since the church typically gathered for its meetings in homes. There is no basis, then, for distinguishing the gathering here from what we find in 14:33b–36. Paul assumes that women will pray and prophesy when the church gathers (cf. Acts 21:9).⁴⁸

Since the passage explicitly distinguishes between appropriate head coverings for women and the regulated removal thereof for men when praying or prophesying, and proceeds to instructions for observing the Lord’s Table, Grudem’s and Schreiner’s arguments for the public worship setting are far more compelling than MacArthur’s argument for a private setting.

While the passage instructs believers in aspects of gender differentiation, careful examination of the passage fails to confirm the ACBC Standards of Conduct’s assertion that “those genders are called to function in different capacities in the contexts of the home, church, and society.”⁴⁹ In 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, Paul regulates the apparel rather than the activities of men and women while they are praying and prophesying in the gathered assembly, preserving the distinctions of the genders. He does not actually assign men and women different functions, nor does he distinguish between their capacities.

⁴⁷ Wayne Grudem, “Prophecy—Yes, But Teaching—No: Paul’s Consistent Advocacy of Women’s Participation without Governing Authority,” *JETS* 30, no. 1 (March 1987): 11.

⁴⁸ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 228–29.

⁴⁹ Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, “Standards of Conduct: V. The Commitment to Humanity,” sec. D.

Galatians 3:28

Galatians 3:28 frequently takes center stage in church gender debates: “There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus.”⁵⁰ The chapter begins with Paul calling the Galatians foolish for forgetting that they were saved by faith in Christ rather than by works of the law. Paul distinguishes between the law and the promise, provides the purpose of the law, and then ends the chapter with the above-referenced verse. His announcements regarding the discontinuation of these classifications generate significant discourse in the commentaries regarding his reasons for including these words in holy writ.

For example, Scott McClelland notes, “The three couplets in verse 28 may reflect an ordering by Paul devised to contradict existing prayers found in Jewish and Gentile circles which gave thanks to God for an individual’s superiority over supposed inferiors.”⁵¹ F. F. Bruce is more dogmatic: “Paul makes a threefold affirmation which corresponds to a number of Jewish formulas in which the threefold distinction is maintained, as in the morning prayer in which the male Jew thanks God that he was not made a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.” Bruce goes on to assert, “It is not their distinctiveness, but their inequality of religious role, that is abolished ‘in Christ Jesus.’”⁵² However, the verse in context is dealing with matters of justification, and not with gender roles in the church.⁵³ At the same time, the identity-shaping characteristics bestowed at

⁵⁰ D. Francois Tolmie, “Tendencies in the Interpretation of Galatians 3:28 since 1990,” *Acta Theologica* 19 (2014): 105–29, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/actat.v33i2S.6>. Tolmie’s research indicates that between 2000 and 2010, more was written in new commentaries about 3:28 than any other verse in Galatians.

⁵¹ Scott E. McClelland, “Galatians,” in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1995), 3:1014, Logos.

⁵² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 187, Logos.

⁵³ S. Lewis Johnson Jr., “Role Distinctions in the Church: Galatians 3:28,” in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 163.

birth—gender, ethnicity, and class—become relativized with the new birth.⁵⁴

Referencing Genesis 1:27, Grant Osborne links the final couplet with the creation narrative, “Finally, there is in God’s economy no ‘male and female.’ Interestingly, the grammar changes here. The first two juxtapositions are ‘neither/nor,’ while this third one reads literally as ‘no male and female.’”⁵⁵ Osborne notes the debate between egalitarian and complementarian camps regarding Galatians 3:28 and concludes that differing roles and equality coexist in the new creation.⁵⁶ Daniel Roberts writes an entire article to “demonstrate Paul’s subtle, deliberate quotation of Gen 1:27 to draw one’s mind to the unity found in Christ compared with the unity of man and woman in marriage by an allusion to, or echo of, Gen 2:24.”⁵⁷ He argues therefore that the verse, while acknowledging more equality for women than is common in the culture, is nonetheless focused on the believer’s union with Christ.

Two implications emerge regarding whether women may counsel men. First, we need to wrestle with Paul’s declaration that our union with Christ supersedes, transcends, or relativizes to some degree other natural markers of our identity.⁵⁸ As we examine the more restrictive texts that also reference creation, we hold the “already and the not yet” type of tension—we remain gendered beings with ethnic and class distinctives—and we remember that our union in Christ connects us more than these earth-bound descriptors divide us. Second, we employ Grudem’s hermeneutic of

⁵⁴ Todd Wilson, *Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 128–29, Logos.

⁵⁵ Grant R. Osborne, *Galatians: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017), 116, Logos.

⁵⁶ Osborne, *Galatians*, 116. See also Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 246, Logos.

⁵⁷ Daniel Wayne Roberts, “Male and Female in Galatians 3:28: A Short Biblical Theology of Unity,” *Southeastern Theological Review* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2022): 1–23, <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.sbts.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAI FZK220527000424>.

⁵⁸ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, BNTC (London: Continuum, 1993), 207, Logos.

recognizing both the principle of male headship and the principle of gender equality as we endeavor to exegete each text in its individual context and make application with the rest of the canon in view. The central thrust of Galatians 3 is not about gender roles, so we need to guard against overapplying this verse to that discussion. Dieter Lührmann agrees, “In 1 Cor. 12:13 Paul writes the same text, but without the male-female pair, for the role of women in the church was precisely what was under dispute in Corinth.”⁵⁹ Therefore, we should not use Galatians 3:28 to negate the restrictions commanded in Paul’s letters to the Corinthians and to Timothy, nor should we ignore the emphasis on union with Christ applying equally to every believer.

1 Timothy 2:9–15

The movement into this Pastoral Epistle introduces the strongest argument for ACBC’s prohibition of women counseling men. The Standards of Conduct indicate that counseling includes “the task of teaching men with authority which is forbidden by Scripture,” drawing support from 1 Timothy 2:9–15.⁶⁰ However, the passage is best understood as restricting women from teaching in the public worship gathering when men are present, not limiting women from counseling men. In support of this assertion, I exegete this text and consult with scholars looking at various aspects of the passage to differentiate the permissible from the impermissible, elucidating the biblical limitations on women teaching men. Ultimately, a believer’s view of gendered boundaries for teaching and exercising authority determines whether women should have the freedom to counsel couples or men.

Paul’s first letter to his protégé opens with a typical greeting and a reminder that Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to combat false teaching through sound teaching. In the

⁵⁹ Dieter Lührmann, *Galatians*, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 76, Logos.

⁶⁰ Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, “Standards of Conduct: V. The Commitment to Humanity,” sec. D.

second chapter, Paul instructs Timothy about prayer and proper decorum for men and women in the church; in the third chapter, Paul describes qualifications for overseers and deacons. Scholars debate nearly every word and aspect of this passage—most notably verses 11, 12, and 15.⁶¹ Library shelves and electronic databases overflow with journal articles, chapters, and complete volumes devoted to word studies, syntactical analysis, and contextual considerations. Scholars attempt to reconstruct cultural norms in first-century Ephesus, hypothesize what false teaching(s) Paul was combatting, discuss whether Paul is addressing husbands and wives or men and women, consider enduring applicability, and explore myriad other tangents. Such diversity of possible interpretations renders “scholarly consensus” elusive at best, even among complementarians. Even when complementarians agree in principle on the interpretation, they often disagree about specific applications.⁶² The pivotal text in church gender roles states,

Also, the women are to dress themselves in modest clothing, with decency and good sense, not with elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, or expensive apparel, but with good works, as is proper for women who profess to worship God. A woman is to learn quietly with full submission. I do not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; instead, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and transgressed. But she will be saved through childbearing, if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with good sense. (1 Tim 2:9–15)

Paul is clearly addressing aspects of the situation in Ephesus, and yet the text contains no direct indicators of limited or widespread applicability to other contexts.⁶³ In practice,

⁶¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, “An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9–15: A Dialogue with Scholarship,” in *Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 183–84, Kindle. See also Douglas Mangum, *1 Timothy*, Lexham Research Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), 1 Tim 2:11–15, Logos.

⁶² Robert L. Saucy and Judith TenElshof, “A Problem in the Church,” in *Women and Men in Ministry: A Complementary Perspective*, ed. Robert L. Saucy and Judith TenElshof (Chicago: Moody, 2001), 27.

⁶³ First Timothy does not include a command to share with others such as found in Col 4:16, “After this letter has been read at your gathering, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.”

neither complementarians nor egalitarians universally restrict all women from teaching all men in every circumstance.⁶⁴

The most relevant questions pertaining to this text regarding the role of female biblical counselors are (1) whether the prohibition in verse 12 applies today, (2) what type of teaching is being prohibited (*διδάσκειν*), (3) what is meant by having or exercising authority (*αὐθεντεῖν*), (4) whether the syntactical structure of verse 12 narrows the proscription in verse 12, (5) what is the setting of the passage and its implications for other settings, (6) whether or not a woman's submissiveness under the elders' authority constitutes obedience, and lastly, (7) whether biblical counseling is inherently the same form of teaching or exercising authority that is forbidden. I will explore each of these questions in the order listed.

First, I consider whether the prohibition in verse 12 continues in our day given challenges based on grammar and the presumed situation in Ephesus. S. M. Baugh convincingly refutes the claim that Paul, in his instruction for women to learn but not teach, is addressing only a specific problem with uneducated women beguiled by false teaching in first-century Ephesus.⁶⁵ Similarly, Schreiner interacts with published scholars, countering their claims that the occasional nature of the epistle with its emphasis on combatting false teaching diminishes its enduring applicability.⁶⁶ These scholars effectively engage with and counter the arguments proffered by egalitarians and feminists to limit the restrictions in the passage to the first century because of the situation in Ephesus.

Likewise, commentator George Knight rebuts the grammatical argument for

⁶⁴ Andrew Bartlett, *Men and Women in Christ: Fresh Light from the Biblical Texts* (London: InterVarsity, 2019), 206.

⁶⁵ S. M. Baugh, "A Foreign World: Ephesus in the First Century," in Köstenberger and Schreiner, *Women in the Church*, 57–60.

⁶⁶ Schreiner, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9–15," 165–72.

limiting the duration of the commands to the first century:

It has also been suggested that the present indicative form of ἐπιτρέπω indicates a temporal limitation and thus limits Paul's statement to the then and there of Ephesus. An examination of other occurrences of Paul's use of first person singular present indicative (Rom. 12:1, 3; 1 Cor. 4:16; 2 Cor. 5:20; Gal. 5:2, 3, Eph. 4:1; 1 Thes. 4:1; 5:14; 2 Thes. 3:6; 1 Tim. 2:1, 8) demonstrates that he uses it to give universal and authoritative instruction or exhortation (cf. especially Rom. 12:1; 1 Tim. 2:8).⁶⁷

Knight shows the absence of grammatical grounds to presume that Paul intended his words "I do not allow" to be understood as a temporary measure. Contrary to feminist and egalitarian arguments, complementarians agree that the commands in the passage endure beyond the local Ephesian church Timothy served—but not necessarily how, when, and where the boundaries lie. Nevertheless, the standard is not the agreement of complementarians, but faithfulness in the exegesis and hermeneutics employed in the argument. Admittedly, since complementarians generally conclude that the immediately preceding apparel commands in verse 9 are relativized cultural applications while the limitations on teaching and exercising authority merit continued enforcement, it is incumbent upon us to more carefully consider the challenges raised by others. The fact that Paul anchors his argument in the historicity of creation and the fall (verses 13 and 14) lends credence to an enduring principle less subjectively rooted in cultural expressions. However, other aspects of the passage require careful evaluation before making a current application.

Second, to define the type of *teaching* (διδάσκειν) meant in Paul's "I do not allow a woman to teach" (1 Tim 2:12a), we must consider the teaching's content, purpose, and people involved. Claire Smith combines English definitions and communication theory to create a working definition of teaching: "*to impart a message from an addresser to an addressee, where the purpose and/or result of the act is to cause*

⁶⁷ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 140, Logos.

the addressee to gain knowledge, understanding, a skill, attitude or belief or to transform thought, belief or conduct.”⁶⁸ Her definition aligns well with the teaching spectrum involved in biblical counseling, especially her assertion that all believers are included in both the “addresser” and “addressee” categories.⁶⁹ Saucy emphatically adds a similarity to biblical counseling’s aim: “But the Biblical concept of teaching differed quite radically from secular Greek teaching in the matter of its goal. Whereas the Greek teacher sought to impart knowledge and skills, teaching for the Jew sought to change one’s entire life.”⁷⁰ Focusing on gender roles, Piper frames the teaching prohibition broadly in terms of “personal” and “directive” contours, asserting that “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, and thus controvert God’s created order.”⁷¹ Piper’s perspective on this point aligns more closely with the proscription of women counseling couples or men. However, Piper and Grudem “admit that there are ambiguities in separating the Priscilla-type counsel from the official teaching role of 1 Timothy 2:12.”⁷² It is incumbent upon the theologian to pause and examine the text carefully while seeking to understand its harmony with the rest of Scripture.

A survey of other scholars confirms consensus that a specific type of instruction should be understood in 1 Timothy 2:12, rather than an unlimited, universal prohibition of women ever teaching men anything, anywhere, at any time (even if

⁶⁸ Claire S. Smith, *Pauline Communities as “Scholastic Communities”*: A Study of the Vocabulary of “Teaching” in 1 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 43 (italics original).

⁶⁹ Smith, *Pauline Communities as “Scholastic Communities”*, 76.

⁷⁰ Robert L. Saucy, “Women’s Prohibition to Teach Men: An Investigation into Its Meaning and Contemporary Application,” *JETS* 37, no. 1 (1994): 81.

⁷¹ John Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible,” in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 51.

⁷² Piper and Grudem, “An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers,” in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 76. The implications of the Priscilla example receive further attention in chapter 5.

personal and directive). Knight agrees,

That which is not permitted is first of all διδάσκειν, “to teach,” but not as an unqualified prohibition since the object “man” indicates a limitation, as does the immediate context, which has been dealing with religious instruction in the life of the church. To this can be compared Paul’s commendation of women teaching other women (Tit 2:3–5) and teaching their children and sons (2 Tim 1:5; 3:14, 15: cf. Acts 16:1); he apparently also approved of the team effort of Priscilla and Aquila in explaining in private conversation (“they took him aside”) to Apollos “the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:25, 25). Just as v. 11 was not a demand for all learning to be done in silence, as an unqualified absolute, but was concerned with women’s learning in the midst of the assembled people of God, so also the prohibition of teaching here has the same setting and perspective in view.”⁷³

Again, we see a contrast between the type of instruction proclaimed in the gathered assembly versus the more private application of those truths to the struggles that an individual faces.

The context, format, and preset expectations play a role in determining the type of teaching occurring. Andrew Wilson helpfully draws a crucial distinction between what he calls “Teaching with a Little ‘t’ and a Big ‘T’” in Paul’s letters to the churches versus in the Pastoral Epistles.⁷⁴ He observes that in the letters to the churches, everyone with the gift of teaching is encouraged to teach, but not in the letters to Paul’s protégés left behind in Ephesus and Crete. He explains,

In the Pastorals, however, things are a bit different. The *didasko* word group is used far more frequently, for a start. The concern with false doctrine in the church causes Paul to speak more directly about correct doctrine, and he urges Timothy and Titus to ensure its preservation by confronting some, and entrusting Paul’s apostolic deposit to others. The overseers/elders have responsibility for defining doctrine in the church, and the right to instruct others is repeatedly connected with godly character and maturity in the faith. In this sense, I see Paul as using *didasko* in a more authoritative, more doctrinally definitive way in the Pastorals than in the church letters—hence my distinction between teaching and Teaching.⁷⁵

Wilson concludes that both “Little t” teaching and “Big T” teaching as thus defined are

⁷³ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 140–41.

⁷⁴ Andrew Wilson, “Teaching with a Little ‘t’ and a Big ‘T,’” *Think Theology* (blog), June 27, 2012, <https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/teaching-with-a-little-t-and-a-big-t>.

⁷⁵ Wilson, “Teaching with a Little ‘t’ and a Big ‘T.’”

necessary and compatible elements in the normal life of the church, with the stipulation that it is clear to all concerned which form of teaching is occurring. While doctrine certainly informs the teaching involved in biblical counseling, the majority of instruction in counseling sessions tends to be the little “t” type, by Wilson’s characterization.

While God commands all believers to teach (Col 3:16), Scripture accords elders an amplified role setting the instruction for the church—a type of teaching that encompasses the entire congregation. Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin focus on the doctrinal aspect: “Teaching involved official doctrinal instruction in the Scriptures (1 Tim 5:17) and was a task delegated to the pastor-teacher (Eph 4:11).”⁷⁶ Interestingly, those pastor-teachers are charged with “equipping the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph 4:12), which includes training others in the faith (Jude 3). Training counselors to multiply the church’s ministry efforts should top the list of ways that elders equip the saints. Homer Kent contributes the concept of “office” to the discussion: “This has reference solely to the function of the authoritative teacher of doctrine in the church. . . . The role of the teacher in New Testament days was an authoritative office. The teacher was the declarer of doctrine.”⁷⁷ Kent’s distinction aligns with the elder qualifications in the immediately succeeding verses in 1 Timothy 3.

Complementarian scholars consistently make distinctions between prohibited public teaching and permitted private instruction by women to men. Schreiner clarifies the textual connection between learning and teaching: “The emphatic position of ‘to teach’ at the beginning of v. 12 does not show that the verse is a parenthesis. Instead, Paul uses the placement of the verb to emphasize that although women are permitted to learn, they must not teach. Teaching here involves the authoritative and public transmission of

⁷⁶ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, NAC 34 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 99, Logos.

⁷⁷ Homer A. Kent Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles: Studies in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, rev. ed. (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1986), 107–8, Logos.

tradition about Christ and the Scriptures.”⁷⁸ R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell echo the public and authoritative aspects of teaching, concluding that “what is prohibited is *preaching*”; they link that prohibition to the “*teaching-elder*” role.⁷⁹ They are not the only scholars to link the teaching in verse 12 to the required teaching aptitude for elders in the following chapter (1 Tim 3:2). Köstenberger also references preaching and incorporates combatting the false teaching mentioned earlier in the epistle. He adduces, “Teaching also entails refuting false teaching (1:3, 10; 4:1; 6:3; 2 Tim 4:3; Titus 1:9, 11) and passing on apostolic teaching to successive generations (2 Tim 1:12, 14; 2:2). The directive that women not teach men pertains to situations where women would be teaching men by preaching to a congregation including both men and women.”⁸⁰ How does a woman formally counseling a man violate this principle? Robert Yarbrough likewise notes the less private nature of teaching in the passage: “It could be understood as affirming an important principle in congregational assembly: a major goal (alongside prayer; see previous verses) is didactic equipping and building up through the teaching and learning that takes place.”⁸¹ This consensus of complementarian voices agrees regarding the public and authoritative characteristics of the type of teaching that is forbidden.

Another nuance of the type of teaching that might be limited by 1 Timothy 2:12 is frequency. Piper and Grudem contend, “We use the qualifiers *occasional* and *periodic* because the regularity of teaching one group of people is part of what constitutes the difference between *official* teaching leadership, which is withheld from women in 1

⁷⁸ Schreiner, “An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9–15,” 190.

⁷⁹ R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 69, Logos (italics original).

⁸⁰ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy and Titus*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 114, Logos.

⁸¹ Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 170.

Timothy 2:12, and the *unofficial* guidance given by Priscilla and Aquilla in Acts 18:26.”⁸² Following their logic, one must consider whether the number of planned sessions impacts the permissibility of women counseling men. With the notable exception of Piper, most complementarian scholars agree that women may legitimately teach other subjects or graciously exercise authority over men in diverse settings outside of the home and church.⁸³ Synthesizing the above complementarian perspectives on teaching in 1 Timothy 2:12, I conclude that the type of teaching that Paul restricts from women is the public and authoritative doctrinal type, especially preaching in the gathered assembly.

The authority (*αὐθεντεῖν*) dimension cannot be wholly extracted from the teaching element; therefore, I will now seek to answer the third relevant question by exploring effects of authority’s inclusion in the passage. Saucy helpfully guides in the somewhat blurry transition from teaching to authority: “Although a certain authority is probably present in all of the uses of *didasko*, there appears to be quite a latitude of gradations. Christ amazed His hearers with the authority of His teaching (e.g., Matt. 7:28–29; Mark 1:22). To His disciples, His teaching carried absolute authority because of who He was.”⁸⁴ From this observation, there are both personal and positional aspects to authority.

On a much more mundane level, I serve several clients as their fractional Chief Financial Officer and other clients merely as an advisor or on a project basis. I bring the same set of skills and accounting acumen to each client setting—yet with vastly different

⁸² Piper and Grudem, “An Overview of Central Concerns,” 85 (italics original).

⁸³ Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” 50. Piper’s concern extends to giving generic directions:

To illustrate: it is simply impossible that from time to time a woman not be put in a position of influencing or guiding men. For example, a housewife in her backyard may be asked by a man how to get to the freeway. At that point she is giving a kind of leadership. She has superior knowledge that the man needs and he submits himself to her guidance. But we all know that this is a way for that housewife to direct that man that neither of them feels their mature femininity or masculinity compromised.

⁸⁴ Robert Saucy, “Paul’s Teaching on the Ministry of Women,” in Saucy and TenElshof, *Women and Men in Ministry*, 299.

degrees of authority and impact determined by my position in each organization. My responsibility to and corresponding authority on behalf of each client depends on varying contractual arrangements outlined in a position description. If I serve the church as a treasurer, the limits and nuances of my authority in the church change from my role of serving as a counselor. In other words, the functional role intrinsically shapes the boundary of authority. Leeman makes a similar observation: “It is critical to acknowledge that authority inheres in the office (an institutionalized set of rules), not in the man.”⁸⁵ He then indicates his agreement with Nicholas Wolterstorff and expands, “Authority can only be something a human being *has*, not something that a human being *is*. It must be given, and the giver always specifies the authority’s jurisdiction and purposes—the purpose and limits of an office. Only God possesses authority in and of himself.”⁸⁶ Former elders and pastors share a similar experience in the church setting—they merit and receive elevated respect based on prior service but no longer enjoy the same degree of authority they exercised in a previous role or context.

Authority varies by assigned position, role, or task. Saucy agrees, “Teaching by those who were not elders or pastors, and therefore had no authority as official leaders, was no doubt somewhat less authoritative in the church.”⁸⁷ Teaching in the church usually involves a number of individuals in a variety of settings beyond the gathered worship service such as prayer meetings, Bible studies, small groups, and community outreach programs, each with significantly different levels of authority vested in the teacher. By contrast, an elder maintains his spiritual authority when he counsels members of his congregation, but that does not mean a woman counseling necessarily usurps elder

⁸⁵ Leeman, *Don’t Fire Your Church Members*, 133.

⁸⁶ Leeman, *Don’t Fire Your Church Members*, 133–34 (italics original).

⁸⁷ Saucy, “Paul’s Teaching on the Ministry of Women,” 299.

authority.⁸⁸ Christ retains all authority and concurrently delegates authority in varying degrees to individuals in a variety of situations and circumstances (Matt 28:18–20). Discerning the loci and assigning the level or degree of divinely delegated authority suffers no lack of competing perspectives.

To understand the authority aspect of 1 Timothy 2:12, I will consider a variety of English translations and their difference in the verbs used related to *authority*. While the KJV uses the words “usurp authority,” and the NIV still employs the possibly pejorative “assume authority,” the vast majority of translations use the more neutral terms “have authority,” or “exercise authority.” What is meant by having or exercising authority?

Burk describes the battleground over the term *authority*: “Without question, 1 Timothy 2:12 is the most contested verse in the wider debate among evangelicals . . . and the most contested clause is, without a doubt, ἀυθεντεῖν.”⁸⁹ The *hapax legomena* arouses creative assertions about why Paul chose the relatively obscure term rather than a more common word for authority—unless he intended a different nuance than the other choices would convey. How are believers to know? Al Wolters, building on Henry Scott Baldwin’s earlier work on ἀυθεντεῖν, explains, “The most significant evidence for the meaning of a disputed word, apart from what can be gleaned from its immediate context, is the use of that word in other contexts that are roughly contemporaneous with it.”⁹⁰ Unfortunately, he notes, “We are left with only five secure extrabiblical examples of the verb before [AD] 312” and these vary in meaning from “have authority,” “be superior

⁸⁸ I revisit this topic in more detail in chapter 4.

⁸⁹ Denny Burk, “New and Old Departures in the Translation of ἀυθεντεῖν,” in Köstenberger and Schreiner, *Women in the Church*, 279.

⁹⁰ Albert Wolters, “The Meaning of ἀυθεντεῖν,” in Köstenberger and Schreiner, *Women in the Church*, 69.

to,” “originate,” “rule,” and “act on one’s own.”⁹¹ His research incorporates later usage of the word and its cognates, as well as etymological challenges raised by egalitarians.⁹² He contends that the verb is not pejorative or ingressive and is accurately translated as “have authority” or “exercise authority.”⁹³ Köstenberger agrees,

“Exercise (or have) authority” (αὐθεντεῖν) in the present context is tantamount to being in charge of and responsible for a church in its entirety by holding the office of overseer/elder (see 3:4–5; 5:17). The contrast with “full submission” (see v. 11 above) and the parallel structure with the term “teaching” make clear that the expression αὐθεντεῖν has no necessary negative connotation.”⁹⁴

Both Grudem and Köstenberger view the exercising of authority that Scripture prohibits women from exercising in 1 Timothy 2:12 as the governing authority invested in elders.⁹⁵

Fourth, I explore whether the syntactical structure of verse 12 narrows the proscription. In other words—is authoritative teaching a special category of teaching, or is Paul prohibiting two distinct activities—teaching and exercising authority? In a section subtitled, “Authoritative Teaching as a Special Category?,” Bartlett responds to this question:

Complementarians interpret Paul’s meaning in verse 12 as something on the lines of “I do not permit any woman to teach Christian doctrine authoritatively to men, or to exercise authority over men.” They base this on the twin propositions that (1) the word “teach” in the Pastoral Epistles always has a restricted sense of “authoritative doctrinal instruction” and (2) authority to teach resides in qualified males (if not apostles, then elders and pastors).⁹⁶

Embedded above, one sees the thorny dual propositions with some ambiguity as to whether “or” indicates discrete or significantly overlapping activities that defy separation. DeYoung opines, “Two commands are in view, not just one. To put it another way, Paul is

⁹¹ Wolters, “The Meaning of Αὐθεντέω,” 83.

⁹² Wolters, “The Meaning of Αὐθεντέω,” 110–14.

⁹³ Wolters, “The Meaning of Αὐθεντέω,” 65–114.

⁹⁴ Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy and Titus*, 114–15.

⁹⁵ Grudem, *EFTB*, 93.

⁹⁶ Bartlett, *Men and Women in Christ*, 224.

not just opposed to the authoritative teaching (where nonauthoritative teaching could be permissible?). He prohibits women doing two different, but related things in the church: teaching men and exercising authority over men.”⁹⁷ He goes on to equate the teaching and ruling required of elders as the same that is withheld from women.⁹⁸

Teaching and authority in this verse do not constitute a single or nonintersecting double circle on a Venn diagram—there is some distinction even if they are not entirely separable. Philip Ryken perceives a high degree of overlap: “One sign that Paul and the Holy Spirit have preaching in mind in 1 Timothy 2:12 is the way that teaching is coordinated with having authority. ‘Teach’ and ‘exercise authority’ are closely related terms.”⁹⁹ For Ryken, the terms best harmonize as the official instruction of the church. He concludes, “The activity they most clearly suggest is preaching, or any other form of doctrinally authoritative teaching in the church.”¹⁰⁰ If one follows his conclusion that the proscribed activity is preaching or similarly “doctrinally authoritative,” then a complementarian church should not forbid women from counseling men with appropriate guardrails in place.

Köstenberger completed an exhaustive study of the syntactic parallels and the function of οὐδέ, concluding,

It is important to keep in mind that οὐδέ functions as a coordinating conjunction in 1 Timothy 2:12, and as such—particularly as a negative conjunction—it does not combine two separate elements in the sense that it excludes any consideration of those elements individually. While the elements may overlap conceptually and a larger “single idea” may legitimately be posited that encompasses or includes both elements, they retain a certain degree of distinctness.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church*, 82–83.

⁹⁸ DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church*, 91.

⁹⁹ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 95, Logos.

¹⁰⁰ Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 95.

¹⁰¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, “A Complex Sentence: The Syntax of 1 Timothy 2:12,” in Köstenberger and Schreiner, *Women in the Church*, 149, Kindle.

He considers teaching to be an example of the broader authority category.¹⁰² A majority of authors I consulted cite Köstenberger's work and accept his argument that both teaching and authority are viewed positively, thereby refuting an egalitarian charge that the term should be translating adversely along the lines of domineering.

Adding to the consensus of distinct yet overlapping meaning of the phrase, Ben Cooper summarizes, "Likewise, any translation which suggests that 'teaching' and 'exercising authority' constitute together a single, unified idea (an 'hendiadys') in Paul's mind is probably unwarranted, given the separation of the terms in the original word order. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that they are entirely separate or separable."¹⁰³ Yarbrough tempers the tendency to broaden the scope of the text: "Paul's point as explained above is not to decertify women as teachers or leaders, nor is it to license men per se to instruct and rule. It is not to make assertions about human nature and the superiority or inferiority of one sex in relation to the other. It is rather to describe what Paul wants Timothy to promote as regular worship order."¹⁰⁴ He then cites Paul's instruction to Titus (Titus 2:15) and Timothy (1 Tim 4:11) as the examples for the portion of the public worship service set aside for elders to exercise their authority through teaching—seemingly indicating a special category of teaching versus distinct activities.

Fifth, we must consider the passage's setting and its implications for other settings. As referenced above, many scholars (including Knight, Schreiner, and Köstenberger) refer to the congregational or public assembly setting to explain the type of teaching Paul means in verse 12. In her literature survey, Joan Holmes records, "There is today virtually universal acceptance that 1 Tim. 2.1–2, 8–12 deals with activities taking

¹⁰² Köstenberger, "A Complex Sentence," 149.

¹⁰³ Ben Cooper, *Positive Complementarianism: The Key Biblical Texts*, Latimer Studies 79 (London: Latimer Trust, 2014), 39.

¹⁰⁴ Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 185.

place in the congregation.”¹⁰⁵ It is worth noting the reasons cited for concluding that the setting is the gathered assembly specifically or the church more broadly, as a means of discerning the implications for application in other settings. Knight cites Paul’s statement, “I have written so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household” as reason for the restrictions to apply not only in the gathered assembly, but throughout community life (1 Tim 3:15b).¹⁰⁶

On the other hand, Donald Guthrie argues, “The full submission (*en pasēi hypotagēi*) mentioned by Paul relates primarily to public worship as it was then enacted, and reserve must be exercised in deducing universal principles from particular cases.” He likewise explains that the harmonization of the New Testament commands narrows the application of the limitation to the setting indicated rather than extending it to additional spheres of life.¹⁰⁷ Hughes and Chapell issue a similar judgment regarding the setting: “These instructions have nothing directly to say about teaching and authority in the marketplace or the academy or the public square. They are about order in the church. Neither do these directives allow any man within the church, by virtue of his gender, to exercise authority over women in the church.”¹⁰⁸ Ryken addresses the issue more precisely:

Here it is important to remember the context of Paul’s command. Since the beginning of the chapter he has been giving Timothy instructions about corporate worship services. What he writes is not intended to govern men and women in every situation, but applies especially to those occasions when the church gathers for the preaching of the Word.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ J. M. Holmes, *Text in a Whirlwind: A Critique of Four Exegetical Devices at 1 Timothy 2.9–15* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 36. Holmes disagrees that the congregation is the setting/context and uses her belief that the original setting was not the congregation to argue for an egalitarian position.

¹⁰⁶ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 131.

¹⁰⁷ Donald Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 14 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 90, Logos.

¹⁰⁸ Hughes and Chapell, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, 69.

¹⁰⁹ Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 94.

Scholars agree that the most likely setting for Paul's commands is the gathered assembly.

Based on the above, I wholeheartedly affirm that women may not serve as elders or preach in the gathered assembly. However, because the setting in 1 Timothy 2:12 is the gathered assembly, I do not believe that 1 Timothy 2:12 is forbidding women from counseling men. Even when counseling includes teaching doctrine, the private setting of a counseling session falls under the one-another aspect of church life, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Sixth, another facet of the exegetical landscape to explore is whether or not submissiveness under the elders' authority permits a woman to do what verse 12 otherwise prohibits. In other words, is she free to teach and exercise authority if she does so under the approval and guidance of male elders? Ryken sees room for delegation: "The elders are responsible before God for what is taught in the classes and Bible studies of the church, but they can exercise spiritual oversight without doing all of the teaching themselves."¹¹⁰ This makes sense, especially given that elders are to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4:12). Ryken excludes preaching and or exercising "doctrinal and disciplinary authority" from the examples of teaching that elders may delegate to women.¹¹¹ A pastor's forbidding a woman from teaching in a particular context or to a particular segment of the congregation should be sufficient to preclude her from doing so. As discussed more fully in the next chapter, there is no scriptural warrant for a pastor to allow women to preach or serve as elders in direct contradiction to the text. At the same time, elders may come to different conclusions regarding how they delegate authority and distribute the multifaceted task of teaching.

Having carefully considered teaching, authority, and setting angles in this passage, I conclude that the church should not view women serving men with biblical

¹¹⁰ Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 97.

¹¹¹ Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 95.

counseling as a violation of God’s command. Paul’s prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12 does indeed apply today. Paul prohibits women from authoritatively teaching biblical doctrine in the context of the gathered assembly, not the private ministry of the Word.

Köstenberger concurs, “Neither does the passage [1 Tim 2:9–15] rule out the private instruction of men by women together with their husbands (Acts 18:25–26) or their participation in the church’s decision making on an informal or advisory basis.”¹¹² Elders may involve women in the church’s decision making, but they do not have the authority to place women in public teaching positions in the gathered assembly nor to abdicate governing authority to women. While biblical counseling may at times include doctrinal instruction, the private setting and the lack of governing authority inherently differentiate biblical counseling from the form of teaching and exercising authority that is forbidden. In contradistinction with the ACBC Standards of Conduct, as argued throughout this exegetical study of 1 Timothy 2:9–15, biblical counseling does not entail the forbidden public teaching or violate the limits on women exercising ruling authority in the congregation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have considered the biblical restrictions on women’s role in the church. The Genesis 1:26–27 passage confirms men and women are both created in the image of God and are given the same mandate to exercise dominion over the earth but does not introduce role limitations. Paul affirms male headship in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and regulates the apparel of men and women when praying and prophesying in the gathered assembly. Galatians 3:28 relativizes but does not nullify gender distinctions and roles. Most significantly for the role of female counselors in complementarian churches, 1 Timothy 2:12 restricts women from teaching in the gathered assembly or serving as

¹¹² Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy and Titus*, 115.

elders; it does not restrict women from the private ministry of biblical counseling. Scripture presents a broader view of all believers' role in the church, both men and women. We will now examine the "one-another" commands of the New Testament to describe a more comprehensive view of God's design for his people.

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL COUNSELING AS THE COALESCENCE OF ONE-ANOTHER COMMANDS GIVEN WITHOUT GENDER RESTRICTION

In the previous chapter, I examined what Scripture forbids women to do in the church; in this chapter, I examine what Scripture commands women to do in the church. I will demonstrate that biblical counseling is the coalescence of the one-another commands, given without gender restriction. These commands are issued to and intended for exercise by both male and female members in service to both men and women in complementarian churches. To advance this argument, I will first provide definitions for a complementarian church and the ministry of biblical counseling. Through surveying the accepted definitions for biblical counseling, I will demonstrate that none of the definitions include teaching with authority and will describe the essential elements of biblical counseling, which likewise excludes teaching with authority. In the second section, I will explore the intersection of the one-another commands with biblical counseling and demonstrate that restricting women from counseling men contributes to women falling short of God's design for this part of community life.

Definitions and Limitations

As noted previously, both the modern biblical counseling movement and complementarianism exist along a spectrum. Key terms can hold differing connotations and definitions; therefore, I will clarify what I mean by the key terms I employ.

Complementarian Church

The universal church includes local churches that both accept and reject complementarian convictions—placing gender roles in a secondary (and depending on

specific application, tertiary) position in our theological triage.¹ Southern Baptists describe complementarian application for autonomous local churches: “In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.”² As alluded to in the prior chapter, the Danvers Statement merely indicates that “some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men.”³ Combining these sources, I believe that we can clarify the minimum definition of a complementarian church. In the complementarian church, only qualified males can fill the office of pastor or elder and perform the function of authoritative teaching in the gathered assembly and ruling over the congregation. Women usually enjoy uncontested opportunities to instruct children and other women in accordance with their Spirit-given gifting. Even though the one-another passages provide ample scriptural warrant for all believers to counsel both men and women, some churches and organizations limit counseling to same-gender counselor and counselee formats. When they do, they broaden the definition of complementarianism and limit the role of women within the church, going beyond the explicit biblical commands and the “mere complementarianism” of the Danvers Statement.⁴ How and

¹ R. Albert Mohler Jr., “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity,” *Albert Mohler* (blog), July 12, 2005, <https://albertmohler.com/2005/07/12/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity>.

² Southern Baptist Convention, *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, accessed August 29, 2023, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/>. The messengers to the 2023 Southern Baptist Convention added the words *elder/overseer* to the office of pastor. Erin Roach, “Motion to Amend BF&M Passes, Task Forces Approved,” *Baptist Press*, June 14, 2023, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/motion-to-clarify-bfm-passes-task-forces-approved/>.

³ Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, “The Danvers Statement,” June 26, 2007, <https://cbmw.org/2007/06/26/the-danvers-statement/>.

⁴ See Jonathan Leeman, “A Word of Empathy, Warning, and Counsel for ‘Narrow’ Complementarians,” 9Marks, February 8, 2018, <https://www.9marks.org/article/a-word-of-empathy-warning-and-counsel-for-narrow-complementarians/>; and Denny Burk, “Mere Complementarianism,” *Eikon* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 28–43, <https://cbmw.org/2019/11/20/mere-complementarianism/>.

where does biblical counseling fit into the ministry of the complementarian church—what are its components, and how should we assess both the teaching and authority aspects of particular concern to complementarians?

Biblical Counseling Defined

Differences exist within the broader biblical counseling movement, and not all who use the descriptor “biblical counseling” mean the same thing, requiring further definition and description. General biblical counseling definitions omit “teaching with authority,” and yet ACBC restricts women from counseling men “since this generally requires the task of teaching men with authority which is forbidden by Scripture.”⁵ To demonstrate the various views of teaching and authority included in biblical counseling definitions, I will survey a broad range of contributions. Then, I will explore counseling essentials and connect biblical counseling to the church. I begin again with Robert Jones’s definition of biblical counseling provided in the first chapter: “It is the Christlike caring, person-to-person ministry of God’s Word to people struggling with personal and interpersonal problems to help them know and follow Jesus Christ in heart and behavior amid their struggles.”⁶ Jones’s definition excludes reference to teaching with authority—a recurring absence in each of the accepted definitions.

In fact, biblical counseling resists a neat and tidy description. After surveying the available resources, Jeremy Lelek, president of the Association of Biblical Counselors, laments, “While biblical counseling has, in the modern sense, existed for at least forty years (Adams, 1970; Bettler, 1988), a comprehensive definition, developed

⁵ Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, “Standards of Conduct: V. The Commitment to Humanity,” accessed December 1, 2022, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/about/beliefs/positions/standards-of-conduct/#humanity>.

⁶ Robert D. Jones, “What Is Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling?,” in *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, by Robert D. Jones, Kristen L. Kellen, and Rob Green (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2021), 20.

through the research method, has yet to be offered in the literature.”⁷ His Delphi research method included proponents of biblical counseling, nouthetic counseling, Christian psychology, and Christian counseling. After three rounds of vetting by each of the panels, he indicates that a fairly exhaustive one-and-a-half-page definition garnered the most consensus from the biblical counseling panel.⁸ It begins,

Biblical Counseling is Christ-centered, church-based, comprehensive, compassionate, culturally-informed and transformative. It depends upon the Holy Spirit to relate to God’s inspired truth about people, problems, and solutions to human suffering (through the Christian soul care arts of sustaining and healing) and sin (through the Christian spiritual direction arts of reconciling and guiding) to empower people to exalt and enjoy God and to love others (Matthew 22:35–40) by cultivating conformity to Christ and communion with Christ and the Body of Christ. It follows the biblical model of seeking truth and knowledge in the world as it informs and contributes to our understanding and counseling abilities (Proverbs, Dan 1–2, Tit 1:12). All information is subject to the authority and interpretation of the revelation of God (the ultimate source of all wisdom), particularly as it is expressed through Holy Scripture and the genuine counsel of the Holy Spirit.⁹

The longer definition likewise locates whatever authority is intrinsic to biblical counseling in Scripture and references teaching found in the Bible rather than describing the counselor as teaching with authority.¹⁰ The nouthetic panel likewise affirmed definitions that contained “church-based,” whereas the Christian psychology panel did

⁷ Jeremy Lelek, “A Study of the Constructs and a Proposed Definition of Biblical Counseling,” (PhD diss., Regent University, 2012), 302. Lelek’s Delphi research method incorporated panels representing nouthetic counseling, Christian psychology, Christian counseling, and biblical counseling perspectives to define biblical counseling. The resulting definitions are more cumbersome and complex than helpful for this dissertation, yet his point about the dearth of concise definitions is well-founded and his work is the most thoroughgoing attempt at defining biblical counseling. The Association of Biblical Counselors (ABC) is distinct from ACBC. For more information about ABC, see Association of Biblical Counselors, “Mission & Beliefs,” accessed August 29, 2023, <https://christiancounseling.com/mission-beliefs/>.

⁸ For a more robust treatment of the similarities and differences within counseling in the Christian sphere, see also Eric L. Johnson, ed., *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

⁹ Lelek, “A Study of the Constructs,” 148–49. The rest of the definition includes paragraphs devoted to biblical counseling being theological, comprehensive in theory, comprehensive in methodology, and conformed to a biblical model of seeking truth and knowledge. The definition concludes with ways that counselors learn and communicate in the culture.

¹⁰ Lelek, “A Study of the Constructs,” 148–50.

not.¹¹ As expected, the constructs that the biblical counseling panelists included prioritize the work and presence of the triune God, Scripture, and the church, though the inclusion of “seeking truth and knowledge in the world” differs significantly from the orientation expressed in other definitions. Even the rigorous method employed and longest definition generated omits reference to teaching with authority.

In distinction from the panel definition above, Jones argues for a more active and robust view of Scripture’s role in biblical counseling: “When done properly, our core concepts and methods don’t merely align with or not contradict Scripture; they *emerge from* Scripture as we interpret it accurately and apply it wisely.”¹² In contrast to a model that seeks truth in the world to inform our counseling abilities in the panel discussion method above, Jones posits, “The Bible does more than guide, inform, or control our counseling model; it proactively forms it. Scripture *generates* our understanding of God, people, and their situations. Biblical counseling is biblically driven counseling.”¹³ Not only does biblical counseling resist a neat and tidy definition, but also some of the boundaries appear semipermeable, increasing the difficulty of discerning exactly when or where one crosses the border into an integrationist version of counseling.¹⁴

Dale Johnson, executive director of ACBC, connects the centrality of the church to biblical counseling. He co-wrote this definition:

Biblical counseling is the personal discipleship ministry of God’s people to others under the oversight of God’s church, dependent upon the authority and sufficiency of God’s Word through the work of the Holy Spirit. Biblical counseling seeks to reorient disordered desires, affections, thoughts, behaviors, and worship toward a God-designed anthropology in an effort to restore people to a right fellowship with God and others. This is accomplished by speaking the truth in love and applying

¹¹ Lelek, “A Study of the Constructs,” 150–52.

¹² Jones, “What Is Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling?,” 15.

¹³ Jones, “What is Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling?,” 15 (italics original).

¹⁴ Integrationist versions of counseling are outside the scope of my dissertation. It is difficult to find a consensus definition for biblical counseling, much less a consistent interpretation of the term, and how women should be involved in it.

Scripture to the need of the moment by comforting the suffering and calling sinners to repentance, thus working to make them mature as they abide in Jesus Christ.¹⁵

Their definition locates biblical counseling in the church, highlights the discipleship aspect, and guards the centrality of Scripture in the process. While speaking truth in love and applying Scripture convey the idea of teaching, the definition implies that authority inheres in Scripture rather than the counselor.

The Biblical Counseling Coalition Confessional Statement begins with a preamble titled “Speaking the Truth in Love—A Vision for the Entire Church.”¹⁶ While not exactly a definition per se, the subtitles of the succeeding paragraphs demonstrate the organization’s view of the discipline: “In Christ Alone,” biblical counseling must be “Anchored in Scripture,” “Centered on Christ and the Gospel,” “Grounded in Sound Theology,” “Dependent upon the Holy Spirit and Prayer,” “Directed toward Sanctification,” “Rooted in the Life of the Church,” “Founded in Love,” “Attentive to Heart Issues,” “Comprehensive in Understanding,” “Thorough in Care,” “Practical and Relevant,” “Oriented toward Outreach,” and marked by “Unity in Truth and Love.”¹⁷ As expected, this umbrella organization focuses on the core aspects of biblical counseling that unite the movement. They likewise omit reference to teaching with authority.

Robert Kellemen offers a more succinct definition that includes the one-another aspect and focuses on biblical counseling in the church setting:

Biblical Counseling is Christ-centered, church-based, comprehensive, compassionate, and culturally-informed one-another ministry that depends upon the Holy Spirit to relate God’s Word to suffering and sin by speaking and living God’s truth in love to equip people to love God and one another (Matthew 22:34–40). It

¹⁵ T. Dale Johnson Jr, *The Church as a Culture of Care: Finding Hope in Biblical Community* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021), 9. Johnson credits Samuel Stephens as his co-author of the definition.

¹⁶ Biblical Counseling Coalition, “BCC Confessional Statement,” last modified July 2018, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/confessional-statement/>.

¹⁷ Biblical Counseling Coalition, “BCC Confessional Statement.”

cultivates conformity to Christ and communion with Christ and the Body of Christ leading to a community of one-another disciple-makers (Matthew 28:18–20).¹⁸

Kellemen’s definition rightly emphasizes the one-another aspect as well as the church as the preferred setting for practicing biblical counseling. Like Lelek’s panel result, Kellemen uses the phrase “relate God’s Word” versus teaching and omits any reference to teaching with authority.

Paul Tautges includes teaching in his definition: “Biblical counseling is an intensely-focused and personal aspect of the discipleship process whereby believers come alongside one another for the threefold purpose of teaching, warning, and leading one another toward biblical love and godliness that mark progress toward spiritual maturity (2 Timothy 3:16–17).”¹⁹ Tautges’s definition does not indicate that biblical counseling involves teaching with authority.

Among the cited definitions above, the other thirteen definitions accompanying Kellemen’s and Tautges’s in Kellemen’s blog, and the complete definition chosen by Lelek’s panelists, none indicate that biblical counseling consists of “teaching with authority.” Under the section “Defining Biblical Counseling,” ACBC indicates that the nature of biblical counseling is “the personal discipleship ministry of God’s people to others under the oversight of God’s church, dependent upon the authority and sufficiency of God’s Word through the work of the Holy Spirit.” The method of biblical counseling is described as “speaking truth in love and applying Scripture to the need of the moment by comforting the suffering and calling sinners to repentance, thus working to make them mature as they abide in Jesus Christ.”²⁰ Given the ACBC Standards of Conduct statement

¹⁸ Bob W. Kellemen, “15 Definitions of Biblical Counseling,” *Resurrection Power Multipliers Ministries* (blog), September 12, 2011, <https://www.rpmministries.org/2011/09/15-definitions-of-biblical-counseling/>. Very similar wording appears in Lelek’s dissertation referenced above.

¹⁹ Kellemen, “15 Definitions of Biblical Counseling.”

²⁰ Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, “Our Mission: Defining Biblical Counseling,” accessed July 26, 2023, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/about/our-mission/#:~:text=Biblical%20counseling%20is%20the%20personal,work%20of%20the%20Holy%20Spirit.>

that “women will strive to avoid formally counseling men since this generally requires the task of teaching men with authority which is forbidden by Scripture,”²¹ one might expect the majority of biblical counseling definitions to more clearly indicate that biblical counseling includes teaching with authority. The consensus locus of authority is in Scripture rather than the counselor. Collectively, the definitions indicate a common reliance on God’s Spirit and Word for one believer to help another believer mature spiritually amid sin, suffering, or confusion. In other words, biblical counseling is the coalescence of one-another commands.

With this defining framework in place, I will turn to other questions as I unpack the person-to-person ministry aspect. What are the essential components of biblical counseling—what distinguishes biblical counseling from other biblical ministries in the church, and what distinguishes biblical counseling in the church from Christian or pastoral counseling outside the church? Moreover, what crucial elements are common to secular counseling, and which are exclusive to biblical counseling ministry in the church?

Biblical Counseling Characteristics

Definitions are helpful and demonstrate that biblical counseling does not necessarily or even typically involve teaching with authority. However, definitions fail to fully convey the essence of biblical counseling and the degree of overlap shared between biblical counseling and the one-another commands. Biblical counseling distinguishing characteristics include forming Christlikeness, listening ministerially, exploring spiritual aspects of difficulties, addressing suffering Christianly, and pointing counselees to find their identity and hope in Christ.

Guided by the Bible, with the goal of conformity to Christ and growth in

²¹ Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, “Standards of Conduct: V. The Commitment to Humanity,” accessed December 1, 2022, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/about/beliefs/positions/standards-of-conduct/#humanity>.

satisfaction with Christ, the biblical counselor takes an alternate route compared to other types of counselors.²² Today's biblical counselors do not seek to help counselees less than our secular counterparts—though not our ultimate goal, we typically want them to experience symptom relief. Reduced anxiety, hopefulness instead of hopelessness, improved communication, and conflict resolution, for example, are all good gifts to be celebrated. At the same time, we more deeply desire for them to be more faithful to Christ as a result of counseling. Unlike most secular counselors, the biblical counselor seeks to listen and know the counselee in order to wisely offer Scripture's confrontation of sin and comfort in suffering, as a means to both symptom relief and growing in Christlikeness—activities that mirror one-another commands.

Like other counseling modalities, biblical counseling begins with careful listening. Dietrich Bonhoeffer exhorts members of a Christian fellowship to minister to one another in a distinctly Christian way:

There is a kind of listening with half an ear that presumes already to know what the other person has to say. It is an impatient, inattentive listening, that despises the brother and is only waiting for a chance to speak and thus get rid of the other person. This is no fulfillment of our obligation, and it is certain that here too our attitude toward our brother only reflects our relationship to God. It is little wonder that we are no longer capable of the greatest service of listening that God has committed to us, that of hearing our brother's confession, if we refuse to give ear to our brother on lesser subjects. Secular education today is aware that often a person can be helped merely by having someone who will listen to him seriously, and upon this insight it has constructed its own soul therapy, which has attracted great numbers of people, including Christians.²³

Bonhoeffer's convicting summary underscores that ministry occurs in graciously and patiently listening before speaking. He reinforces the importance of listening to understand rather than merely half-listening waiting to respond. God hears, and

²² John Piper and Jack Delk, "The Glory of God: The Goal of Biblical Counseling," in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God's Changeless Truth*, ed. James MacDonald, Bob Kellemen, and Stephen Viars (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013), 32–33. Biblical counseling uniquely acknowledges the need for both the counselor and the counselee to grow in Christlikeness.

²³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper Collins, 1954), 98.

counselors wisely embody this practice. Biblical counselors minister through active, reflective listening and assist counselees in viewing themselves and their circumstances through the lens of Scripture. While Scripture does not explicitly command believers to listen to one another, listening is a necessary precursor to effectively obeying most of the Word-based one-another commands.

When counselors carefully listen to counselees, they earn the right to be heard. Using skillful questions, they can help an individual see how his attitudes and actions impact others and how well those attitudes and actions conform to Scripture. David Powlison explains, “Ministry is always helping people make connections they haven’t been making. It’s always reinterpreting what’s going on, identifying redemptive opportunities in what seem like the same old ruts.”²⁴ The willingness to identify and confront sin as sin requiring repentance separates biblical counseling from secular counseling. Galatians 6:1 shapes the counselor’s approach: “Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won’t be tempted.” Often the counselor will use an illustrative story as Nathan did when confronting David (2 Sam 12:1–15). At other times, the counselor will prod the counselee to confront individuals that have sinned against them, following the protocol in Matthew 18:15–20. The biblical counselor is willing to prompt or provoke the counselee to experience godly sorrow to produce repentance like Paul did with the Corinthians (1 Cor 5; 2 Cor 7). The confrontation of sin is usually involved in the commands to admonish, confess sin, and pursue peace with one another (as discussed above, the means of expressing mutual care in words). At nearly every point, biblical counseling is expressed through one or more one-another commands.

²⁴ David Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love: Counsel in Community* (Winston-Salem, NC: New Growth Press, 2005), 55–56.

People typically seek biblical counseling with the goal to reduce some aspect of suffering in their lives.²⁵ Counselors respond by helping them find comfort and hope in Christ, reassuring them that God is still good and up to something good amid their suffering, and anchoring their identity in Christ.²⁶ The counselor reminds the believer that God is present and a very real help in time of need (Deut 31:6; Ps 46; Isa 41:10). Counselors heed the instruction from Isaiah to comfort and speak tenderly (Isa 40:1–2) and remind counselees that “in bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was entirely appropriate that God—for whom and through whom all things exist—should make the source of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb 2:10). Rather than fixing hope either in changed circumstances or looking within to lessen suffering, biblical counseling uniquely links believers’ suffering to God’s redemptive purposes and mysterious providence.

While biblical counselors desire that counselees feel encouraged in their faith and more hopeful about their situation, that desire remains submitted to a desire to help them please God whether or not anything else changes. All counselors share a goal to give counselees hope, but for biblical counselors, the object of hope is not found within the counselee. Unlike many secular counseling approaches, biblical counselors connect hope to Christ, often joyfully expand their involvement with counselees outside of the counseling office, and typically provide instruction and strong directives (including assigning homework) to counselees caught in sinful patterns.²⁷ Confidence arises from reliance on God’s character, indwelling Spirit, and his enduring promises rather than the counselor’s expertise.

²⁵ Michael R. Emler, *Cross Talk: Where Life and Scripture Meet* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2009), 80.

²⁶ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 150–53.

²⁷ Randy Patten and Mark Dutton, “The Central Elements of the Biblical Counseling Process,” in MacDonald, Kellemen, and Viars, *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, 325–38.

The Intersection of One-Another Commands with Biblical Counseling

In contrast to the relatively few gender-restrictive passages, the Bible abounds with dozens of descriptive and prescriptive instructions for life in the body of Christ. Even though the one-another commands appear quite frequently throughout the New Testament, ecclesiology portions of systematic theology books fail to mirror the biblical emphasis.²⁸ Complementarian resources naturally focus on gender role passages; however, these resources fail to give due consideration to the implications of the one-another commands. The ministry of mutual care dominates the biblical counseling literature because of correlation between the two. While Jones does not incorporate biblical counseling or complementarianism in his thesis, he makes a strong argument for every-member ministry:

The New Testament places a very high value on the ministry role of members, an importance that is at least as high if not higher than the role of leaders. Many of the epistles make little or no reference to the role of pastors but virtually all of them refer to one-another ministries. Even books that refer to pastors, like Philippians (in 1:1), say little if anything about their role. In addition, passages like Ephesians 4:11–16 that discuss the role of pastors remind us that one of their chief duties is to equip members to carry out their one-another ministries, again highlighting the importance of mutual care.²⁹

All these commands display different facets of loving one another: be at peace, do not grumble, wash feet, encourage in the faith, outdo in showing honor, live in harmony, withhold judgment, edify, accept, instruct, greet, welcome, care, serve, avoid provoking, carry burdens, bear with, speak truth, show kindness and compassion, forgive, submit, pursue what is good for, confess sins, extend hospitality, and humble self before each other.³⁰ Jones shares the need for churches to prioritize the ministry of mutual care

²⁸ Robert David Jones, “A Biblical-Theological Study of the New Testament Church as God’s Designed Agent and Setting for the Ministry of Mutual Christian Care” (ThD thesis, University of South Africa, 2015), 10.

²⁹ Jones, “Ministry of Mutual Christian Care,” 232.

³⁰ This list is derived through a Logos Bible Software keyword search on the term ἀλλήλων, which yielded more than fifty instances of the term’s usage in conjunction with an imperative. It is presented in canonical order without repetition of the commands even though most of the commands are

because “the one-another ministries we will explore are given to all believers,” and he helpfully summarizes five categories of ways that believers minister to one another: by their words, example, deeds, prayers, and presence.³¹ I will include prayers in the ministry of words and combine example and deeds into a single category of actions.

These categories of believer-to-believer commands appear frequently in the New Testament without mention of withholding such care from members of the other gender. Rather, the emphasis is on the shared give-and-take nature of the obligations. Gene Getz observes, “Again and again, New Testament writers exhorted believers to engage in specific activities that would enable the body of Christ to function effectively and grow spiritually. Frequently they used a unique word to describe this mutual and reciprocal process—the Greek word *allēlōn*, most frequently translated ‘one another.’”³² H. Krämer concurs, “The understanding of ἀλλήλων in the NT is unproblematic; the translation ‘each other’ or ‘mutually’ is sufficient for every instance.”³³ Unlike the rare restrictive passages exegeted in chapter 2, the mutual ministry responsibility indicated by *allēlōn* dominates the biblical discourse. After dispatching with a few outliers, Krämer describes the general usage and import of the term:

Otherwise ἀλλήλων is used in connection with groups of persons who are in some way peers and with reference to relationships within a homogeneous group in order to express communication with or, sometimes, negative conduct toward, each other. (It never refers to the relationship of Jesus to his disciples or of Christ to his people; on the other hand, and significantly, it is used with reference to Paul and the Church in Rom 1:12.)

Of theological relevance here is the use of ἀλλήλων primarily in the description of the (obligatory) conduct of Christians in the community toward each other, with emphasis on mutuality and culminating in the love commandment.³⁴

repeated in Scripture.

³¹ Jones, “Ministry of Mutual Christian Care,” 11, 14–15.

³² Gene A. Getz, *Building Up One Another* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1977), 4.

³³ H. Krämer, “Ἀλλήλων,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, Ἀαρῶν τοῦ Ἐνώχ, ed. Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 63.

³⁴ Krämer, “Ἀλλήλων,” 1:63.

Both Getz and Krämer underscore the prevalence and mutuality of the commands usually translated with “one another” as the object of the command. Neither of these writers introduce hierarchy or gender limitations for either the subject or the object of the one-another commands. Krämer’s added reference to the implied peer relationship does not imply a gender restriction. The prevalence of these commands echoes Jesus’s admonition that his disciples embrace a servant mentality toward each other as opposed to lording authority over others (Matt 20:24–28). Scripture reinforces reciprocity and servanthood as well as authority and submission; therefore, it is incumbent upon believers to respect both principles.³⁵

The local church provides the ideal setting for believers to engage and obey the one-another commands as they foster spiritual maturity among the members. One means of helping members achieve the joint goal is teaching them to “invest in spiritually intentional relationships,” including counseling, discipling, and hospitality.³⁶ As members study together in small groups, work together in community outreach initiatives, chauffeur, and wait with other parents during children’s activities, they form relationships with the opportunity to produce spiritual fruit. Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop encourage this private, informal type of counsel that nurtures community in the local church: “All Christians are to be meaningfully and self-consciously committed to a particular body of believers, acting as providers rather than consumers. And this behavior doesn’t exist to indicate that they are *mature* Christians, but that they *are* Christians.”³⁷ They advocate for an every-member ministry paradigm in which “the bulk of ‘ministry’ in a congregation is the thousands of small conversations and actions springing from God’s Word that form

³⁵ Wayne Grudem, *EFTB*, 392–93.

³⁶ Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, *The Compelling Community: Where God’s Power Makes a Church Attractive* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 117–24.

³⁷ Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community*, 60.

the rich community we seek.”³⁸ These “small conversations” often become informal biblical counseling sessions. Members may benefit by earlier detection and correction of problems before they escalate into issues requiring more formal biblical counseling. As discussed below, the overlap of the one-another commands with biblical counseling means that nurturing the practice of the one-another commands in the local church fosters the development of biblical counseling.

Similarly, Jones emphasizes the centrality of the church for obeying the one-another commands. He counsels, “We must begin with a *fact*, not a command; with what *is*, not what should be: Christians *are* members of one another . . . a study of the church’s ministry functions proceeds best from an understanding of its essential identity—that ontology (who the church is) undergirds functionality (what the church should do).”³⁹ Biblical counseling done well, at its core, is the coalescence of one-another commands. Biblical counseling still combines one-another commands when practiced outside the local church, but other settings may temper the added responsibilities of member-to-member care. Although several defy neat categorization, I will address them in the three aforementioned categories: speaking appropriately, acting righteously, and being present.

Mutual Care Expressed in Words

The heart of biblical counseling exemplifies the ministry of mutual care as it echoes and applies Scripture and wisdom derived from Scripture. Powlison graciously suggests,

Biblical wisdom must always be sharpened and developed. It is fashioned by engaging new problems, meeting new threats, interacting with new contenders, and identifying new needs in order for us to grow into greater wisdom. It helps all of us when someone can put familiar truths into unfamiliar words and can point out unexpected implications.⁴⁰

³⁸ Dever and Dunlop, *The Compelling Community*, 211.

³⁹ Jones, “Ministry of Mutual Christian Care,” 17–18.

⁴⁰ David Powlison, foreword to *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams*, by Heath

The New Testament one-another commands give us guidelines for the types of speech to refrain from, such as gossiping and slandering, grumbling and complaining, harshly judging or criticizing, lying and deceiving, and provoking. Instead of these forbidden forms of communication, our conversations should evince a transformed heart that seeks to teach and instruct, admonish, encourage and comfort, confess sin and pray, and pursue peace with each other.⁴¹ With each of these categories of commanded godly speech, I will look at a sampling of related verses in context and examine how they apply to biblical counseling in the complementarian church.

Teach and Instruct (διδάσκω)

The ACBC Standards of Conduct emphasize the prohibition of women teaching men found in 1 Timothy 2:12. For counterbalance, I will begin with Colossians 3:16, which contains a mutual imperatival use of διδάσκω without the aforementioned prohibition. The short epistle begins with Paul’s usual salutation and prayer before erupting into Christological doxology, followed by a description of Paul’s ministry and warnings, before making the shift to life application. Douglas Moo contends that a major purpose for the letter was to combat false teaching and provide the necessary resources to maintain the faith.⁴² The third chapter of Colossians opens with “the root principle” of the Christian life and moves to guidelines for the Christian life—“sins of the old life to be abandoned” and “virtues of the new life to be cultivated.”⁴³ The virtues to cultivate include participatory worship and mutual instruction. Paul commands, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing

Lambert (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 17.

⁴¹ This categorization is heavily influenced by Jones, “Ministry of Mutual Christian Care.”

⁴² Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 40–47, Logos.

⁴³ Curtis Vaughan, *Colossians*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, *Ephesians through Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 170–71, Logos.

psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col 3:16).

Paul includes men and women in the command both to teach and to receive instruction. Robert Saucy, a member of the Board of References for the Danvers Statement, also links Colossians 3:16 to 1 Timothy 2:12. He argues,

Beyond the specific ministry of teaching other women, the NT also appears to teach the participation of women in a ministry related to the speaking of the Word that would involve men as well as women. Clearly prophecy was of such a nature. But aside from prophecy which does not have the same presence in the Church today that it did in the NT times, the gathered church practiced a ministry involving the Word in which any could contribute. When they came together, the apostle writes, “each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation” (1 Cor 14:26). There does not appear to be any indication that any of the ministries mentioned are restricted to men.

It is probable that something similar to this is being described in Paul’s instruction to the Colossian church (3:16 above). . . . While “teaching” is included in both passages it is likely that the functions of exhortation and admonition were also exercised.⁴⁴

Saucy agrees that women may minister the Word to men. Throughout the Christian life, even to some degree in the gathered assembly, Paul encouraged teaching and admonishing one another without limitation by gender. Concurrently, as discussed in the preceding chapter, the apostle also restricted the authoritative, public proclamation of doctrine to qualified men in 1 Timothy 2:12.

The command to teach one another applies to all believers, not just leaders. James Dunn observes, “The failure to mention or refer to any leaders here (prophets or teachers) may be significant.”⁴⁵ In a similar vein, Jones summarizes, “Nothing suggests these tasks should be limited to the Colossian leaders; indeed, there are no references to the leaders here or anywhere in the Colossian letter.”⁴⁶ Though paid staff members may

⁴⁴ Robert L. Saucy, “Women’s Prohibition to Teach Men: An Investigation into Its Meaning and Contemporary Application,” *JETS* 37, no. 1 (1994): 92.

⁴⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 236, Logos.

⁴⁶ Jones, “Ministry of Mutual Christian Care,” 195.

have more time to devote to teaching in the church, all members bear some teaching responsibility. Unlike the Pastoral Epistles, Paul writes “to the saints in Christ at Colossae, who are faithful brothers and sisters” (Col 1:2a). Unless otherwise indicated in the New Testament, I take the terms *saints* and *brothers* to include both men and women. Men and women share equally in the benefits of salvation, and other than the role of elder reserved to men, both genders likewise share the obligations of community life. Dunn agrees, “Indeed, it is a striking feature of the Pauline corpus how much Paul insisted that the members of the churches to which he wrote should recognize their mutual responsibility to instruct and admonish.”⁴⁷ These observations did not arise via first or second wave feminism. Herman Bavinck, referencing this verse among others, comments, “This Word of God was not given exclusively to the church as institute, to the office-bearers, but to all believers (John 5:39 and Acts 17:11), in order that with patience and comfort of the Scriptures they should have hope (Rom. 15:4) and in order that they should mutually teach and admonish one another.”⁴⁸ Paul deems every-member-ministry, including teaching and instructing one another, part of the fabric of the Christian life.

From initiation into the Christian life, discipleship includes teaching converts to observe everything Jesus commanded (Matt 28:18–20). As believers learn, they are to reinforce their knowledge by practicing what they have learned and through sharing their knowledge with others. Noticeably, obedience to the Lord’s last earthly command goes beyond evangelistic proclamation of the gospel to the unsaved. All disciples are to teach (διδάσκω) other disciples to keep all of Jesus’s commands, which certainly includes some doctrinal instruction. The Great Commission and Colossians 3:16 omit reference to limiting instruction based on gender or church office.

⁴⁷ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 237.

⁴⁸ Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Glenside, PA: Westminster Seminary Press, 2019), 522. The quoted sentence’s footnote cites Rom 12:7–8, Col 3:16, and Heb 10:24–25.

While the ability to teach is required of all elders (1 Tim 3:2), elders should not carry the full burden of teaching in the faith community. After all, the elders are to ensure that all of the saints are fully equipped to minister such that each member works together (Eph 4:11–16). N. T. Wright agrees, “The tasks Paul described as his own in [Col] 1:28 (proclaiming Christ, warning and teaching everyone) are not his alone: they are for the whole church, as you teach and admonish one another, in the mutual forgiveness and trust of verses 12–15.”⁴⁹ The whole church in this instance includes both men and women in the roles of teacher (and student), without a same-gendered restriction. Likewise, Eduard Lohse connects Colossians 3:16 with 1:28, “The functions of ‘teaching’ (διδάσκειν) and ‘admonishing’ (νουθετεῖν), which in 1:28 were mentioned as functions of the Apostle, are not bound to a distinct office, but were exercised by members of the community because of the gifts of the Spirit bestowed upon them (1 Cor 12:28, 14:26).”⁵⁰ The Spirit includes women in the distribution of teaching gifts essential for the flourishing of the church.⁵¹ Referencing Colossians 3:16, Getz notes, “Anyone who reads Paul’s letters objectively cannot miss this critical truth. All believers—both men and women—are necessary for every local church to function as God intended.”⁵² Surveying commentators’ explanations of Colossians 3:16 confirms my understanding that both men and women are enjoined in the command to teach and admonish fellow saints.

Biblical counseling supplies a specific context and setting for women to do their part to obey this command without violating the restriction in 1 Timothy 2:12. John Frame connects teaching to the goal of biblical counseling: “Teaching in the New

⁴⁹ N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 12 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 148, Logos.

⁵⁰ Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 150–51, Logos.

⁵¹ I will further explore the use of spiritual gifts in chapter 4.

⁵² Gene A. Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God’s Plan for Leading the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 112.

Testament (and I think also in the Old) is the use of God’s revelation to meet the spiritual needs of people, to promote godliness and spiritual health.”⁵³ In this sense, counselors teach counselees how to increase in Christlikeness through the renewing of their mind so that they can discern how to please the Lord (Rom 12:1–2).

What form of teaching is Paul advocating for in Colossians 3:16? Alexander MacLaren incorporates a modal limitation: “The teaching and admonishing are here regarded as being effected by means of song.”⁵⁴ However, Wright makes a more compelling argument:

This ministry of teaching and admonishing is to be part of a life of thankfulness that overflows into song: as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. Linking the two parts of the verse in this way suggests that the singing is not the sole or primary means of teaching, though Christian hymns and songs have often been a powerful means of implanting and clarifying Christian truth. Rather, the ministry of instruction should always be seen as one part of a total life characterized by grateful worship.⁵⁵

Yes, worship through song teaches—and helps to form us in ways that we do not entirely understand—but as Wright argues, mutual instruction also permeates the Christian community life experience.

Among the nearly two dozen contributed articles, this verse receives scant attention in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. Thomas Schreiner notes that too much is often made of this verse (like the Priscilla pericope): “The text refers not to public authoritative teaching by believers, but to the mutual instruction and encouragement that occur when the community is gathered.”⁵⁶ Douglas Moo argues

⁵³ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 81.

⁵⁴ Alexander MacLaren, *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Colossians and Philemon*, in *The Expositor’s Bible*, vol. 6, *Ephesians to Revelation* (Hartford, CT: S. S. Scranton, 1903), 270, Logos. Peter O’Brien expresses a similar sentiment. Peter O’Brien, *Colossians–Philemon*, WBC, vol. 44 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 208–9, Logos.

⁵⁵ Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 149, Logos.

⁵⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching,” in *RBMW*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, 218, 504n8. Elsewhere in the same volume, in a passing reference, Piper and Grudem presume the verse includes men and women. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, “An Overview of Central

against conflating the teaching referenced in Colossians 3:16 with that in 1 Timothy 2:12: “While the word [teach] can be used more broadly to describe the general ministry of edification that takes place in various ways (e.g. through teaching, singing, praying, reading Scripture [Colossians 3:16]), the activity usually designated by *teach* is plainly restricted to certain individuals who have the gift of teaching.”⁵⁷ Wherever one lands on (or off) the complementarian spectrum, we must guard against the tendency to let any single verse serve as the lens through which we interpret the rest of Scripture. In the gender role debate, 1 Timothy 2:12, Galatians 3:28, and Colossians 3:16 frequently receive undue emphasis or neglect corresponding to one’s theological inclination toward feminism, egalitarianism, complementarianism, or patriarchy.

The normal rhythm of Christian life includes the duty to teach others in a variety of settings. Jones seems to capture the breadth of the verse best: “The Colossians 3:16 one-another teaching ministry could occur in one-on-one, informal interactions or even, as the context might suggest, in a corporate worship setting.”⁵⁸ As one considers the implications for biblical counseling in the church, the church must give appropriate weight to both Paul’s limitation of women teaching men in 1 Timothy 2:12 and his exhortation for the believers to teach and admonish one another (Col 3:16). While my interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12 limits the roles and functions of teaching and governing the gathered assembly to men, the one-another passages encourage mutual ministry among all believers without a hint of gender restriction. Though Jay Adams staunchly argued for pastors to counsel, he also recognized that “all Christians are to teach informally. Clearly, he [an elder] would be required (as are all Christians—Colossians

Concerns: Questions and Answers,” in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 69.

⁵⁷ Douglas Moo, “What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority over Men? 1 Timothy 2:11–15,” in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 185. Moo references 1 Cor 12:28–30 and Eph 4:11 in support of his assertion.

⁵⁸ Jones, “Ministry of Mutual Christian Care,” 195.

3:16) to do informal teaching.”⁵⁹ Exegetically, the teaching element of biblical counseling aligns closely with the command to every believing church member to teach one another.⁶⁰ Women are not exempt as teachers, and men are not prohibited from receiving instruction from women.

Admonish (νουθετέω)

Before leaving Colossians 3:16, we must look at the counterpart imperative to teaching included in the verse: the word derived from *νουθετέω*, which is often translated as “admonishing.” Beyond merely conveying a warning, Martin Manser defines the actions as “a loving attempt to correct another’s attitude or behaviour. Christians are to admonish fellow believers.”⁶¹ Biblical counselors, focused on heart transformation, admonish counselees when necessary. Adams named his counteroffering to secular psychiatry and counseling “nouthetic” based on this Greek word (*νουθετέω*).⁶² Adams described nouthetic confrontation as “1. Discernment of wrong doing in another that God wants changed, 2. Verbal confrontation of another with the Word of God in order to change his attitudes or behavior. 3. Confrontation of another for his benefit.”⁶³ As with

⁵⁹ Jay E. Adams, *I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus*, Christian Counselor’s Commentary (Hackettstown, NJ: Timeless Texts, 1994), 22. However, contra my exegetical understanding and resulting conviction, Adams limited his call to vocational ministers in *The Christian Counselors Manual*:

There is no indication in the Scriptures that anyone but those who have been so recognized [ordained] should undertake the work of counseling or proclamation of the Word *officially* (i.e., as in an office, work, or life calling). This means that persons with a life-calling to do counseling ought to prepare for the work of the ministry and seek ordination, since God describes a life-calling to counseling as the life-calling of a minister. (Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual: The Practice of Nouthetic Counseling* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973], 12)

⁶⁰ Grudem, *EFBT*, 84–87. As noted in the first chapter, in a section titled “What Can Women Do in the Church?,” Grudem specifically includes counseling through a trio of lists designed to illustrate activities that are decreasing in their levels of authority, biblical teaching, and public visibility. In his lists, women’s counseling does not violate the restrictions of 1 Timothy 2:12. Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, 12.

⁶¹ Martin H. Manser, ed., *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009), s.v. “Admonition” (entry 5777), Logos.

⁶² David Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 3.

⁶³ Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, 14.

biblical counseling generally, the impetus for admonishing is the development of Christlikeness in both the counselor and the counselee.

Romans 15:14 also contains *νοθερέειν*; the CSB translates the term in this instance as “to instruct”: “My brothers, I myself am convinced about you that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.” The job description for admonishers highlights a depth of goodness and knowledge rather than leadership position or gender. Donald Grey Barnhouse describes the requisite goodness and knowledge with a host of familiar themes in counseling:

Having complimented the Roman believers on being filled with all goodness, Paul now commends them for possessing what might be called educated goodness, disciplined goodness. Far from being the dry-as-dust intellectual bones without flesh so characteristic of much theological writing, their knowledge was encased in goodness, like the helmet of salvation on the head of the believer who puts on the whole armor of God.

Let us examine the knowledge with which believers are to be filled. The New Testament appeals to faith in and through knowledge. It never appeals to ignorance. The Greek verb *ginōskō* occurs many times in the New Testament with a dozen shades of meaning. To know is *to feel* (Mark 5:29; Luke 8:46); *to observe* (Mark 8:17; 12:12); *to perceive, discern, recognize* (Luke 7:39, Gal. 3:7; John 4:1; 5:6); *to learn, discover* (Mark 5:43; Phil. 1:2; 4:5); *to make certain* (Mark 6:38; John 4:53); *to be aware of* (Matt. 24:40; Heb. 10:24); *to be acquainted with* (Matt. 25:24; Rom. 2:18); *to comprehend* (Luke 18:34; John 3:10); *to be expert in* (Matt. 16:3); *to be familiar with* (Rom. 7:7); and *to decide* (Luke 16:4).⁶⁴

Barnhouse’s wide-angle view of the knowledge needed to admonish coincides with Jones’s progressive movements in counseling: enter their world, understand their needs, and bring them God’s answers with compassion, humility, and gentleness.⁶⁵

Godly character, not gender, serves as the prerequisite to admonish others.

William Hendriksen connects the type of advice envisioned in Romans 15:14 with counseling: “Today the word ‘counseling’ is heard again and again. Ever so many books and articles have been written about it. Well, the apostle here reveals that also in this

⁶⁴ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 4:79–80 (italics original).

⁶⁵ Robert D. Jones, “The Counseling Process, Step One: Enter Their World,” in Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 157–68.

respect ‘there is nothing new under the sun.’ There was mutual counseling already in his day, and it was of a high character. By and large the members of the Roman church were ‘competent to admonish one another.’”⁶⁶ Paul contends that Christians have both the necessary resources and the responsibility to counsel each other. Colin Kruse observes, “Competence to ‘instruct’ carries not so much the idea of the ability to convey information as to provide counsel about proper behavior, and thus often the notion of admonition or warning.”⁶⁷ Nothing in the verse nor the context suggests that admonishing is limited to same-gendered instruction.

Encourage and Comfort (παρακαλέω)

Biblical counselors devote significant energy to encouraging and comforting counselees amid trials. Kellemen insightfully guides the transition from admonishment to encouragement: “Paul never intended Romans 15:14 to be the final or only word on the nature of biblical counseling. Nor did he use *noutheteō* as the only or even the primary concept to describe the personal ministry of the Word.”⁶⁸ After describing four other counseling terms used in 1 Thessalonians 5:14, he summarizes, “Among the many New Testament words for spiritual care, *parakaleō* predominates. Whereas *noutheteō* occurs eleven times in the New Testament, *parakaleō* (comfort, encourage, console) appears 110 times.”⁶⁹ While Kellemen’s three-word parenthetical summarizes the common sense of the verb, the range of meaning is broader. The *Lexham Research Lexicon* provides the following list of verb usages for παρακαλέω: “to entreat,” “to exhort,” “to comfort or to

⁶⁶ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, New Testament Commentary 13 (1981; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 484–85, Logos.

⁶⁷ Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 536, Logos.

⁶⁸ Bob Kellemen, *Equipping Biblical Counselors: A Guide to Discipling Believers for One-Another Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2022), 190, Kindle.

⁶⁹ Kellemen, *Equipping Biblical Counselors*, 190.

be comforted,” and “to summon someone to be present.”⁷⁰ Like Kellemen, I will begin with 1 Thessalonians 5:11 to understand the injunction to comfort and encourage one another.

Paul opens his epistle to the Thessalonians with his customary greetings and prayers, reminds them of his conduct among them, updates them on his subsequent travel and activity, and then models for them the imperatives before issuing the directives. For example, he shares, “And we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ to strengthen and encourage you concerning your faith” (1 Thess 3:2), and “Additionally then, brothers and sisters, we ask and encourage you in the Lord Jesus, that as you have received instruction from us on how you should live and please God—as you are doing—do this even more” (1 Thess 4:1). Paul bolsters the church with his observations set to the meter of “love one another” and calls them to give and receive comfort anchored in Christ’s return. God commands and commends believers to encourage each other: “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are already doing” (1 Thess 5:11), followed closely by “And we exhort you, brothers and sisters: warn those who are idle, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, be patient with everyone” (1 Thess 5:14).⁷¹

These staccato instructions at the end of the epistle provide us with concrete ways to faithfully respond as we wait for the Lord’s return. Charles Wanamaker remarks, “Paul’s particular concern in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 lies with the mutual responsibility of members of the community to aid one another in inculcating and carrying out the ethical demands of the faith and in communicating the theological concepts supporting those demands.”⁷² Jones agrees and references Hebrews 3:12–14 and 10:24–25, elaborating,

⁷⁰ Rick Brannan, *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), s.v. “Παρακαλέω.”

⁷¹ See also Rom 1:12 and 1 Thess 4:18.

⁷² Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek*

In two admonitory contexts, the unknown writer of the epistle to the Hebrews uses the verb *parakaleō* to charge the readers to mutually minister to one another. English versions vary between translating it as “encourage” or “exhort.” The semantic range of *parakaleō* allows for either emphasis. Most Greek grammarians argue that the verb’s essence lies in coming alongside of someone to help someone, with the specific shade of help defined by the context.⁷³

After citing Hebrews 3:12–14, he continues, “The stakes here are high—the danger of members’ hearts becoming self-deceived and hardened by sin, and the members themselves apostatizing. What is the antidote?”⁷⁴ From these texts and nuances of *παρακαλέω*, he concludes that the ministry of mutual care applies to all members of the covenant community and is vital for the flourishing of the church.⁷⁵

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul stresses the comfort aspect of *παρακαλέω*:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. He comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation. If we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings that we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that as you share in the sufferings, so you will also share in the comfort. (2 Cor 2: 3–7)

Paul David Tripp instructs fellow counselors, “The comfort we have received from the Lord has ministry in view. God has chosen me not only to be the recipient of his grace but to convey his grace to others. I must not hoard the comfort I have received like some spiritual heirloom. I have been called to share what I have received.”⁷⁶ Comforting one another extends beyond biblical counseling in situations where the counselee is grieving. This type of comfort includes urging, exhorting, entreating, and even commanding others to obey God. We see it again (1) in Philippians 4:2, where Paul entreats Euodia and

Text, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 190, Logos.

⁷³ Jones, “Ministry of Mutual Christian Care,” 203.

⁷⁴ Jones, “Ministry of Mutual Christian Care,” 203.

⁷⁵ Jones, “Ministry of Mutual Christian Care,” 203.

⁷⁶ Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 152.

Syntyche to agree in the Lord; (2) in 2 Timothy 4:2, where Paul advises Timothy to encourage with great patience; and (3) in 1 Corinthians 14:31, where all members of the body are to prophesy in an orderly manner for the encouragement of all. Though women must remain silent during the weighing of prophecies (1 Cor 14:34–35), they may, and indeed must, encourage brothers and sisters in the faith.⁷⁷

Biblical counselors enter the life of their counselees, nourishing and cherishing the evidence of grace in their lives, confident that God will complete what he began. Counselors hike the spiritual mountains and slough through the valleys side-by-side with counselees, sowing the Word, gently weeding, and encouraging rightly-ordered worship.⁷⁸ Biblical counseling sessions provide the ideal setting to entreat one another with strong encouragement and gentle admonishment as occasion may require and therefore should not be unduly restricted based on gender.⁷⁹

Edify (οἰκοδομέω)

The counseling connection in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 extends beyond *παρακαλεῖτε* to include *οἰκοδομεῖτε*—“build each other up.” Brannan again provides a fuller range of meaning: “to make something by combining materials and parts” or “to make nearer to fullness or completion (as of moral strength or someone’s conscience); conceived of as constructing something further.”⁸⁰ The second sense given above relates more directly to the intersection of biblical counseling and the one-another command to

⁷⁷ D. A. Carson, “‘Silent in the Churches’: On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36,” in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 151–53. While interpretations of these verses vary, complementarians generally agree that to whatever extent it applies, it does so in the gathered assembly rather than a counseling setting.

⁷⁸ Powlison, *Speaking the Truth in Love*, 75–76.

⁷⁹ Capitol Hill Baptist Church, “Church Covenant,” accessed July 26, 2023, <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/about-us/what-we-believe/church-covenant/>. Since our church also recites this covenant at every members’ meeting and when we celebrate the Lord’s Table, it has shaped and formed my thought patterns such that it is hard for me to rephrase these truths.

⁸⁰ Brannan, *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, s.v. “οἰκοδομεῖτε.”

edify. Gene Green explains, “Each individual in the community is responsible for the development of others and of the whole through this mutual building process. This term therefore becomes fundamental to Paul’s understanding of the life of the church.”⁸¹ How should we understand this fundamental term?

Paul uses the same sense of the term three times in in his letter to the church at Corinth. Answering a prior question, he responds, “Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that ‘we all have knowledge.’ Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (1 Cor 8:1). While the elders incur a special obligation to equip the saints and bring them nearer to completion, all the saints—men and women—share in the command to build up one another. Later Paul explains, “‘Everything is permissible,’ but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible,’ but not everything builds up” (1 Cor 10:23). This sounds quite like the dilemma in counseling—“All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). Counselors can employ a wealth of biblical wisdom, but wisdom and experience guide their selection of passages. Biblical counselors emphasize the sufficiency of Scripture, but not every passage will edify this saint, in these circumstances, delivered by this counselor, at this time. Less directly connected to counseling, Paul also indicates prophecy builds up saints more than speaking in another tongue (1 Cor 14:1–5).

The command to edify extends beyond the churches in Corinth and Thessalonica. In Romans, Paul instructs, “So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another” (Rom 14:19). In this sense, Paul commands Christians to consider the impact of their words and actions on others. C. K. Barrett explains, “What all should seek is the peace of the community and its edification. ‘Edification’ is for Paul not individualistic but corporate. The Church is God’s building (cf. 1 Cor. 3:9), and

⁸¹ Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 245.

‘building up’ means the building up of the Church.”⁸² Edification is an every-member community project that requires the Spirit’s empowerment to produce the desired fruit of peace, unity, and Christlikeness. Getz considers the contrast between the fruit of the Spirit and the works of the flesh and observes: “A church that is manifesting ‘the fruit of the Spirit’ is practicing the ‘one another’ injunctions that build up the body of Christ and lead to one-mindedness and unity.”⁸³ On a practical basis, Gary DeLashmutt links encouraging and edifying to several prescriptions that resemble biblical counseling practices: “affirming potential,” “recognizing spiritual accomplishments,” “communicating God’s faithfulness,” and “challenging each other when necessary.”⁸⁴ Once again, Scripture does not limit the exercise of the command to build up one another to the same gender or to male leadership.

Confess Sin and Pray (Ἐξομολογέω and εὐχόμεαι)

Ἐξομολογέω means “to admit to a punishable deed or sin,” “to consent or assent to a condition or agree to do something,” or “to profess openly in honor of another, whether in praise, thankfulness, or acknowledgement.”⁸⁵ The combined exhortation to confess sin and pray for one another is found only in James 5:16: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” While the context of this verse emphasizes the need for physical healing and the elders’ responsibilities, the command also applies to all members. Douglas Moo concurs, “And while it is appropriate that those

⁸² C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, rev. ed., BNTC (London: Continuum, 1991), 244, Logos.

⁸³ Gene A. Getz, *Building Up One Another*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2002), 12.

⁸⁴ Gary DeLashmutt, *Loving God’s Way: A Fresh Look at the One Another Passages*, 2nd ed. (n.p.: New Paradigm, 2015), chap. 4, “Encourage One Another,” para. 1, Kindle.

⁸⁵ Brannan, *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, s.v. “Ἐξομολογέω.”

charged with the spiritual oversight of the community should be called to intercede for those seriously ill, James makes clear that *all* believers have the privilege and responsibility to pray for healing.”⁸⁶ Powlison connects this passage to counseling: “First, notice a few things about James 5:13–20. This passage is *the* warrant for praying for the sick. It is significant that James envisions prayer not in a congregational setting but in what we might think of as a counseling setting!”⁸⁷ Wise questions from a discerning counselor frequently initiate recognition of sin that leads to confession that results in forgiveness.

Biblical counselors’ focus on forming Christlikeness in counselees motivates them to help strugglers view their suffering biblically and to recognize, confess, and repent of sin. Ed Welch associates suffering and sin: “Suffering *feels* like our biggest problem and avoiding it like our greatest need—but we know that there is something more. Sin is actually our biggest problem, and rescue from it is our greatest need.”⁸⁸ While commiserating with our natural tendency to avoid discussion of sin, he warns, “In other words, when we put sin off-limits, we cannot defend ourselves as being polite people who merely avoid meddling. Rather, we are Pharisees who, during a leisurely walk, avoid eye contact with the dying person we almost trip over. We are neglecting matters of life and death.”⁸⁹ We find the remedy to our greatest problem—sin—in confession, repentance, and forgiveness, and the Lord instructs his church to help each other in this area, without limiting such help by gender.

The mutual admonishment and encouragement discussed above logically flow

⁸⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, PNTC (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2000), 247 (italics original).

⁸⁷ Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love*, 120 (italics original).

⁸⁸ Edward T. Welch, *Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 43 (italics original).

⁸⁹ Welch, *Side by Side*, 134.

into confessing sin and praying together. Grant Osborne comments, “The thrust is that we need to be involved in one another’s spiritual lives, and that includes acknowledgment of sins.”⁹⁰ Likewise, confessing sin and praying together incorporate the commands to care for each other, bear one another’s sin burden, and restore a sinning brother in meaningful ways. Much of the biblical counseling process involves identifying root and fruit sin, teaching counselees how to confess their sin to God and others, making necessary changes to reduce the likelihood of repeating sin, and praying with them as they seek the Lord’s healing and help in multiple dimensions of life.⁹¹ These one-another commands include no gender restrictions.

Accept (προσλαμβάνω)

Given the current cultural climate, Christians may instinctively struggle or immediately seek clarity when encountering a demand for acceptance. Romans 15:7 offers a challenging directive: “Therefore accept one another, just as Christ also accepted you, to the glory of God.” Biblical acceptance differs significantly from Rogerian unconditional positive regard. Terri Watson, Stanton Jones, and Richard Butman describe the secular version: “Person-centered therapy never involves advice giving, shaming, teaching, giving interpretation, manipulation or other ingenuine interactions. These, it is argued, are based on a fundamental disrespect of others, they foster dependency and thwart the development of any meaningful sense of autonomy.”⁹² How then, does this one-another command relate to biblical counseling? The lexical entry for *προσλαμβάνω*

⁹⁰ Grant R. Osborne, *James, 1–2 Peter, Jude*, in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, vol. 18, *James, 1–2 Peter, Jude, Revelation*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2011), 114, Logos.

⁹¹ Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 105–10.

⁹² Terri Watson, Stanton L. Jones, and Richard E. Butman, “Person-Centered Therapy,” in *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal*, by Stanton L. Jones and Richard E. Butman, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 269.

begins with “receive; accept; take aside” and then provides the more robust descriptions: (1) “to take or lead someone apart from general association for a particular purpose”; (2) “to have, give, or receive a share of”; and (3) “to welcome someone into one’s presence or home.”⁹³ Comparing description 1 with the usage of *προσλαμβάνω* in Acts 18:26 brings the counseling connection into focus. When Priscilla and Aquila recognized that Apollos, though “competent in the use of the Scripture,” still lacked necessary comprehension, Priscilla and Aquila “took him aside” from the congregation and provided additional instruction so that his future bold, fervent speaking would be more accurate (Acts 18:24, 26).⁹⁴ Contra person-centered therapy, they demonstrated their biblical acceptance through giving advice and teaching Apollos. Steve Viars illustrates biblical counseling as an eddy along the discipleship river whereby members caught in sin, suffering, or other difficult situations receive more intensive remedial or corrective care until they can once again thrive in the normal flow of church discipleship without the added support of counseling.⁹⁵ Biblical counselors obey the command to accept one another through taking counselees aside and providing additional support to help them respond to their circumstances in Christ-honoring ways.

For brief context, Romans 15:7–13 restates the major themes of the whole letter, as well as recapping the immediately preceding section’s exhortations to the “strong” and the “weak”: to put away dissension and recriminations and experience the blessings of their shared faith.⁹⁶ I will explore the Christian liberty aspect of the aforementioned passage in the next chapter; here, my concern remains the overlap of the ministry of mutual care commanded of every believer with the practice of biblical

⁹³ Brannan, *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, s.v. “προσλαμβάνω.”

⁹⁴ I address Priscilla’s role in instructing Apollos in chapter 5.

⁹⁵ Steve Viars, “The Discipleship River,” *JBC* 20, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 58–60.

⁹⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 753.

counseling. For example, the charge of accepting and receiving brothers and sisters in Christ applies to all, without same-gender restrictions. Biblical counseling provides one platform to display God's glory by obeying this command. Moo emphasizes the similarity of Romans 15:7 with 14:1 and notes, "But there is an important difference: in 14:1, he urged the Roman community to 'receive the person who is weak in faith.' Here, however, he exhorts every believer to receive every other believer."⁹⁷ Usually the required acceptance will entail the welcoming into their presence, possibly into their home, as noted in description 3 above. Kruse notes the motive and suggests a likely setting: "They need to accept one another in order to bring praise to God. The context is probably still that of the communal meal. In that setting, if the believers were not accepting one another, they could hardly bring praise to God. It is implied that for Paul glorifying God and bringing praise to him is not just an individual but also a communal thing."⁹⁸ Glorifying God provides purpose, and as Kruse implies, fellow believers provide part of the means for obeying the command. Both the context and the setting of Paul's instruction to accept one another indicate an enduring command for men and women to extend a welcoming presence in general to other believer, and an implicit invitation to take a fellow saint aside for a particular purpose akin to biblical counseling.

Biblical acceptance does not translate to agreeing with everyone simply because they identify as a Christian, or pretending that disagreements do not exist, or that differences are necessarily unimportant. Nor does obeying the command to accept one another negate other commands to rebuke or bear with one another as appropriate. DeLashmutt posits that since the Holy Spirit indwells and spiritually unites believers, and they affirm the Bible as authoritative, Christians must accept one another more deeply

⁹⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 873.

⁹⁸ Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 531–32.

and actively than they accept the unregenerate.⁹⁹ The mutual obligation does not make obedience easy or simple. He warns,

As we consider how to show acceptance to those who claim to believe in Christ, things get more complicated; if we show acceptance on matters that the Bible forbids us to accept, we become guilty of *spiritual compromise*. If we fail to show acceptance to those who, while differing from us on other matters, agree on essential issues, we become guilty of *spiritual bigotry*.¹⁰⁰

DeLashmutt identifies the inherent tension involved in fully accepting individuals with different demographics, political persuasions, cultural assessments, or theological convictions. Counselors need to avoid both spiritual compromise and spiritual bigotry as they model biblical acceptance during sessions.

Extending acceptance to fellow believers begins with how we view one another because Christ first accepted us.¹⁰¹ Jones argues, “Believers should accept one another despite their personal differences”; he then adds force by stating, “Believers should show their acceptance for one another by ministering to one another. Acceptance implies not only cessation of judgment but also engagement in service.”¹⁰² Jones fleshes out the relationship between accepting and judging: “The flipside of accepting one another is not to judge one another. The New Testament urges believers to avoid the sharp negative judgments arising from a spirit of self-righteousness, hypocrisy, incomplete understanding, and lack of love that once marked them.”¹⁰³ As biblical counselors serve counselees, they receive one another for God’s glory and their mutual benefit. Counselors should be reluctant to withhold this form of accepting one another based on gender since Scripture omits any gender-based exceptions.

⁹⁹ DeLashmutt, *Loving God’s Way*, chap. 8, “What Kind of Acceptance?,” para. 2–6, Kindle.

¹⁰⁰ DeLashmutt, *Loving God’s Way*, chap. 8, “Two Equal but Opposite Dangers,” para. 1, Kindle.

¹⁰¹ Jones, “Ministry of Mutual Christian Care,” 155–56.

¹⁰² Jones, “Ministry of Mutual Christian Care,” 155–56.

¹⁰³ Jones, “Ministry of Mutual Christian Care,” 23.

Pursue Peace (διώκω εἰρήνης)

Relational dynamics prompt many individuals and couples to seek biblical counseling within the church, and for a good reason. Our peacemaking God demands that believers pursue peace as our Christian duty in every relationship, leaving the results to God in response to the mercy we first received from God.¹⁰⁴ Mark's Gospel records Jesus saying, "Salt is good, but if the salt should lose its flavor, how can you season it? Have salt among yourselves and be at peace with one another" (Mark 9:50). What is the connection between salt and peace? David Garland and Morna Hooker posit that the practice of sharing salt at meals indicated peaceful relationships.¹⁰⁵ Alan Cole suggests, "Christians are to be the moral preservative of the world; they are to 'salt' life, to purify it, and to stop it becoming utterly corrupt, but how can they do this, if they themselves have lost all Christian distinctiveness?"¹⁰⁶ Jesus's exhortation to pursue peace sharply contrasts the disciples' preceding argument about their status (Mark 9:33–37).¹⁰⁷ Rather than pursuing a worldly agenda or elevating personal status, Christians are to prioritize pursuing and preserving peaceful relationships. Jones observes, "But having God-pleasing relationships is not a dispensable luxury. It is more than icing on a good Christian's cake. It lies at the heart of Christian discipleship."¹⁰⁸ Though the example in Mark 9:50 specifically addresses the disciples, nothing in the context suggests that the Lord expects only the men to pursue and be at peace, or for only men to lead such reconciliation efforts.

Paul frequently couples multiple imperatives in the one-another commands. In

¹⁰⁴ Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 23.

¹⁰⁵ Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, BNTC (London: Continuum, 1991), 233, Logos; David E. Garland, *Mark*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 370–71, Logos.

¹⁰⁶ R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 2 (1989; repr., Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 230, Logos.

¹⁰⁷ Garland, *Mark*, 371.

¹⁰⁸ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 19.

Colossians, Paul combines “bearing with one and forgiving one another” (Col 3:13) and “teaching and admonishing one another” (Col 3:16). In Romans, he combines loving and showing honor (Rom 12:10) before pairing pursuing peace with edification (Rom 14:19). Romans 15:5 combines harmony with peace and incorporates perseverance: “Now may the God who gives endurance and encouragement grant you to live in harmony.”¹⁰⁹ A few chapters earlier, Paul plainly writes, “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation” (Rom 12:16), followed closely by the injunction, “If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Rom 12:18). Paul logically couples these commands because of their interdependent nature. Peace does not usually arise in a vacuum—one path of pursuing peace involves each member of the community committing to help build each other in the faith. Likewise, the pathway to peace includes humility, a willingness to learn, and a large measure of endurance.

Living in a fallen world can tempt us to respond to fractured relationships by seeking revenge or (just as wrongly) doing nothing. Tripp explains, “It is wrong to be passive in the face of mistreatment, waiting around for God to do something. God calls us to be obediently active, looking for ways to do good, make peace, and meet needs.”¹¹⁰ Biblical counselors help counselees avoid gossip and bitterness as well as the “slippery slopes” of “peace-faking” and “peace-breaking” responses that wreak havoc in our homes and churches.¹¹¹ As with all of the other one-another commands we explored, this is an every-member ministry not limited to the pastors, elders, and deacons, even in complementarian churches.

¹⁰⁹ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 19.

¹¹⁰ Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 256.

¹¹¹ Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 22.

Mutual Care Expressed in Actions

Even the one-another commands less directly relevant to biblical counseling are given without gender restriction. The ministry of mutual care expressed in actions encompasses both static and dynamic aspects. It is both who we are and what we do because of what Christ has done and continues to do in us.¹¹² Many of the one-another commands are actions that take the form of character qualities such as being kind, compassionate, and accepting; not indulging in judgmentalism or complaining; readily forgiving; and developing a submissive spirit.¹¹³ In this section, I will delve into the less verbal components of the one-another commands. Admittedly, such categorization invokes some relatively arbitrary decisions. When practiced in a biblically faithful, “one-anothering” way, the practices of greeting, sharing table fellowship, sharing material provisions, extending hospitality, and serving generally require more than words, though the accompanying words always matter.

Greeting (ἀσπάζομαι)

The apostle Paul frequently exhorts the churches to greet one another with a holy kiss and never suggests that these greetings are limited to woman to woman or man to man.¹¹⁴ For example, after a series of greetings directed to particular people, Romans 16:3–16 ends with the broader instruction, “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (Rom 16:16a). Peter issues a similar command: “Greet one another with a kiss of love” (1 Pet 5:16a). How does this comport with the more common handshake or side hug today? Bronwyn Lea adduces, “Scripture invites us to express familial affection in Christ in holy and wholly appropriate ways. Somehow we need to reclaim the ground between the

¹¹² Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 134.

¹¹³ For a more thorough treatment of the appropriate attitudes of mutual Christian care, see Jones, “Ministry of Mutual Christian Care,” 144–53.

¹¹⁴ For example, see Paul’s direct commands in Rom 16:16, 1 Cor 16:20, 2 Cor 13:12, as well as the sharing of greetings from various individuals and churches within the salutation and closing sections of his letters.

awkward side hug and greeting each other with a holy kiss, whatever that might mean in our context.”¹¹⁵ Al Wright describes the ancient practice: “The holy kiss was widely practiced among the early Christians as a manner of greeting, a sign of acceptance, and an impartation of blessing. This custom could well have been used to express the unity of the Christian fellowship.”¹¹⁶ The emphasis seems to lie in the depth, warmth, and spiritual connection of an otherwise cultural norm—the union with Christ purposively united brothers and sisters with demonstratively affectionate love.¹¹⁷ Whether with a kiss, handshake, regular or side hug, or even a fist bump, believers’ greetings must communicate the relational character traits noted above.

Biblical counseling sessions intensify the relational aspect of acceptance in the greeting as counselors strive to deliberately enter the world of counselees and walk alongside them in their struggles. In the counseling room, we see, hear, and accept counselees as they are, though always with a view of not remaining as they are. Tripp poignantly describes, “We can offer love that is personal and specific, not aimless and platitudinous. We can follow the model of the Wonderful Counselor, the Good Shepherd who goes right to where his lost sheep is, wraps him in his arms, and carries him to a place of safety.”¹¹⁸ Greeting in this comprehensive “one-anothering” manner initiates the biblical counseling session and provides an example for the congregation to emulate when they encounter one another. Scripture encourages familial, brother-sister type of physical touch without hyper-vigilance regarding bodily contact that presumes a sexual

¹¹⁵ Bronwyn Lea, *Beyond Awkward Side Hugs: Living as Christian Brothers and Sisters in a Sex-Crazed World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2020), 181, Kindle.

¹¹⁶ G. Al Wright Jr., “Kiss,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper and Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible, 2003), 997, Logos.

¹¹⁷ Jones, “Ministry of Mutual Christian Care,” 163–67.

¹¹⁸ Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 129.

risk or undercurrent. Once again, biblical counseling fulfills this one-another imperative given to all believers without gender restriction.

Eating and Sharing

The early church set the example: “Now the entire group of those who believed were of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common” (Acts 4:32). The writer to the Hebrews prescribes, “Don’t neglect to do what is good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices” (Heb 13:26). Joseph Hellerman observes, “Perhaps most basic to Christian brotherhood is the sharing of material resources.”¹¹⁹ Table fellowship and the sharing of material possessions rarely mark a formal biblical counseling session. However, church members who regularly come to the Lord’s table together and share other meals often engage in informal counseling and disclose issues that later prompt more formal counseling sessions.¹²⁰ Likewise, biblical counseling sessions often reveal opportunities for the church to extend benevolence to those in need of financial or other material help. Unlike secular counselors, the biblical counselor embraces the enjoyment of multiple roles and relationships with counselees in the ordinary community life of the church.¹²¹ Once again, Scripture includes no gender-based limitations with these commands.

Extending Hospitality and Serving One Another

Peter joins these two commands as the outflow of loving one another: “Above all, maintain constant love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Be

¹¹⁹ Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus’ Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville: B&H Books, 2009), 145, Kindle.

¹²⁰ For his counseling in community approach that provides a more thorough exploration of the integration of counseling within the body life of the local church, see Garrett Higbee, “Biblical Counseling and Soul Care in the Church,” in *Biblical Counseling and the Church: God’s Care through God’s People*, ed. Bob Kellemen and Kevin Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

¹²¹ Jones, “What Is Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling?,” 10–11.

hospitable to one another without complaining. Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God” (1 Pet 4:8–10). Rosaria Butterfield envisions the biblical fulfillment of this command: “Radically ordinary hospitality is this: using your Christian home in a daily way that seeks to make strangers neighbors, and neighbors family of God. It brings glory to God, serves others, and lives out the gospel in word and deed.”¹²² Extending hospitality and serving one another, as well as serving with one another within the Christian fellowship, allow both the counselor and the counselee to more fully apprehend the myriad ways they relate to other people, challenges, and circumstances. The counselor gains the opportunity to flesh out the teaching components by acting wisely and modeling appropriate responses. These types of exposure provide invaluable insight into how the counselee’s interpretation of events or perspective may be distorted. One of the most gloriously beautiful contrasts between biblical counseling and secular counseling perspectives shines most brilliantly in the local church: expressing mutual care in actions intended to do each other spiritual good for the glory of God. Though Scripture repeatedly warns believers to exercise wisdom and avoid temptation, it does not indicate that service and hospitality should automatically be withheld from members of the opposite sex.

Mutual Care Expressed by Presence

While biblical counseling activities focus on words and actions, the mutual care shown by physical or relational presence intensifies the impact of words and actions. Nancy Guthrie’s *What Grieving People Wish You Knew* resounds with encouragement to engage in the ministry of presence. She summarizes, “If I had to boil down the message of this entire book to just two words, these two would probably cover it: *show up*.”¹²³

¹²² Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), chap. 2, “What Is Radically Ordinary Hospitality?,” para. 1, Kindle.

¹²³ Nancy Guthrie, *What Grieving People Wish You Knew about What Really Helps (and What*

Such admonitions apply not only amid grief but throughout life within the Christian community. Jonathan Leeman captures the impact in a group setting: “What makes gathering so powerful? The fact that you are physically *there*. You see. You hear. You feel. Unlike watching something on a screen, in which you’re bodily removed from the thing you’re watching, a gathering literally surrounds you.”¹²⁴ While counselors rarely should literally surround a counselee, they do convey by their physical presence a greater ability to see, hear, feel, and know the person in the room with them. Although we are thankful for the ability to counsel remotely when circumstances require it, those who have done both in-person and virtual counseling find the in-person format more effective in many ways.

The writer to the Hebrews exhorts, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb 10:24–25). Love, care, and encouragement happen more frequently when believers spend time together both corporately and individually. Paul Ellingworth comments, “The mutual care which the author has commended to his readers in v. 24 cannot be sustained unless members of the Christian community meet to encourage and exhort one another. Failure to do so is associated with apostasy (vv. 26–28), though the author does not claim a direct causal link between the two.”¹²⁵ The context of these verses emphasizes the public assembly gathered for worship. However, as Jones winsomely articulates,

As important as wise words, consistent modeling, kind actions, and persistent prayers are, the New Testament also commends the simple, sympathetic presence of other brothers and sisters in Christ as a way to help others (Rom 12:15). Paul

Really Hurts) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 69.

¹²⁴ Jonathan Leeman, “Do We Really Need to Gather?,” in *Rediscover Church: Why the Body of Christ Is Essential*, by Collin Hansen and Jonathan Leeman (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 46.

¹²⁵ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 527–28, Logos.

himself expresses his desire for his dear friends Titus and Timothy to be with him (2 Cor 2:13; 7:6; 2 Tim 4:9).¹²⁶

Caring for one another includes showing up and being present.

While social media may enhance the sense of connectedness with Christian brothers and sisters around the world, social media posts lack relational intimacy and cannot compare to the richness of verbal expression accompanied by physical presence. Just as Jesus, Emmanuel, dwells among his people, so too, believers are to be with each other. Ed Welch elaborates, “As the King goes, so go his people. He moves toward people; we move toward people. He moves toward people who seek him and people who do not; we move toward those who want help and those who seem distant and marginalized.”¹²⁷ Jesus cares for the “least of these,” modeling for us what it means to love one’s neighbor. Jesus listened to people and responded to the deepest needs of their hearts. How much more do limited, finite humans need to move in close, to observe posture and facial expression to begin to understand the brother or sister seeking assistance, avoiding conflict, or tempted to isolation?

Christ saves individuals into a community of believers for his glory and their good. Rob Green connects these commands with counseling: “Every Christian has the responsibility and capability to live out the one-another passages of Scripture. One-another opportunities occur in the normal course of life and in formal counseling settings.”¹²⁸ Serving, loving, and many other forms of “one-anothering” regularly require sacrifice to slow down and spend time in each other’s presence, even bearing with one another when one might not particularly enjoy the other’s company. Physical presence is often necessary, but not sufficient. Most people have experienced the disappointing contradiction of a loved one’s physical proximity and simultaneous relational distance.

¹²⁶ Jones, “Ministry of Mutual Christian Care,” 15.

¹²⁷ Welch, *Side by Side*, 174.

¹²⁸ Rob Green, “The Role of the Counselor,” in Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 138.

More positively however, the converse situation also occurs when a friend at significant physical distance manages to be relationally present in the midst of celebrations, crisis, or intense suffering. Relational and physical nearness enriches fellowship and life in the community. Biblical counseling sessions epitomize the ministry of presence: utter dependence on the Holy Spirit, gentleness, safety, attentive listening, space for reflection, and the sense of identity forged by God-ordained interdependence.

God has rescued his elect people not as independent, isolated individuals, but rather as interdependent members in the body of Christ. There is both a corporate and an individual dimension to the Christian life. While orthodox ecclesiology comprehensively addresses the church's corporate nature and encompasses more than the ministry of mutual care, the ministry of mutual care is crucial to a biblical understanding of the church. The corporate and individual aspects of the Christian walk intersect in Scripture's one-another exhortations. Johnson agrees that "every believer is called by God to minister to one another. We are each called to be the body of Christ. We are called to be his hands and feet for the sake of each other. We are called to minister his Word as his counsel for encouragement, comfort, correction, discipline, and so much more."¹²⁹ As members of the body teach, admonish, encourage, comfort, edify, confess sin to, pray with and for, accept, and pursue peace with one another, they are counseling biblically.

Conclusion

The intersection of one-another commands, biblical counseling, and complementarianism requires careful consideration of the full canon. As discussed throughout this chapter, biblical counseling is the coalescence of the ministry of mutual care expressed in words, actions, and presence. Scripture consistently presents these dozens of exhortations without gender restriction. Grounding their argument in 1

¹²⁹ Johnson, *The Church as a Culture of Care*, 128.

Corinthians 11:2–16 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15, complementarians recognize that “some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men.”¹³⁰ Biblical counseling should be excluded from the governing and teaching roles restricted to men because those cited foundational passages are given in the context of the gathered assembly; by contrast, biblical counseling consists of the private ministry of the Word, as one means of fulfilling gender-inclusive one-another commands.

With a wide-view lens, Jones summarizes two foundational truths about the one-another commands:

First, each of them is addressed to the church as a whole, to be done by every member (although some will be more gifted than others in various functions). They do not appear in the epistles written to individuals (e.g., the Pastoral Epistles or Philemon). They are not directed to the leaders and they are not given to the church for the leaders to perform. These are mutual ministries that members should carry out toward each other. . . .

. . . The second foundational theological observation to make is that the one-another commands arise from the church’s one-another identity. Because of the saving work of God in Christ, believers in Christ belong to one another.¹³¹

While Paul instructs the elders to equip the saints, he also commands every believer to minister to other believers. In the context of arguing for primarily same-gendered relationships, Carol Cornish concedes, “‘The one another’ passages found in the New Testament are not directed toward one sex or the other. So we can safely assume that encouraging, admonishing, teaching, rebuking and so on were being done by both men and women.”¹³² None of the one-another passages indicate a same-gendered restriction between the parties involved. Therefore, contra ACBC, we may assume that the restrictions given in 1 Timothy 2:9–15 and 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 are intended to be limited to the gathered assembly and not extended to other ministry contexts.

¹³⁰ Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, “The Danvers Statement,” Affirmation 6.

¹³¹ Jones, “Ministry of Mutual Christian Care,” 16–17.

¹³² Carol Cornish, “Why Women Should Counsel Women,” in *Women Helping Women: A Biblical Guide to Major Issues Women Face*, ed. Elyse Fitzpatrick and Carol Cornish (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1997), 89.

Women may not serve in the office of elder, but Scripture does not forbid women from serving in the role of counselor. Dan Doriani makes a helpful distinction between role and office: “A role becomes an office when the congregation recognizes, calls, and consecrates someone for a formal leadership position. Officers meet known criteria for a position described in Scripture.”¹³³ While qualified men should govern and shepherd the congregation through both the public and private ministry of the Word, the sheer volume of “one-another” commands make it plain that elders are insufficient to do all the work of ministry. Doriani summarizes,

Christians may fulfill almost any kingdom task, as needed. Students can instruct their teachers, shy believers give an account of their faith, and those who lack empathy can encourage others. Women may carry out almost any spiritual function. They may exercise vital roles as they use their skill to meet needs and advance the kingdom. If they excel for a long period, they may become informal leaders even if they never hold office.

Doriani helpfully describes the compatibility of providing opportunities for women to minister as a necessary complement to the governing and public, authoritative teaching role reserved to the biblically qualified men serving in the office of elder. Women should be free to minister in all spheres not explicitly restricted by Scripture. Doriani continues,

Scripture says God has given men the ordained offices of teaching and leading the church, but he has given encouragement, service, administration, and many other gifts to women. With their gifts, they should do all sorts of things, if not everything. As long as they do not usurp final leadership authority, they will greatly aid the work of elders and deacons. Therefore, we should rejoice when women lead by using their gifts, for the Spirit distributes these gifts to build up the body of Christ for the common good.¹³⁴

As demonstrated in the parable of the talents, God desires for each believer to wisely steward each gift entrusted to them so that it produces much fruit (Matt 25:14–30). Getz agrees, “Though Jesus stated that the apostles would have a primary, unique, and authoritative role in teaching these spiritual truths, Paul made it just as clear that every

¹³³ Dan Doriani, *Women and Ministry: What the Bible Teaches* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 110.

¹³⁴ Doriani, *Women and Ministry*, 111.

member of Christ’s body—both men and women—would share in the responsibility to ‘teach’ one another biblical truth revealed by the Holy Spirit.”¹³⁵ As demonstrated previously, biblical counseling is not the type of teaching prohibited by 1 Timothy 2:12. Furthermore, as evidenced by the preponderance of definitions and elements of biblical counseling, the discipline does not regularly consist of teaching with authority. Rather, biblical counseling is primarily the ministry of mutual care expressed in words—commands given to men and women alike with no indication of gender restriction. Thus, women should be permitted to serve both men and other women with the ministry of biblical counseling.

In the next chapter, I will explore additional biblical themes that contribute to discerning the appropriate role for female biblical counselors in complementarian churches.

¹³⁵ Getz, *Elders and Leaders*, 113–14.

CHAPTER 4

PERSPECTIVALISM APPLIED: EIGHT BIBLICAL THEMES RELEVANT TO FEMALE COUNSELORS

The literature review in the introductory chapter showed the dearth of robust theological resources devoted to the role of female biblical counselors in complementarian churches. In the second chapter, I sketched the contours of the complementarian spectrum and then explored the biblical passages commonly referenced when applying complementarian convictions to the practice of biblical counseling. In the third chapter, I demonstrated the significant degree of overlap between the practice of biblical counseling and the ministry of mutual Christian care, also known as the one-another commands. The preceding chapters demonstrate that women should exercise their gifts to instruct men and women outside the context of the gathered assembly. Discerning what Scripture restricts women from doing and requires women to do are of primary importance in determining their role in the church. However, Scripture provides more guidance on the issue.

In this chapter, I consider eight other biblical themes that should inform decisions regarding the role of female biblical counselors in complementarian churches. First, since God designed mankind to be interdependent, churches should consider team counseling. Second, leveraging gender complementarity by employing male and female co-counselors enhances counseling efficacy in marriage counseling. Third, while Christ, the head of his church, gives various forms of authority to the congregation and to its elders, authority does not inhere in the act of counseling. The congregation has authority also—the keys of the kingdom, to admit and remove members, to call and remove elders. Therefore, women are not usurping elder authority when they counsel. Fourth,

individuals sometimes misuse authority and thereby inflict spiritual abuse, so churches must employ safeguards such as team counseling to reduce the risk of abuse occurring or to at least detect and correct it more quickly. Fifth, believers are fundamentally family members; men and women should be able to counsel one another as brothers and sisters naturally do in families of origin. Sixth, biblical counseling expresses itself through nongendered wisdom as a learned skill taught to others for skillful and God-pleasing living. Seventh, the Spirit endows male and female believers with gifts for the edification of the body without specifying gender limitations, so men and women should have the freedom to counsel one another. Eighth, Christian liberty is a gift to be guarded, not only within counseling sessions but also in churches by allowing counselors the freedom to discern whether they will counsel both men and women. Collectively, these biblical themes provide additional perspectives on why women should exercise their spiritual gifts through biblically counseling both men and women.

Gender roles in the church, while important, do not rise to the level of primary gospel issues in our theological triage.¹ Discussions of secondary issues in theological triage rarely include counseling. How then should practitioners and pastors think about different theological positions on these topics within the biblical counseling movement—how important are they to how the church delineates counseling roles and responsibilities? Jeremy Pierre insightfully suggests, “The beliefs we derive from Scripture serve as the authoritative system of organization that distinguishes both the truthfulness and the priority of all other beliefs.”² Our theological convictions serve as a lens through which we view the world, and where we rank those convictions within our

¹ R. Albert Mohler Jr., “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity,” *Albert Mohler* (blog), July 12, 2005, <https://albertmohler.com/2005/07/12/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity>.

² Jeremy Pierre, “Scripture Is Sufficient, But to Do What?,” in *Scripture and Counseling: God’s Word for Life in a Broken World*, ed. Bob Kellemen and Jeff Forrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 100.

theological triage profoundly shapes our perceptions.³ Pierre adds, “As sinners, we love our own way and interpret facts based on our own perspectives that either ignore or alter God’s (Rom 1:19–23; 1 Cor 1:20–25). Put simply, there is a world of difference between *general revelation* and *our interpretation* of general revelation.”⁴ Similarly, there is a difference between believing in the inerrancy of Scripture versus inerrancy in one’s interpretation thereof—we must not confuse the infallible authority of Scripture with the all-too-fallible human interpretation of divine writ. Nevertheless, the faithful believer must follow the dictates of his Scripture-informed conscience (Rom 14).

Before expounding upon other pertinent themes, I use John Frame’s description of perspectivalism to serve as the foundational structure for this chapter’s goal. Frame introduces the concept, “I employ perspectivalisms of two kinds, as a general concept, and as a more specific method. The general concept is simply that because we are not God, because we are finite, not infinite, we cannot know everything at a glance, and therefore our knowledge is limited to one perspective or another.”⁵ As used here, a perspective describes an individual’s angle of seeing at a finite point in time, in and from a particular location. Frame contrasts human incomplete, finite perspectives with God’s exhaustive, infinite perspective, which he calls “omniperspectival.”⁶ To partially transcend the limitations of finitude, Frame emphasizes gleaning the perspectives of others. However, he also acknowledges, “This does not mean, of course, that all ideas are equally true, or equally false. It does not mean that as our perspective grows larger we

³ For example, groups like Together for the Gospel and The Gospel Coalition can set aside denominational distinctions such as credo versus paedo baptism, and yet require confirmation of complementarianism, effectively ranking gender roles higher within the secondary tier than the proper candidate for baptism.

⁴ Pierre, “Scripture Is Sufficient, But to Do What?,” 102 (*italics original*).

⁵ John M. Frame, “A Primer on Perspectivalism,” *Frame-Poythress* (blog), June 5, 2012, <https://frame-poythress.org/a-primer-on-perspectivalism/>.

⁶ Frame, “A Primer on Perspectivalism.”

inevitably agree with everybody else.”⁷ Rather, considering multiple perspectives helps finite human minds embrace creational human interdependence in order to comprehend more of God’s omniperspectivalism. Frame provides additional guidance relevant to my dissertation:

So 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.⁸

Answering these questions led to my realization that God’s norms direct the church to believe that both genders bear his image, that both are equal in dignity and worth, and that God’s gender-based role limitations continue in the present age.

The situational perspective—especially the context and setting of the gathered assembly in 1 Corinthians 11:2–6, 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, and 1 Timothy 2:8–15—collectively receives less weight and emphasis in Scripture than the one-another commands issued without gender limitations. However, egalitarian arguments to set the restrictive texts aside as lacking perspicuity fail to persuade. Since Scripture does not contradict itself, one must reconcile the few gender-restrictive texts with the dozens of one-another commands that apply to all believers. How does one navigate such dilemmas? Frame cautions,

Not all “perspectives” are equally prominent in Scripture or equally useful to the theologian. It is quite right for a theologian to prefer one perspective to another. He errs only when he gives to that perspective the kind of authority due only to the biblical canon as a whole or when he seeks to exclude other perspectives that also have some validity.⁹

Pierre concurs, “To emphasize the wrong thing is to misunderstand the story, even if you

⁷ Frame, “A Primer on Perspectivalism.”

⁸ Frame, “A Primer on Perspectivalism.”

⁹ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 194.

know every detail.”¹⁰ In the same way, to emphasize male headship and the dangers of immoral fallout from mixed-gendered counseling and ignore other risks related to counseling in the church constitutes a misuse of Scripture.

From the existential perspective, what will satisfy the believing heart? I suggest that the answer is to harmonize both the explicit instructions in the restrictive passages while allowing women the freedom to fully obey the one-another commands. While the gender-restrictive passages and the one-another commands speak volumes about the role of female biblical counselors, these verses do not sufficiently address the topic. A host of other biblical angles contribute additional depth and clarity. The rest of this chapter explores the biblical themes of human interdependence, gender complementarity, the authority exclusive to elders, spiritual abuse, family relationships, wisdom as learned skill, spiritual gifts, and Christian liberty. I will demonstrate the relevance of these themes to establishing the role of female biblical counselors in complementarian churches.

Perspective 1: Interdependence and Co-counselors

Since God created human beings to be dependent on him and interdependent on each other, symbiotic co-counseling, when possible, should be preferred in many church counseling situations. Team counseling multiplies training opportunities and enriches the counselee’s experience; the practice is particularly helpful when it incorporates gender complementarity, especially in marriage counseling. In one sense, separating interdependence from complementarity resembles separating teaching from authority in 1 Timothy 2:12—the degree of overlap is significant, though the terms are not equal. Not all God-designed human interdependence requires gender complementarity. Though Paul references anatomical features in 1 Corinthians 12:12–31,

¹⁰ Pierre, “Scripture Is Sufficient, But to Do What?,” 99.

he argues that the church consists of members who need each other, without any reference to gender.

Specifically, interdependence frequently finds expression in the reciprocal nature of the one-another commands reviewed in chapter 3. Obeying God’s direction to love in the various expressions such as serving and edifying one another requires another person as the receiving object—one person cannot fully comply independently without involving another person at some level. Not only are individuals interdependent upon each other, but also the combined obedience to the one-another commands expressed as biblical counseling relies upon the interdependence of greeting, teaching, admonishing, encouraging, serving, confessing sin to, and praying for one another. Frame applies his multiperspectivalism method and describes how interdependence relates to counseling methodology:

Every ethical decision involves the application of a law (norm, principle) to a situation by a person (self). Thus in counseling people with problems, we generally seek to ascertain three things: (1) What was the situation (problem)? (2) How are you responding to it? (3) What does Scripture say? For the Christian, as we have seen, these questions are interdependent. The individual and the Scripture are part of the situation, the situation and the Scripture are parts of the person’s experience, and an analysis of the situation and person helps to show us what Scripture says (i.e., how it applies in this case).¹¹

Interdependence is expressed in the questions themselves, the counseling relationship, and the counselor’s benefit from the shepherding insight of elders and counseling expertise of other counselors.

The need for supervision during the training process and active collaboration with other counselors throughout ministry expresses another dimension of human interdependence. Keith Christensen notes four benefits received during his ACBC certification required supervision: confirmation, oversight, instruction, and experience.¹²

¹¹ Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 74.

¹² Keith Christensen, “Ode to Supervision,” *Association of Certified Biblical Counselors* (blog), April 25, 2017, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/ode-to-supervision/>.

He recounts, “I still remember my first formal counseling session, when a man who was spiritually and emotionally ‘choking’ came to me crying for help. It made a big difference to know a supervisor was looking over my shoulder, ready for *me* to cry out for someone to help the helper.”¹³ Counselors need help too. Bob Kellemen notes, “Every word Paul wrote about competent biblical counselors he penned in the plural—‘brothers,’ ‘one another,’ ‘you yourselves.’ The effective biblical counselor is no ‘Lone Ranger’ Christian. Competent biblical counselors live and grow together in community as they commune with Christ and connect with the body of Christ.”¹⁴ While never expecting to acquire all the education and expertise desired, when counselors attain a reasonable level of competency, they should endeavor to train others who will continue to teach others (2 Tim 2:2).

Throughout the book of Proverbs, the reader encounters the general call to seek wisdom and to consult with the wise. For example, consider these admonitions: “Get wisdom, get understanding; don’t forget or turn away from the words of my mouth” (Prov 4:3); “A fool’s way is right in his own eyes, but whoever listens to counsel is wise” (Prov 12:15); “The one who walks with the wise will become wise, but a companion of fools will suffer harm” (Prov 13:20). Three other proverbs specifically encourage individuals to seek multiple counselors: “Without guidance a people will fall, but with many counselors there is deliverance” (Prov 11:14); “Plans fail when there is no counsel, but with many advisers they succeed” (Prov 15:22); and “For you should wage war with sound guidance—victory comes with many counselors” (Prov 24:6). While “many counselors” applies more appropriately to war strategizing, two counselors working together provide a good balance in counseling sessions for both individuals and couples.

¹³ Christensen, “Ode to Supervision” (italics original).

¹⁴ Robert W. Kellemen, *Equipping Counselors for Your Church: The 4E Ministry Training Strategy* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2011), 193.

Proverbs has much to say about giving and receiving counsel in various settings. Leo Perdue senses a broader application for the term “counsel” in Proverbs than in a modern-day counseling practice: “Counsel is also a prominent theme in this first subdivision (chapters 10–15). ‘Counsel’ or ‘advice’ (12:15; 19:20–21; 20:18) would be the guidance especially of the teachers at court and in the family to shape a course of action that leads to success.”¹⁵ Since “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding,” the people of God should pursue godly wisdom more than worldly success (Prov 10:9). Referring to Proverbs 11:14, Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch make current application in the church:

But the truth of the clause 14b is in modern times more fully illustrated in the region of ecclesiastical and political affairs; and in general it is found to be true that it is better with a people when they are governed according to the laws and conclusions which have resulted from the careful deliberation of many competent and authorized men, than when their fate is entrusted unconditionally to one or to a few.¹⁶

Similarly, the interdependent collaboration of multiple counselors provides additional helpful perspectives about the life situation of the counselee. Jay Adams endorsed team counseling, tying the practice to the biblical examples of Paul with his co-laborers, Jesus sending six dozen disciples in pairs, and the notion that “two are better than one” (Eccl 4:9a).¹⁷ He confirms the benefits of meaningful case reviews following counseling sessions leading to improved competency, noting the need for “an open nouthetic relationship” among the counselors, and affirms that team counseling helps a counselor remain above reproach.

Team counseling provides an effective means of safeguarding propriety for all involved. Furthermore, even in the context of a same-gendered counselor and counselee,

¹⁵ Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox, 2000), 176, Logos.

¹⁶ K&D 6:172.

¹⁷ Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 204.

having a co-counselor reduces the likelihood of a sexual advance by either party. It provides a second trained person to help promptly deescalate the situation if it arises. Mark Shaw, recognizing that team counseling has not yet been widely adopted in biblical counseling circles, nevertheless advocates for it as “more effective, balanced, safe, powerful, and loving.”¹⁸ He describes it this way:

We define team biblical counseling as “at least *two* redeemed sinners *partnering together* in the body of Christ to ‘speak the truth in love’ to counselees so that all involved may know God intimately, glorify the Lord, become more like Christ, fulfill the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37–40), and fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20). It is disciple-making that is Christ-centered, Gospel-driven, Word-based, and Holy Spirit-empowered.”¹⁹

Shaw indicates that he “stumbled upon this approach” based on the Lord’s sending the seventy-two in pairs (Luke 10:1), as well as his sending the disciples in pairs on ministry (Mark 6:7) and twice more in preparation for his passion (Mark 11:1–2; 14:13–14).²⁰ Shaw stresses that the team approach reduces the likelihood of the counselors being deceived, becoming unduly hampered with note-taking, absorbing self-glory rather than ensuring all glory is directed to the Lord, succumbing to sin, or incurring false accusations. From the positive angle, he asserts that team counseling adds a prayer partner, more wisdom, timely feedback or correction during a session, mentoring, and training opportunities.²¹ In his counseling service, The Addiction Connection, counselees are assigned to same-gendered or mixed-gendered counseling teams based on multiple factors, including the presenting issue and the expertise of available counselors.²² In their

¹⁸ Mark E. Shaw, *Strength in Numbers: The Team Approach to Biblical Counseling*, exp. ed. (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2010), 12.

¹⁹ Shaw, *Strength in Numbers*, 12 (italics original).

²⁰ Shaw, *Strength in Numbers*, 37.

²¹ Shaw, *Strength in Numbers*, 43–57.

²² Shaw, *Strength in Numbers*, 89–90. More information about his team and their ministry is available at The Addiction Connection, “Leadership,” accessed August 29, 2023, <https://www.theaddictionconnection.org/leadership/>.

ministry, when possible, spouses serve as active, participating co-counselors with the expectation that husbands will demonstrate leadership and wives will demonstrate submission during the counseling sessions. Scripture endorses multiple counselors but does not specify the gender nor indicate that married couples should necessarily counsel together.

As one expression of human interdependence, team counseling optimizes the ability to train helpers, develop a pool of seasoned counselors, leverage collective insight, and impart more wisdom when working interdependently versus independently. The secular counseling model, with the attendant financial profit motive, often seeks to maximize the billable units through group counseling. The church motivated by love often enjoys the freedom to reverse the one-to-many model with two counselors to an individual counselee or couple. Admittedly, team counseling adds to the scheduling juggernaut and may introduce additional sources of relational conflict between counselors.²³ However, the benefits outweigh the potential costs: the team approach in counseling embraces our interdependence and more faithfully emulates the biblical pattern and instruction found in Proverbs. Interdependence is part of our creational design. We need one another. Pastors and elders also need trained helpers to do much of the work of ministry, including counseling. By allowing women the freedom to counsel both men and women, elders regain more time to devote to governing and public authoritative teaching.

Perspective 2: Gender Complementarity

Our gendered image-bearing constitutes one dimension of our interdependence. Gender complementarity, by logical extension, assumes that both genders should complement one another in all spheres. Since God explicitly precludes

²³ Shaw, *Strength in Numbers*, 12–13, 66–67, 97–99.

women from holding the office of elder or engaging in the public authoritative teaching in the gathered assembly, the elder sphere will not reflect gender complementarity. At the same time, churches should maximize the opportunity to engage gender complementarity in the counseling sphere for a host of reasons including improving efficacy, lessening the risk of misuse of spiritual influence, and grafting increased participation of members into the ministry of the church. Complementarian resources customarily begin with acknowledging God’s creative intent in humanity’s gendered design. I addressed this more thoroughly in the first chapter. Here, I will summarize. Alexander Strauch opens his book by affirming, “God created men and women equally in His divine image. Men and women are fully equal in personhood, dignity, and worth (Genesis 1:26–28).”²⁴ Like other complementarians, he acknowledges the contributions of women, including Euodia, Syntyche (Phil 4:2–3), Lydia (Acts 16:14), and those listed by Paul at the end of Romans. He later remarks, “These women were Paul’s sisters in the Lord, his beloved friends, and fellow workers in the gospel. He is positively delighted to praise them for their noble service, courage, hard work, and love. Their work was a vital and necessary part of the Lord’s work.”²⁵ However, like most complementarian books, the bulk of the content between those early and late citations emphasizes role distinctions—mainly male headship and female limitations. Ironically, the theme of gender *complementarity* receives far less attention and emphasis than might be expected in *complementarian* literature. Even more troubling is the sentiment shared by Katie McCoy: “It is an unfortunate and ironic reality in my own theological community that affirming the equality of women leaves one open to suspicion of closeted heterodoxy.”²⁶ Instead of

²⁴ Alexander Strauch, *Men and Women, Equal Yet Different: A Brief Study of the Biblical Passages on Gender* (Colorado Springs: Lewis & Roth, 1999), 6–7.

²⁵ Strauch, *Men and Women, Equal Yet Different*, 92.

²⁶ Katie J. McCoy, “God Created Them, Male and Female,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 63, no. 2 (Spring 2021): 51.

under-emphasizing complementarity, the church must endeavor to embrace its beauty fully.

To connect the literature with life, consider Jacki King's experience, which others could echo:

I tried to get some advice and wisdom from several pastors about what it meant to be called to ministry as a woman, but more often their replies included some form of the statement, "That's great that God is calling you to ministry, but just remember you can't _____."

What filled in the blank following *can't* would differ depending on who I was talking to and where they landed theologically on the issue of a woman's role in the church.²⁷

Complementarian literature confirms King's observation of the instinctive initial response about functions and activities women cannot do in ministry and the emphatic weight accorded to those restrictions. A woman sensing a call to serve the church through biblical counseling must diligently prepare for having conversations about the boundaries of her service as well as for the performance of the service.

Even within the previously described broader expressions of complementarianism, female submission, though often framed to emphasize the limitation, does not indicate a relationship of superiority and inferiority, but instead requires complementarity to operate well. As part of gender complementarity, God created an ordered structure for men and women and requires each to recognize and conform to his or her appointed position.²⁸ With respect to gender, God delegates authority to male elders in the church and to husbands and fathers in the home. Biblical submission is the voluntary yielding to and positioning of oneself under the leadership of another as an expression of obedience, not inferiority. Nancy Pearcey observes, "Through most of human history, male authority in the family and society has been justified by the

²⁷ Jacki C. King, *The Calling of Eve: How the Women of the Bible Inspire the Women of the Church*, Church Answers (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2022), 12.

²⁸ Frederick Danker et al., *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 1041. Logos.

assumption that men are superior and women are inferior. But biblically committed Christians deny that women are inferior.”²⁹ She astutely describes a robust and nuanced version of a westernized view of submission:

We can enrich our understanding of the word *submit* by asking how it is used in other contexts. We speak of a consultant who *submits* a report to a client, or a lawyer who *submits* arguments in a court case, or an academic paper where a scholar presents a theory by writing, “I *submit* to you that . . .” In all these usages, the word means to offer your best insights for another person’s consideration and judgment. Your goal is to inform, advise, and educate them for their benefit. A person who thinks submission means to be quiet and go along is actually holding back and *not* contributing to the good of the other person.³⁰

“Submission” in American usage can mean more than merely subordinating oneself to another’s authority or desires; Pearcey’s expanded view of submission correlates to biblical counseling. Counselors labor to form Christlikeness in counselees through listening well and responding wisely. The form of teaching exercised in biblical counseling differs from the type restricted in 1 Timothy 2:12. In the appropriate settings and timing, a woman may submit her biblical insight to a man without violating broader complementarian convictions that extend a woman’s required submission to males beyond her father, husband, or elders. Counseling is not an undue exercise of authority.

Furthermore, to fully deploy God’s good gift of complementarity, men and women must share their gifting, skills, and resources with both men and women in the covenant community. David Murray acknowledges similarities between the genders and then notes, “but we are different in many other ways—physically, emotionally, cognitively, and so on. And these differences are not a problem, they are the solution. The differences are not accidental but intentional.”³¹ He denies the inferiority or superiority of either gender, commends the synergy in creational design, and contends, “They don’t

²⁹ Nancy Pearcey, *The Toxic War on Masculinity: How Christianity Reconciles the Sexes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2023), 75, Scribd (italics original).

³⁰ Pearcey, *The Toxic War on Masculinity*, 92.

³¹ David P. Murray, “Completing, Not Competing: The Biblical Model of Marriage,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 7, no. 1 (January 2015): 208.

compete with each other, they complete each other.”³² Men and women, by design, should complete each other as necessary allies and teammates, working together to fulfill the creation mandate. However, like other complementarian resources, the rest of Murray’s article fleshes out role differences. He emphasizes male headship and female submission rather than exploring how men and women are intended to fully complete or complement each other in community life.

God designed complementarity to mean more than merely affirming gender equality and male headship. Gregg Allison describes Adam and Eve’s created physicality and observes, “Together and indispensably, they begin to engage in the cultural mandate involving procreation and vocation for human flourishing. They’re able and obligated to carry out the mandate to build society because of, and only because of, their complementary genderedness.”³³ At the same time, he vehemently denies differing capacities: “To repeat: there are no particular capacities and properties that belong exclusively to women or men. There are, instead, common human capacities, and common human properties that are—indeed, will naturally be—expressed in gendered ways.”³⁴ Why two genders with largely the same capacities? Do men and women need each other’s distinctions beyond procreation? Gregg Allison responds, “The fact that we are gendered in the totality of our perspectives is a key reason we desperately need each other. Men need women and women need men, and not just in terms of marriage, to be transported beyond our own limited viewpoint so as to experience life in a multifaceted way.”³⁵ Unfortunately, Allison does not flesh out what he means by indispensability in vocation.

³² Murray, “Completing, Not Competing,” 208.

³³ Gregg R. Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021), 43.

³⁴ Allison, *Embodied*, 49.

³⁵ Allison, *Embodied*, 49

Interestingly, the only one-another command with explicit gender terminology does not subordinate women to men but instead stresses mutuality in marital sexual relations. First Corinthians 7:5 begins, “Do not deprive one another—except when you agree for a time.” God’s gender design includes, but is by no means limited to, physical reciprocity. Daniel Heimbach’s terminology in the description of gender complementarity in sexual relations also applies to other spheres of complementarity: “So to say that sex is complementary means that sex is designed to unite corresponding differences needed to make something greater than what you get by just adding sexual partners.”³⁶ The unity of “corresponding differences” between genders creates something greater in various dimensions of human functioning besides procreation. Specifically, since men and women express their image-bearing capacities in gendered ways, the corresponding differences between male and female co-counselors can create a stronger ministry team than same-gendered teams. Expanding the adjectival vocabulary, J. Budziszewski describes what he calls “*polaric complementarity*,” explaining, “Men and women aren’t just different, but different in corresponding ways. They are complementary opposites—alike in their humanity, but different in ways that make them natural partners. Each sex completes what the other lacks, and helps bring the other into balance.”³⁷ Complementarians sometimes neglect the benefits of complementarity by emphasizing role over relationship.³⁸

Similarly, by God’s gracious design, the corresponding differences in male and female perspectives contribute synergy to the counseling relationship, irrespective of the counselee’s gender. Robert Jones agrees, “Without overstating gender differences (too

³⁶ Daniel R. Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality: Recovering Biblical Standards for a Culture in Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 170.

³⁷ J. Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 2023), 49, Scribd.

³⁸ McCoy, “God Created Them, Male and Female,” 62.

many do), a female counselor might see something in a female counselee that I might miss or misinterpret, and vice-versa.”³⁹ He also indicates that counselees may sometimes receive certain advice better from the same or the other-gendered counselor. The advantages of complementary male and female perspectives and voices drive him to routinely include his wife or another female co-counselor when he counsels women or couples.

Given the complementarian emphasis on male headship, why include female voices in counseling? Paul reminded the Corinthians near the end of the head covering passage, “In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, and man is not independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman, and all things come from God” (1 Cor 11:11–12). John Koessler observes,

Too often, complementarians approach theology only through a male lens. But in order to see the complete picture of what’s being taught in Scripture, we need the theological perspective of both sexes. If it is true that men and women see things differently, as we complementarians often assert, then stifling the feminine perspective can only lead to an inadequate theology. Adam’s first sin was his silence in the garden when Eve was being tempted. His subsequent sin has been to silence the voice of his God-given partner.⁴⁰

Koessler’s bold proclamation invokes another reason to invite both male and female voices and perspectives into the counseling room—to know and be known with complementing perspectives. Robert Saucy makes a similar observation to Koessler’s:

I am not suggesting that the absence of women’s participation in the ministry of the Word has caused the Church to go without certain themes of Scripture. I would ask, however, if women with their differences might not be intended by God to contribute certain emphases and dimensions of God’s truth that would enrich in a complementary way the Church’s hearing of the Word.⁴¹

³⁹ Robert David Jones, “Counseling Together: Ten Benefits to Co-Counseling with Your Spouse,” *Biblical Counseling Coalition Grace and Truth* (blog), October 8, 2018, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2018/10/08/counseling-together-ten-benefits-to-co-counseling-with-your-spouse/>.

⁴⁰ John Koessler, “Wounds of a Friend: Complementarian,” *Christianity Today*, June 2008, 40.

⁴¹ Robert L. Saucy, “Women’s Prohibition to Teach Men: An Investigation into Its Meaning and Contemporary Application,” *JETS* 37, no. 1 (1994): 94.

God assembles men and women together in the church and gifts them with natural inclinations and proclivities that provide needed balance for the unified body. What does the church forsake when excluding women from counseling couples? To begin with, it potentially places women in the position of violating the distortion warned against in the Danvers Statement, “to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.”⁴² Moreover, excluding qualified women from counseling couples diminishes the quantity and quality of spiritual care available in the church, overburdens the male leadership, and impedes women’s ability to obey the one-another commands fully. Rather than focusing on the inherent restrictions on the role of women, the church must recalibrate its attention and devote similar emphasis to learning how to leverage the beneficial gender differences for the church’s growth, in obedience to God’s design and commands.

Ironically, when complementarians prioritize roles and segregate ministry efforts by gender, they often diminish the benefit of God’s designed complementarity. Graham Beynon and Jane Tooher describe contrasting dangers attendant to over-emphasizing or under-emphasizing differences in genders. Concerning overemphasis, they observe, “Along with the overemphasis on difference comes the tendency to specify particular ways in which we are meant to be different. This often leads to what’s been called ‘performative identities,’ where we’re given an identity to live up to and so feel the need to perform appropriately.”⁴³ They note that these roles may reflect more of the speaker’s preferences than biblical guidance. With respect to an underemphasis, they see a tendency to “make our gender seem accidental and almost irrelevant to our personhood.”⁴⁴ As they consider the trend toward separate ministries for men and women,

⁴² Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, “The Danvers Statement,” June 26, 2007, Affirmation 4.2, <https://cbmw.org/2007/06/26/the-danvers-statement/>.

⁴³ Graham Beynon and Jane Tooher, *Embracing Complementarianism: Turning Biblical Convictions into Positive Church Culture* (Epsom, England: Good Book Company, 2022), 55, Kindle.

⁴⁴ Beynon and Tooher, *Embracing Complementarianism*, 55.

Beynon and Tooher acknowledge another possible danger: “Our concern, though, is that if the ministries become mainly separate, there isn’t much complementing going on.”⁴⁵ They note that this results in losing the “synergy that comes through togetherness.”⁴⁶ Male and female co-counselors working together appropriately leverage God’s gift of gender complementarity to increase efficacy. Including women in the counseling ministry also complements the public proclamation and teaching ministry of male leadership.

Female biblical counselors contribute an added perspective in the counseling room, especially when co-counseling with pastors or elders. While we must avoid unhelpful stereotypes and caricatures, men and women often have different strengths, weaknesses, and aptitudes in reflective listening, critical thinking, nurturing and sustaining relationships, problem-solving, and providing helpful feedback or instruction—all necessary skills in counseling. To the extent that God designed beneficial differences in the genders, the church should embrace his design and deploy the fullness of his image-bearers’ wisdom and experience expressed in both male and female believers to come alongside brothers and sisters seeking help amidst suffering, sin, and relational difficulties.

Perspective 3: The Authority Exclusive to Elders

Though gender complementarity should extend to many spheres in the church, I now turn to the exception. In the second chapter, I exegeted 1 Timothy 2:12, the pivotal verse undergirding the complementarian position for reserving both the office and function of elders (synonymous with pastors or overseers) to qualified men. As a convictional complementarian congregationalist, I wholeheartedly affirm that elders must be qualified men. Since women may not serve as elders, it is important to recognize the

⁴⁵ Beynon and Tooher, *Embracing Complementarianism*, 8.

⁴⁶ Beynon and Tooher, *Embracing Complementarianism*, 9.

scriptural boundary lines of elder authority to avoid female counselors trespassing on those boundaries. Similarly, since biblical counseling is a form of discipling believers that often involves identical activities, whether the counselor is an elder or a woman, clarification is needed to ensure elder authority does not transfer to female counselors. As previously demonstrated, the restricted sphere does not include all forms of teaching. Non-elders, both male and female, perform similar activities in teaching and discipling through biblical counseling. Since the functions and activities of biblical counselors largely mirror the private ministry of the Word done by elders, I argue in this section that a female biblical counselor's ministry remains distinct from the exercise of pastoral oversight and authority. In this section, I consider the breadth of elders' authority, the portion of authority uniquely and exclusively belonging to elders in congregationalist churches, and that authority's relationship to the role of female biblical counselors in complementarian churches.⁴⁷

Surveying Elders' Authority

The Bible nowhere delineates the exact authority reserved to elders versus non-elders. The descriptions of the tabernacle and temple have more detail than role assignments in the church. Rather than providing a job description, the apostle Paul outlines the requirements for elders more in terms of mature spiritual character qualifications instead of skills or responsibilities:⁴⁸

This saying is trustworthy; "If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble work." An overseer, therefore, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, self-controlled, sensible, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not an excessive drinker, not a bully but gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy. He must manage his own household competently and have his children under control with all dignity. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of

⁴⁷ While much of my dissertation will apply equally to other forms of church government, since other forms of church polity are not my focus, I am limiting my discussion to elder-led congregationalism.

⁴⁸ Collin Hansen and Jonathan Leeman, *Rediscover Church: Why the Body of Christ Is Essential* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 130.

God's church?) He must not be a new convert, or he might become conceited and incur the same condemnation as the devil. Furthermore, he must have a good reputation among outsiders, so that he does not fall into disgrace and the devil's trap. (1 Tim 3:1–7)

The reason I left you in Crete was to set right what was left undone and, as I directed you, to appoint elders in every town. An elder must be blameless: the husband of one wife, with faithful children who are not accused of wildness or rebellion. As an overseer of God's household, he must be blameless: not arrogant, not hot-tempered, not an excessive drinker, not a bully, not greedy for money, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled, holding to the faithful messages as taught, so that he will be able to both encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it. (Titus 1:5–9)

Neither passage contains an organizational chart with solid and dotted lines to indicate reporting relationships or clear lines of authority. However, a measure of authority is evident through the term “overseer,” the competent household management requirement, and the refutation of unsound teaching.

Except for constraints relating to having the ability to teach and not being a recent convert, the character traits describe broader Christian virtues that should be developing in all congregation members.⁴⁹ Mark Dever concurs, “All of the qualifications listed here are repeated elsewhere in Scripture as applicable for all Christians, except one—the ability to teach. The essence of the elder's office lies with ensuring the Word of God is well understood, evidenced by the commitment to teaching one's particular flock this Word.”⁵⁰ The biblical counselor likewise ensures that the counselee understands how the Bible speaks to their particular hardship.

Few (if any) advocate for biblical counselors who do not meet the elder character standards. On the contrary, every member of the household of faith is encouraged to develop those character traits and the ability to teach competently. Bobby Jamieson adds, “A man is an elder only if his character and spiritual labor say so. Which means that every elder is an elder before he is an elder. Every legitimate elder shows

⁴⁹ Jonathan Leeman, *Don't Fire Your Church Members: The Case for Congregationalism* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 135.

⁵⁰ Mark E. Dever, “The Church,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 802.

himself qualified in character and competence before being appointed to the office.”⁵¹ He advises men aspiring to the office of elder to “disciple,” “extend hospitality,” “do evangelism,” and “counsel,” learning “to care for souls.”⁵² Though the above-listed character traits are required of elders, acquiring the required character traits does not automatically or necessarily convey any authority, much less usurp elder authority.

The question progresses to identifying the functions of elders, the specific functions that involve authority, and the nature of that authority. Benjamin Merkle summarizes his findings from the book of Acts: “The authority of the Jerusalem elders was seen in their handling of the famine-relief money (Acts 11:30), their intimate involvement at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), their participation in refuting false teachings (Acts 15), and their leadership in resolving conflicts in the church (Acts 21:17–26).”⁵³ In these situations, the leadership responsibility included inward-facing and outward-facing components and jurisdiction over financial, doctrinal, and relational matters. Merkle adds that “Paul charges the Ephesian elders to be engaged in the activity of guarding and shepherding the flock which has been put under their care. The elders are to be alert, always protecting the congregation against false teaching and false teachers.”⁵⁴ While elders are responsible for working with other churches for the greater theological good beyond their own congregation as they did in the Jerusalem Council, they have a significantly higher responsibility to guard and guide their congregations.

Since Scripture does not directly define and list characteristics of elder authority, it is helpful to consider how scholars have evaluated the nature of elder

⁵¹ Bobby Jamieson, *The Path to Being a Pastor: A Guide for the Aspiring* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 68.

⁵² Jamieson, *The Path to Being a Pastor*, 69–71.

⁵³ Benjamin L. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 135.

⁵⁴ Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer*, 135.

authority. Matthew McDill provides definition and clarity through his comprehensive and meticulous study of the terms used to denote “elders,” “overseers,” and “pastors” in conjunction with the full semantic range of words connoting authority. He begins by describing types of authority: “The first two are types [of] authority *de jure*: authority as position and authority as responsibility. The last two are types of authority *de facto*: authority as power and authority as influence.”⁵⁵ He argues that elders have positional authority beyond mere function based on the character qualities required, the appointment to office, and the potential removal therefrom.⁵⁶ Concluding the section on authority as responsibility, he observes an interesting tendency: “Some responsibilities traditionally given exclusively to elders are noticeably absent from these passages. In particular, the New Testament does not assign specific activities such as presiding over the Lord’s Supper or baptism exclusively to elders. More broadly, ‘ministry’ is not reserved for elders and deacons, but is the responsibility of the entire body of Christ.”⁵⁷ As another convictional congregationalist, McDill affirms the congregation’s role in elders’ appointment or removal, church discipline, and ultimate decision-making for most matters in the local church (elder-led, not elder-ruled).⁵⁸ He concludes,

That elders in sin are to be confronted demonstrates that the church is not to submit to their leaders blindly. Instead, they are to follow as those who are persuaded (Heb 13:17). Elders and leaders who teach twisted things are not to be tolerated (Acts 20:29–31; Titus 1:9–16). The ultimate basis of the authority of an elder, therefore, is not his office or his authorization to lead and teach. The basis for his authority is the alignment of his life and teaching with the truth of God’s Word. While elders have authority *de jure* of position and responsibility, the primary authority that elders exercise in the community is authority *de facto* of influence based on sound teaching, wise leadership, and godly character.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Matthew McDill, “The Authority of Church Elders in the New Testament” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 177.

⁵⁶ McDill, “The Authority of Church Elders in the New Testament,” 177–80.

⁵⁷ McDill, “The Authority of Church Elders in the New Testament,” 185–86.

⁵⁸ McDill, “The Authority of Church Elders in the New Testament,” 186–91.

⁵⁹ McDill, “The Authority of Church Elders in the New Testament,” 199.

Using his definitions, elders have both *de jure* and *de facto* authority, but they typically wield their authority through influence more than through position. Counselors may develop significant spiritual influence in the congregation, so it is important for counselors to align doctrinally with the elders and guide counselees in a way that does not contradict the pulpit ministry. An example of teaching “twisted things” would include elders permitting what Scripture forbids (such as women teaching in the gathered assembly) or forbidding what Scripture commands. The same alignment of stated beliefs with functionally lived doctrinal acuity also applies to biblical counselors, regardless of gender. Elders and counselors must teach in accordance with and not contrary to the Bible.

Authority also varies by degrees of available enforcement. Jonathan Leeman describes this perspective of authority with a helpful distinction:

We need a better understanding of the difference between the *authority of command* and *the authority of counsel*. Both types of authority possess the ability to make commands—conscience-binding injunctions, as in, “You must. . . .” Yet only those with the authority of command possess the power of enforcement. Those possessing the authority of counsel do not.⁶⁰

He argues that governments and parents have the power to enforce their commands that neither husbands nor pastors should presume or practice. Biblical counselors have neither the authority of command nor counsel in the sense employed by Leeman. When counselors encounter prolonged unrepentant sin, they must convey their concerns to elders who have the authority of counsel and the authority to initiate the restorative church discipline process if the person remains unrepentant. Counselors have no authority for enforcement, but they may solicit elders for reinforcement of biblical instruction to

⁶⁰ Jonathan Leeman, “Complementarianism: A Moment of Reckoning (Part 3): How Do We Move Forward? A Better Understanding of Authority and Equality,” 9Marks, December 11, 2019, <https://www.9marks.org/article/complementarianism-a-moment-of-reckoning-part-3/> (italics original). There is significant overlap between this source and Greg Gilbert, “Is There Such a Thing as Church Authority?,” *9Marks Journal* (Summer 2016): 29–40, <https://www.9marks.org/article/is-there-such-a-thing-as-church-authority/>.

counselees. Therefore, a female counselor does not usurp elder authority when she counsels.

Defining Elders' Exclusive Authority

As developed in the previous chapter on the one-another commands, all Christians bear some responsibility to teach other believers. What distinguishes one-another teaching from teaching that is limited to elders only? Elders have the primary responsibility to “protect the church from false teaching.”⁶¹ Elders fulfill this obligation through teaching sound doctrine themselves and through observing and regulating the teaching of others in the congregation. In a sense, the elders serve as the first layer of protection for the church—they must be able to discern false teaching and remove it. Leeman describes one authority-related aspect of teaching: “An elder’s teaching should hardly be treated as inerrant. Nonetheless, an elder has been publicly affirmed and authorized with the task of *giving the meaning* (see Neh 8:8) of God’s Word in a way that distinguishes his teaching from any other member of the church who happens to teach.”⁶² The public affirmation of an elder’s office conveys a responsibility to understand and accurately teach sound doctrine that is greater than what is required of teachers without the elder designation. While all believers bear responsibility to study and discern accurate teaching (Acts 17:10–12), McDill links elders’ special obligation to their authority: “Elders are authorized to protect the church from false teachers by teaching the truth.”⁶³ The elders are the primary arbiters of whether teaching is true or false. In a similar vein, Greg Gilbert suggests, “What’s at issue here is authoritative or conscience-binding teaching and leading—the doctrinal instruction of the church in the Scriptures and the

⁶¹ Jeramie Rinne, *Church Elders: How to Shepherd God’s People Like Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 50.

⁶² Leeman, *Don’t Fire Your Church Members*, 137 (italics original).

⁶³ McDill, “The Authority of Church Elders in the New Testament,” 79.

direction-setting governance of the entire church.”⁶⁴ The church's governance as a whole is part of the exclusive authority given to elders. The authority or conscience-binding of elders' teaching inheres to the office of elder—a non-elder teaching the same material does so with less authority than an elder.

Practically, then, how should the church share authority and ministry responsibility? Alexander Strauch argues, “Since ministry is the duty of every believer, no one person or group of people is responsible to provide the total ministry for the rest of the local congregation.”⁶⁵ He adds that this “does not eliminate the need for supervision and leadership within the body of Christ.”⁶⁶ Strauch defines the essential responsibilities of elders as “*oversight and shepherding*” and then clarifies the work required: elders “govern the community, manage the family, care for people’s needs, and oversee their spiritual well-being.”⁶⁷ He distinguishes teachers that he contends “may function locally, or as itinerates” from shepherds:

Shepherds, on the other hand, are more than teachers since they teach, govern, protect, and practically care for the flock. While shepherds may be itinerate, their gift can be most effectively used in caring for the needs of one local flock. *Since the elders’ task is to shepherd the whole flock* (1 Peter 5:1–4), *elders with the shepherding gift are highly effective.*⁶⁸

His reference to 1 Peter 5:1–4 dovetails with the responsibility of elders to local congregations. Peter instructs his fellow elders, “Shepherd God’s flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but willingly, as God would have you, not out of greed for money but eagerly, not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the

⁶⁴ Greg Gilbert, *Can Women Be Pastors?*, Church Questions (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 14–15.

⁶⁵ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1986), 96.

⁶⁶ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 96.

⁶⁷ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 109–10 (italics original).

⁶⁸ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 251 (italics original).

flock” (1 Pet 5:2–3). Exemplary oversight characterizes the faithful elder’s service to his flock.

Implications for Counseling Ministry

The elders collectively shepherd the entire congregation on a macro level over the longer term. The elders’ responsibility and corresponding authority encompasses the spiritual health and maturity of each member through every season. When individuals join a church, they simultaneously entrust themselves to the elders, who will give an account for their shepherding (Heb 13:17). When elders counsel their church members, they bring their authority as elders into each session. They have the authority to determine what constitutes sound doctrine for their congregation and to bind consciences accordingly. In contrast, biblical counselors (male or female) disciple individuals and couples on a micro level through particular difficulties, for usually short seasons. Biblical counselors serve in a much more limited discipling role, usually only by request. Counselors do not bear the responsibility of overseeing the entire congregation and do not usurp elder authority. While counselors may be the first to detect unrepentant sin ultimately requiring church discipline, the elders bear a greater responsibility to address the offender. Elders retain the authority and primary responsibility to bring the offender before the church for discipline when reconciliation and restoration efforts meet with prolonged resistance. Nevertheless, in tandem with the congregation’s authority in ruling, elders retain exclusive authority for leading, guiding, and shepherding the church collectively.

Perspective 4: Spiritual Abuse

Elders’ authority used appropriately is God’s good gift to the church; however, the improper use of authority can distort this good gift and harm the members. Since believers wrestle with remaining sin, churches must consider strategies to prevent, detect, and correct spiritual abuse. Team counseling is one practice that may serve to lessen the

likelihood of misusing spiritual authority or influence in the ministry of counseling. Michael Kruger sees a twofold danger: “To be clear, both mistakes—abdication of authority and abuse of authority—can be a problem.”⁶⁹ Kruger is not the only Reformed leader expressing concern. Leeman warns, “Any attempt to revitalize a concept of an elder’s authority must be matched by a warning against its excesses.”⁷⁰ Unfortunately, the potential for harm extends to a much wider circle of individuals than pastors and elders. Jeremy Pierre and Greg Wilson echo the Lord’s severe judgment regarding the misappropriation and misapplication of authority and influence:

The greater the influence a person has over others, the greater the potential for harm. Jesus got most harsh with people of influence misusing their power to scandalize those under them. He spoke of millstones, ropes around necks, and deep water (Luke 17:1–2). The problem is not in the authority itself, but in the misuse of authority for self-serving, rather than self-giving purposes.⁷¹

There is a direct and proportional relationship between the degree of spiritual influence and the potential for spiritual benefit or harm; neither influence nor potential are limited by gender or position.

Lest any individuals assume that they are not prone to misuse their spiritual influence in their healthy church, Diane Langberg laments, “The headlines are cause for grief because we have seen that abuse in the church is not something that only happens to ‘other’ groups or some category of ‘them.’ Abuse and subsequent cover-ups are a widespread problem in congregations of all sizes and denominations.”⁷² Sadly, both males and females inflict spiritual abuse.⁷³ Ronald Enroth observes, “Spiritual abuse can

⁶⁹ Michael J. Kruger, introduction to *Bully Pulpit: Confronting the Problem of Spiritual Abuse in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022), xvii, Kindle.

⁷⁰ Leeman, *Don’t Fire Your Church Members*, 140.

⁷¹ Jeremy Pierre and Greg Wilson, *When Home Hurts: A Guide for Responding Wisely to Domestic Abuse in Your Church* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2021), 39, Kindle.

⁷² Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2020), 125, Kindle.

⁷³ Daniel Silliman, “The Christian Peacemaker Who Left a Trail of Trauma,” *Christianity Today*, November 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/november/judy-dabler-creative->

take place in the context of doctrinally sound, Bible preaching, fundamental, conservative Christianity.”⁷⁴ The allegations of the misuse of spiritual authority continue to abound as even the most cursory internet search will confirm.⁷⁵ Abuse of spiritual authority by an elder or even misuse of spiritual influence by a biblical counselor constitutes another potential peril that complementarian churches must consider as they determine the role of male and female biblical counselors in the church. This issue will receive more attention in chapter 6.

Since the term “abuse” and the phrase “spiritual abuse” can mean different things when used by different people, it is important to survey the semantic range employed by various writers, especially complementarians and biblical counselors. Martin Manser defines abuse as “the deliberate misuse of gifts or privileges, and the insulting of individuals. Scripture stresses that neither God’s gifts nor his people are to be abused.”⁷⁶ Darby Strickland describes the manifestation of abuse without specifying intention: “Spiritual abuse occurs when an oppressor establishes control and domination by using Scripture, doctrine, or his ‘leadership role’ as weapons. This form of abuse can be subtle, because it can mask itself as religious practice.”⁷⁷ Strickland describes the form that I think is more likely to happen unintentionally in the counseling setting if counselors conflate their understanding of best practices with biblical commands. Kruger explains what he means by the term “spiritual abuse”:

Spiritual abuse is when a spiritual leader—such as a pastor, elder, or head of a Christian organization—wields his position of spiritual authority in such a way that

conciliation-abuse-lapm-unfit-ministry.html.

⁷⁴ Ronald M. Enroth, *Churches That Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 180.

⁷⁵ Shai Linne, “Authority and Its Abuse,” *9Marks Journal* (Summer 2016), 101, <https://www.9marks.org/article/authority-and-its-abuse/>.

⁷⁶ Martin H. Manser, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009), s.v. “Abuse” (entry 5775), Logos.

⁷⁷ Darby A. Strickland, *Is It Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2020), 180, Kindle.

he manipulates, domineers, bullies, and intimidates those under him as a means of maintaining his own power and control, even if he is convinced he is seeking biblical and kingdom related goals.⁷⁸

In this sense, “a spiritual leader” could include biblical counselors. While non-elders do not have God-ordained positional authority, counselors normally exercise significant spiritual influence on individuals seeking help. Counselees entrusting themselves to biblical counselors for soul care should never encounter nor experience manipulation, domination, bullying, or intimidation. Counselors are often privy to the more unsavory and vulnerable elements of counselees’ life stories. Such sacred trust invokes an obligation that requires great sensitivity in the counselor’s response. Character matters. Since the repercussions of spiritual abuse can be so detrimental, Kruger warns churches of the danger of prioritizing gifting or doctrine over character: “A pastor’s words can either be disproportionately encouraging or disproportionately damaging. Pastors effectively have a ‘pulpit’ inside people’s heads.”⁷⁹ His warning about character and observation about having a continuing voice in counselees’ minds applies equally to counselors.

Unfortunately, some counselors have violated counselees’ sacred trust, and complementarian churches must wrestle with the possibility of sexual misconduct within counseling relationships. Since counselees are vulnerable and counselors usually have more power in the relationship, secular counseling places any sexual contact or innuendo between counselor and counselee in the abuse category. Langberg warns,

A spiritual leader has all the power tools at their disposal and can use them to harm verbally, sexually, emotionally, physically, financially, and spiritually. No matter the tool or the method of delivery, all forms of abuse always do spiritual damage. One cannot sexually, physically, or verbally abuse another person without also inflicting spiritual abuse.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Kruger, *Bully Pulpit*, 24.

⁷⁹ Kruger, *Bully Pulpit*, 11–12, 28.

⁸⁰ Langberg, *Redeeming Power*, 127.

Sexual misconduct and abuse by a spiritual leader also inflict spiritual harm. Biblical counselors acknowledge the agency of all competent adult parties without denying the greater responsibility of teachers (including elders and counselors). Counseling situations may involve sexual temptation and require thoughtful curtailment strategies. Heath Lambert observes that “many pastors fail in ministry because of sexual sin that begins in counseling.”⁸¹ Though striving to inculcate hearts that love God and others as the primary means of avoiding sexual sin and spiritual abuse, churches must also employ other safeguards. While additional measures are discussed in chapter 6, team counseling is one of the most effective deterrents to spiritual abuse. The mere presence of a co-counselor mitigates the risk of improper use of spiritual authority from both a prevention and detection aspect. Male and female co-counseling, when possible and appropriate, helps even more.

When used as God intended, spiritual authority and influence are good gifts; however, they can devolve into spiritual abuse when mishandled. Unfortunately, given the frequency of spiritual abuse and the depth of devastation wrought in the abused, biblical counselors and complementarian churches must proactively consider ways to protect vulnerable counselees. One such safeguard is employing co-counselors, lessening the likelihood of spiritual abuse and sexual impropriety. Essentially, abusing authority and influence betrays the fundamental relationship the church is called to exemplify—that of family.

Perspective 5: Family Relationship

The church is a family, and family members naturally counsel one another without gender restrictions. Aimee Byrd argues, “Christian men and women are more than friends—we are brothers and sisters in Christ, and we need to act according to who

⁸¹ Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 209.

(and whose) we are.”⁸² The call for saints to love as siblings appears in 1 Thessalonians 4:9, Hebrews 13:1, 1 Peter 2:17, and 2 Peter 1:7. These sibling relationships are part of the abundant life meant for believers to enjoy in the present age. Jesus answers Peter’s comment about leaving all to follow Christ with this promise: “There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or children or field for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, who will not receive a hundred times more now at this time—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and eternal life in the age to come” (Mark 10:29–30). Believers must steward this gift wisely. The biblical theme of family relationship among believers appears in the priority of family relationship in the New Testament era and in the metaphor of church as family. This theme should inform a church’s practice in counseling ministry.

Biblical Theme of Family Relationships

In contrast to the often fractured and blended nuclear family structure in Western culture, Ancient Near Eastern culture prioritized the sibling relationship. What might such a priority look like? Joseph Hellerman charts generational family relationships, explaining, “You will notice that for each generation, siblings, not spouses, are identified on the diagram as belonging to the same family. This reality leads us into an exploration of the most intimate and highly charged relationship for people in the world of Jesus and the early Christians—the bond among brothers and sisters.”⁸³ He summarizes key elements of the social order in antiquity: (1) the group came first over the individual; (2) the patrilineal family retained primary allegiance; (3) sanguine siblings enjoyed the closest duty-bound relationship; (4) Jesus challenged his followers to prioritize the surrogate family of believers over family of origin; (5) Paul exhorted

⁸² Aimee Byrd, *Why Can't We Be Friends? Avoidance Is Not Purity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2018), 11, Kindle.

⁸³ Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville: B&H Books, 2009), 39, Kindle.

believers to act like siblings; and (6) the family model continued through early church history.⁸⁴

Jesus prioritizes spiritual family relationships over biological ones in Matthew 12:46–50, concluding with, “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” Paul likewise frequently employs familial metaphors in his letters. Hellerman adds, “Examples abound of sibling solidarity enjoined by Christian writers and practiced in early Christian communities. Paul constantly uses brother-sister language to challenge his communities to treat one another like Mediterranean siblings.”⁸⁵ Charles Bumgardner agrees, “In the NT overall, and in Paul in particular, this sibling language is used considerably more frequently in terms of Christian kinship than it is used in terms of natural kinship. . . . [I]t is evident that siblingship has pride of place as the metaphor for which NT writers reach most often.”⁸⁶ After extensive research into the family language in the Pastoral Epistles (which he refers to as “LTT”), Bumgardner concludes, “Paul’s guidance related to the natural family in the LTT, marked by language related to reputation, is understood not to be a matter of accommodation to the prevailing culture, but a way to extend his gospel ministry by means of his congregations living in accordance with the family ethics they proclaim.”⁸⁷ The enduring nature of the family relationships and the call to live without hypocrisy presses the church in every generation to consider the possible differences between the current cultural understanding of family versus a biblical interpretation.

How should Paul’s repeated usage of familial language, particularly ἀδελφοί, be understood in light of the biblical background? Reidar Aasgaard surmises, “Why did

⁸⁴ Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 205.

⁸⁵ Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 221.

⁸⁶ Charles Joseph Bumgardner, “Family Relationships in the Letters to Timothy and Titus” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 191.

⁸⁷ Bumgardner, abstract to “Family Relationships,” xv.

he employ this specific metaphor? Probably, it had to do with the fact that of all the social roles which Paul might have applied to Christians, the sibling role and relationship appeared the most appropriate. It was a socially important role. It was pre-given, and not the object of choice.”⁸⁸ Believers must learn to love their spiritual siblings just as they learn to love biological siblings, based on God’s assignment rather than mutual interests such as hobbies.

Paul employs familial language with Timothy: “Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and with all propriety, the younger women as sisters” (1 Tim 5:1–2). Byrd observes, “Paul doesn’t give Timothy a bunch of details on how to treat a father or a sister; we already know how to do that. It’s a respectful way to relate to one another—and, when we relate this way, we remove the possibility of sex.”⁸⁹ From a broad complementarian perspective, Denny Burk confirms from these verses that pastors have an obligation to relate to younger women as sisters:

But it is important to notice that Paul places two obligations on Timothy’s relationship to younger women. Timothy must treat them “in all purity” *and* treat them “as sisters.” Pastors have an obligation to get this balance correct.

On the one hand, he must relate to these women “in all purity.” That means he must learn to think about and to talk to these women in ways that neither imply nor intend any sexual possibility. There are certain emotional and physical connections that are only appropriate in marriage. And the faithful pastor must avoid making those connections with women who are not his spouse. He must relate “in all purity.”⁹⁰

Burk correctly detects the dual command in Paul’s instruction to Timothy. All believers must guard purity and moral excellence in their thought life which precludes thinking sexually about anyone besides one’s spouse (Phil 4:8). To the extent that believers can

⁸⁸ Reidar Aasgaard, “*My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!*” *Christian Siblingship in Paul*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series 265 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 312.

⁸⁹ Byrd, *Why Can’t We Be Friends?*, 14.

⁹⁰ Denny Burk, “Treating Young Women as Sisters in Absolute Purity,” *Denny Burk* (blog), May 23, 2017, <https://www.dennyburk.com/treating-young-women-as-sisters-in-absolute-purity/>.

rightly regard fellow believers as divine image-bearing siblings, they will ease the struggle to maintain sexual purity and remain above reproach. Elders and counselors must likewise pay close attention to ensuring that unhealthy and unholy emotional bonds or dependence do not form and flourish.

Burk insightfully places an equal burden on the pastor to not allow his personal holiness efforts to cause him to fail to treat younger women as sisters:

On the other hand, the pastor has an obligation to relate to these young women as “sisters.” This means that a pastor must not simply withdraw from relating to the women of his congregation. He may make private efforts to gouge out his own eye or cut off his own hand (Matt. 5:28–30). But the pastor’s quest for personal holiness does not authorize him to cut off the eyes and hands of Jesus (1 Cor. 12:21). And that is what these younger sisters are—members of the body of Christ. A pastor must not simply tune these women out as if they weren’t members of the body of Christ.⁹¹

Burk strikes a balance in applying this passage, emphasizing the responsibility to engage with women as sisters while maintaining purity through private efforts to preserve holiness. Given the biblical focus on family relationships extending to the church’s very identity, believers should relate to one another as siblings.

Implications for Counseling Ministry

The ACBC Standards of Conduct rightfully prioritizes the counselor’s reputation and character—Christian ethics matter. Amid his staccato instructions, Paul encapsulates and expands these concerns, exhorting the Roman Christians, “Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom 12:9–10). Steven Runge explains the main idea of Romans 12:10: “In other words, instead of concentrating on abhorring evil or being fervent in spirit or enduring affliction, the structure of the text portrays all of these as flowing from genuine love. This kind of love is the wellspring, the source out of which all good things flow. Conversely, without authentic love, all efforts to pursue these

⁹¹ Burk, “Treating Young Women as Sisters in Absolute Purity.”

other things will fail.”⁹² In a similar vein, the complementarian church should focus on viewing each other primarily as deeply loved siblings and, without denying the potential risk, reduce the emphasis on possible sexual misconduct.

Why does this matter? Potential trouble lurks on either side of the narrow path with the narrow gate: one ditch draws with the siren call of temptation and moral failing, but the other ditch buries gifts and talents given to the church for God’s glory and the mutual edification of the saints. Elyse Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher pose a series of haunting questions and more troubling observations about the second ditch (less often emphasized in complementarian contexts):

Women and their gifts are devoured by churches and theologies that promote unbiblical or unbalanced teaching. What happens when seminarians hear that all women, by their female nature, desire to overthrow men? What happens when pastors-in-training are taught only about guarding themselves against temptations, false accusations, and seductresses? What happens when we tell them that friendships with women or coffee with female church members are dangerous and forbidden? Future pastors grow suspicious of their sisters. They will rob the women (and men) in their churches of meaningful partnership and unity in the gospel. The Great Commission and the unbelieving world are underserved when the church prevents men and women from functioning as siblings and allies.⁹³

While these concerns might not mark all or even most evangelical complementarian seminaries and churches, they do remind us that the church today must recapture what it means to live as brothers and sisters in the family of God, and this begins with seeing each other first as siblings to love rather than dangers to avoid or problems to solve.⁹⁴

What if the church more broadly and counselors more specifically fully practiced what Paul preached? How would viewing women as sisters to honor rather than dangers to mitigate or avoid reshape the role of female biblical counselors in complementarian churches? This emphasis would reduce sexual temptation

⁹² Steven E. Runge, *Romans: A Visual and Textual Guide*, High Definition Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), 220, Logos.

⁹³ Elyse M. Fitzpatrick and Eric Schumacher, *Jesus and Gender: Living as Sisters and Brothers in Christ* (Bellingham, WA: Kirkdale, 2022), 51, Kindle.

⁹⁴ Fitzpatrick and Schumacher, *Jesus and Gender*, 202.

hypervigilance, open additional avenues of communication, foster camaraderie, revive the motherly nurturing needed in the household of faith, multiply caregivers, accelerate access to care, and glorify God by living in light of spiritual reality. Viewing women as sisters, or mothers, or daughters rather than possible threats to men’s reputations or temptations would permit the church to enjoy God’s gracious gift of complementarity in counseling ministry.

How might relationships benefit from reevaluating strict adherence to guidelines that limit other-gender relationships in the church to one’s spouse and family of origin? Fitzpatrick and Schumacher cast a vision:

The brother-sister paradigm should motivate love between men and women in the church. A man should be no more afraid of having a conversation (or friendship) with a woman in the church than he should be afraid of interacting with his beloved sister. A woman should offer counsel to a man in conversation the way a kind sister would advise her younger brother.⁹⁵

This call to adopt a familial posture towards other church members aligns with Peter’s instruction, “By obedience to the truth, having purified yourselves for sincere love of the brothers, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pet 1:21–22).

Given the extent of biblical repetition, loving as siblings deserves more emphasis than it is customarily accorded. With this familial framework in place, the call to love fellow believers carries more weight. Recapturing the essence of siblingship would reduce the prevalence of many pitfalls in the church and broaden the contours of the role of female biblical counselors in complementarian churches.

Perspective 6: Wisdom as Learned Skill

Within the family of faith, God’s people grow together in the learned skill of

⁹⁵ Fitzpatrick and Schumacher, *Jesus and Gender*, 202.

wisdom. Biblical counseling embodies Scripture's call, given without gender restriction, to live wisely and to help others mature in the faith. Moving beyond the implications of interdependence in favor of team counseling discussed above, this section deals with how wisdom as learned skill correlates to counseling in the community of faith. Wisdom employed in the biblical counseling setting involves applying specific insights in problem solving. To borrow Murray's terminology, in this sense, such counseling wisdom serves to help "complete" the larger spiritual formation of men and women in the church. It does not "compete" with the shepherding efforts of church leadership.⁹⁶ Sometimes women have more wisdom, skill, and training than men in this non-authoritative, one-another ministry. All the saints should engage in reproducing wisdom as learned skill in the church family, without gender restrictions.

Biblical counselors draw on lived experience and Scripture to help individuals attain wisdom. Martin Shields provides one historical perspective: "Wisdom in the Old Testament describes the practical skills associated with living a successful life. These range from the ability to create highly skilled works to the intellectual capability required to make choices that result in favorable outcomes and avoid troubles."⁹⁷ One example, Proverbs 2:6, identifies the true source of wisdom: "For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding"; this proverb lends credence to the biblical counselor's heavy reliance on Scripture. Paul similarly reminds the Colossians of the goal of employing wisdom in his labor for them: "We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ" (Col 1:28). Kellemen also associates this verse with the practice and goal of biblical counseling: "What's the context for Paul's reference to Christ's wisdom? It's the same context that

⁹⁶ Murray, "Completing, Not Competing," 208.

⁹⁷ Martin A. Shields, "Wisdom," in *Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), n.p., Logos.

brings folks to counseling sessions today: relationship with God—that they would be mature in Christ and in relationships with one another—that they would be united in love and inner-life issues—that they would be encouraged in heart.”⁹⁸ Even when counselees come with lesser goals such as seeking help to “fix their spouse,” biblical counselors draw from the wisdom of Scripture and lead the counselee in understanding how to obey the Lord in their present difficulty.

Counselees more readily identify their desire for relief from suffering than their greater need for wisdom to replace their foolishness. Paul David Tripp describes employing wisdom in biblical counseling: “The purpose of biblical counseling is to change us from being fools to being wise.”⁹⁹ That change process involves probing the details of lives and situations in the depth and breadth that elders rarely have the capacity to extend to all members seeking their counsel. Demonstrating a distinct difference from secular therapy models, Tripp advises, “Personal ministry must overturn the felt needs of foolishness, not bow before them.”¹⁰⁰ He further instructs counselors to thoroughly embrace biblical commands and dispense wisdom: “When we counsel, rather than give people just principles to tweak their lives, we need instead to call them to make definitive risks of faith. We ought to say to them: ‘Let go of that control you’ve tried to have over everybody in your life. Trust the sovereignty of your Lord.’”¹⁰¹ The call to trust and obey the wisdom of the Lord should mark the spiritually intentional relationships not merely with counselors, but among all believers.

Whether formally in a counseling setting or informally amidst day-to-day activities as members of the same church, individuals seek wisdom based on presumed

⁹⁸ Robert W. Kellemen, *Gospel-Centered Counseling: How Christ Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 38.

⁹⁹ Paul David Tripp, “Wisdom in Counseling,” *JBC* 19, no. 2 (Winter 2001): 4.

¹⁰⁰ Tripp, “Wisdom in Counseling,” 9.

¹⁰¹ Tripp, “Wisdom in Counseling,” 13.

knowledge and expertise. People ask mechanics about their cars, nurses about their health, grandparents and successful parents about childrearing difficulties, and counselors about everything in between. The confused, worried, anxious, fretful, and doubting seek relief through acquiring wisdom. Andrew Knowles exclaims, “Wisdom gives life! Wise people are life-givers, because their searching sayings, shrewd comparisons, and teasing riddles make us think. They make truth intriguing and attractive.”¹⁰² While the Lord is the giver of wisdom, he often mediates it through his people. Mark Olivero explains, “God’s wisdom is the perfect divine judgment and insight arising from his infinite knowing—and this wisdom is something he shares with his creatures according to their need and for their good.”¹⁰³ Such wisdom necessitates proclamation from the pulpit and individual application in the counseling room and around the dinner table.

How does this vision of community life accord with the information age? Brett McCracken responds to the plaintive beckoning of wisdom in Proverbs 1:20–22 with this haunting observation: “Our world has more and more information, but less and less wisdom. More data; less clarity. More stimulation; less synthesis. More distraction; less stillness. More pontificating; less pondering. More opinion; less research. More speaking; less listening.”¹⁰⁴ What a ripe opportunity to connect wisdom as lived experience with biblical counseling—to slow down and apply the ministry of listening as advocated by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and to help believers live wisely in an unwise age. McCracken’s description of wisdom in action sounds like a good biblical counseling session: “Wisdom is knowing what *to do* with knowledge gained through various means of education: how

¹⁰² Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2001), 249, Logos.

¹⁰³ Mark Olivero, “God’s Wisdom,” in *Lexham Survey of Theology*, ed. Brannon Ellis and Mark Ward (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), n.p., Logos.

¹⁰⁴ Brett McCracken, *The Wisdom Pyramid: Feeding Your Soul in a Post-Truth World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 11, Kindle. Proverbs 1:20–22 instructs, “Wisdom calls out in the street; she makes her voice heard in the public squares. She cries out above the commotion; she speaks at the entrance of the city gates: ‘How long, inexperienced ones, will you love ignorance: How long will you mockers enjoy mocking and you fools hate knowledge?’”

to apply knowledge and information in everyday life; how to discern if something is true or not; how to live well in light of truth gained. Wisdom is not merely knowing the right answers. It's about living rightly."¹⁰⁵ Counselors come alongside believers to show them the way and methods for course corrections when they stumble, giving them both biblical instruction and life experience. Developing wisdom requires both contemplation and lived experience.

Unlike the gender-based limitations in the Pauline Epistles regarding teaching and exercising authority, in Proverbs, the limitations on sharing wisdom relate to fools. Examples include the proverb, "Don't speak to a fool, for he will despise the insight of your words" (Prov 23:9), as well as the enigmatic couplet, "Don't answer a fool according to his foolishness or you'll be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his foolishness or he'll become wise in his own eyes" (Prov 24:5–6). Like the one-another commands discussed in chapter 3, biblical counseling expresses the pursuit and practice of biblical wisdom. Wisdom and the call to pursue wisdom permeate Scripture. God's people grow in wisdom as they learn together how to walk in his ways. Without neglecting reasonable measures to protect propriety, everyone is called to serve the corporate body with their God-given wisdom without respect to gender—one more reason that women should be free to serve women, men, and couples through biblical counseling.

Perspective 7: Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual gifts, like the ministry of mutual Christian care and wisdom as a learned skill, overlap significantly with biblical counseling. In this section, I first cite the relevant texts and explore the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts and then discuss the gifts that most directly intersect with the ministry of biblical counseling. I conclude by

¹⁰⁵ McCracken, *The Wisdom Pyramid*, 66.

evaluating implications of the lack of gender restrictions regarding the use of spiritual gifts for female counselors.

Biblical Teaching on Spiritual Gifts

While the term “spiritual gifts” does not appear in Scripture, Ralph Martin explains, “The general sense of the term ‘spiritual gifts’ covers all endowments of the Spirit found in Christian experience and designed to be of service to the Church.”¹⁰⁶ The ministry of biblical counseling falls within the realm of Spirit endowments for service in the church. Other scholars likewise emphasize the Spirit’s enabling and gifting for the benefit of the church without including gender-restrictive caveats. Thomas Schreiner defines spiritual gifts as “gifts of grace granted by the Holy Spirit which are designed for the edification of the church.”¹⁰⁷ D. A. Carson similarly highlights the purpose of such gifts for the church: “God establishes his brand of harmony by a lavish grant of highly diverse gifts, each contributing to the body as a whole.”¹⁰⁸ The Spirit gives these gifts as he deems fit for his purposes in the church, and all the gifts received must be deployed appropriately for the benefit of the church.

The gift lists (Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:7–11, 28; Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 4:10–11) contain both similarities and dissimilarities. Fairly similar activities occur between the lists with a consensus purpose to edify the church. Yet there is also dissimilarity in the fact that the lists include both individuals and activities that individuals perform as well as differences in the order and variety of included people and activities. Paul lists people or offices in Ephesians 4:11: “And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets,

¹⁰⁶ Ralph P. Martin, “Gifts, Spiritual,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, D–G, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1016.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are and Why They Matter* (Nashville: B&H, 2018), 18, Scribd.

¹⁰⁸ D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 32.

some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.” He does the same in 1 Corinthians 12:28a: “And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers.” Paul then adds activities: “next miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, various kinds of tongues” (1 Cor 12:28b). The immediate surrounding Scripture does not specify if the people gifts apply to both genders or just men. At the same time, Scripture includes women among those prophesying (Exod 15:20; Num 12; Judg 4:4; 2 Kgs 22:14–20; 2 Chr 34:22–28; Joel 2:28; 1 Cor 12:2–16).¹⁰⁹

In the only non-Pauline gift text, Peter instructs, “Just as each one has received a gift, use it to serve others, as good stewards of the varied grace of God. If anyone speaks, let it be as one who speaks God’s words; if anyone serves, let it be from the strength God provides, so that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ in everything” (1 Pet 4:10–11). The longer functional lists of spiritual gifts appear in the Pauline Epistles—in the concluding portion where the practical imperatives follow the theological indicatives. Paul instructs the believers in Rome, “According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: if prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one’s faith; if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness” (Rom 12:6–8). Romans contains no gender-restrictive passages and no mention of limitations on the exercise of the gifts by gender.

On the other hand, the eleventh chapter of 1 Corinthians contains the head covering passage (11:2–16) exegeted in chapter 2 of this dissertation; this passage regulates the apparel of both men and women when praying and prophesying in the gathered assembly, confirms the interdependency of both genders, and designates man as

¹⁰⁹ Addressing the competing definitions of prophecy as well as the continuation-cessation debate over miraculous gifts is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I will focus on spiritual gifts particularly relevant to biblical counseling without delving into prophecy/prophesying beyond noting that women are included recipients and practitioners.

head of the woman. The instructions for the Lord's Supper follow the head covering passage. The rest of chapter 12 discusses the melding of unity with diversity, and chapter 13 describes love as the superior gift. Nestled between these other topics, Paul gives his lengthiest description of spiritual gifts:

A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good: to one is given a message of wisdom through the Spirit, to another, a message of knowledge by the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another, gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another, the performing of miracles, to another, prophecy, to another, distinguishing between spirits, to another, different kinds of tongues, to another, interpretation of tongues. One and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each person as he wills. (1 Cor 12:7–11)

The scriptural lists indicate that each Christ-follower receives at least one gift and a command to use that gift (or those gifts) in a manner consistent with the nature of the gift for the benefit of the church. While egalitarians interpret these gift passages as license for women to teach and pastor, John Piper and Wayne Grudem warn, “Having a spiritual gift is not a warrant to use it however we please. . . . Spiritual gifts are not only given by the Holy Spirit, they are also regulated by the Holy Scriptures.”¹¹⁰ They support their conclusion with an appeal to Paul's requiring an interpreter when the gift of tongues is employed and limiting prophesying to one person at a time (1 Cor 14:28–30).¹¹¹ As argued in the second chapter of this dissertation, women are precluded from teaching men in the gathered assembly based on 1 Timothy 2:9–15. At the same time, as argued in the third chapter on the one-another passages, women are not excluded or excused from teaching in other settings. Though teaching is significant, it is not the only spiritual gift involved in biblical counseling.

¹¹⁰ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, “An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers,” in *RBMW*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, 77.

¹¹¹ Piper and Grudem, “An Overview of Central Concerns,” 77.

Carson compares the lists of gifts and observes that no list is “meant to be exhaustive” and that “the order of the gifts varies considerably.” Further, Carson notes that

the lists as a whole contain an impressive mixture of what some might label “natural” and “supernatural” endowments, or “spectacular” and “more ordinary” gifts. This is in line with what we have gleaned in Paul’s argument in 12:1–7. The intriguing thing is that Paul himself makes no such distinctions; it is the same God who works all things in all people. Paul’s overarching doctrine of divine sovereignty is precisely what can prompt him to ask the Corinthians elsewhere, “For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?” (1 Cor. 4:7). This suggests in turn that Paul would not have been uncomfortable with spiritual gifts made up of some mix of so-called natural talent—what he would consider to still be God’s gift—and of specific Spirit-energized endowment.¹¹²

Carson’s understanding of the connection of the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 with reference to all human ability directly endowed by God in 1 Corinthians 4 aligns with the synergistic nature of biblical counseling. God gives both gifts and commands; counselors receive gifts and work diligently to increase their skills. In this sense, biblical counseling combines received gifts with learned skills. The Spirit gives gifts according to his will for God’s glory and the corporate good of the church, and each believer incurs an obligation to steward their received gift(s) and ability to those same ends.

Spiritual Gifts and Biblical Counseling

Biblical counseling clearly involves words of wisdom, teaching, and exhortation (admonishing) to a greater degree as well as service, leading, and mercy to a lesser degree. Gerald Small links the message of wisdom to counseling as a spiritual gift: “The person with this gift [wisdom] will display an insight into people and circumstances with an understanding of what needs to be done and how it is to be done. This gift will be evident when someone consistently communicates wise advice in given situations. . . . It

¹¹² Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 37.

will be evident among those who do counseling.”¹¹³ Men and women receive the message of wisdom and should enjoy the freedom to serve both men and women with the gift through biblical counseling.

Since the meaning and restriction of authoritative teaching in 1 Timothy 2:12 dominates the second chapter and teaching and admonishing appears in the third chapter of this dissertation, in this section I am limiting my discussion to the added dimension of the responsibility to steward these two gifts. Since women receive the gift of teaching, complementarian scholars regularly refute egalitarian arguments that women are free to teach men without any restriction.¹¹⁴ Defining the gift of exhortation, Schreiner links the noun form of παρακαλέω (*paraklēsis*) with the aforementioned semantic range of “entreat, exhort, comfort, and summon” to counseling: “This gift is rather broad and includes urging others to live righteously and showing pastoral care to the afflicted and distressed. Pastoral counseling belongs under the gift of exhortation, which is again one of the central ministries in churches as members care for one another in concrete ways.”¹¹⁵

Speaking of what he categorizes as gifts of support and direction, Carson notes, “Some have suggested that these two gifts represent the spiritual endowment necessary for the offices of deacon and bishop respectively. Doubtless that much is true, but there is nothing to suggest that these gifts are restricted to people serving in these offices.”¹¹⁶ Women likewise receive these gifts often referred to as helping and administration and may exercise them in the church, including the context of a counseling

¹¹³ Gerald G. Small, “The Use of Spiritual Gifts in the Ministry of Oversight,” *Journal of Christian Education* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1980): 29.

¹¹⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching,” in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 212.

¹¹⁵ Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 25.

¹¹⁶ Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 41.

session. Schreiner describes the gift of mercy: “Those who have the gift of mercy have a special capacity to minister to those who are hurting. All believers, of course, are to show compassion, but those with the gift of mercy have a special knack of attending to those who are in pain.”¹¹⁷ Counselors demonstrate their love for counselees through their ministry of mercy in times of need. Carson argues, “The various spiritual gifts, as important as they are and as highly as Paul values them, can all be duplicated by pagans. This quality of love cannot be.”¹¹⁸

In conclusion, God bestows spiritual gifts, as he does with the one-another commands, without gender restrictions and for the mutual edification of believers. The Spirit gives gifts according to his will for God’s glory and the corporate good of the church; consequently, each believer incurs an obligation to steward each received gift and ability to those same ends. Therefore, restricting counseling based on gender diminishes the saints’ freedom to build up the church in the specific ways the Spirit equipped and tasked them to do. Such extrapolated restrictions add a rule that precludes obedience to explicit commands in Scripture.

Perspective 8: Christian Liberty

The diversity of spiritual gifts highlights our interdependence as brothers and sisters. The specific ways that believers live out many of the above principles fall into the sphere of Christian liberty. The counseling ministry of complementarian women should likewise be exercised within this sphere of liberty. Beynon and Tooher provide an excellent introduction to considering Christian liberty with respect to complementarianism. They describe their approach: “(1) We accept God’s Word as good, right and authoritative, (2) we read and apply the Bible within our own culture, (3) we

¹¹⁷ Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts*, 25.

¹¹⁸ Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 65.

hold this as a secondary but important issue, and (4) we respect people’s conscience in application.”¹¹⁹ Their explanation of the last point merits lengthy quotation:

Whenever we approach the topic of complementarianism, our consciences, and those of other people, are important considerations. No one has the right to bind another person’s conscience more tightly than the word of God does. We need to respect each other’s consciences, especially in details on which the Bible is silent or gives us freedom (1 Corinthians 10:27–29). Often among those who identify as complementarians, the differences of opinion are not so much about what the biblical passages are saying (although, of course, there is that) but rather about what complementarianism looks like in practice. We do not all have to come to the same conclusion in every area of practice. So, when we are in conversation with someone who differs from us on this issue—but who, nevertheless, delights in God’s good word and wants it to shape the way they practice Christian ministry—we need to keep the conversation going and yet avoid walking all over each other’s consciences. We need to learn how to live with difference in these cases.¹²⁰

Once again, complementarians acknowledge common core theological commitments expressed in or through a wide array of practices; this commonality merits further conversation rather than harsh judgment. Broad, thick, full, and hard complementarians have much more in common theologically with narrow, thin, partial, and soft complementarians than they have in distinction. From this perspective, whether men and women can or should counsel each other warrants further discussion. Adams’s advice pertains here:

Nouthetic counselors must learn to distinguish clearly between good advice that they think grows out of biblical principles and those principles themselves. The latter (“You have not grounds for divorce; it would be sin!”) they may enforce with the utmost authority; the former (“Why not set up a conference table in order to begin to learn how to speak the truth in love?”) they must present with more caution.¹²¹

Adams correctly identifies the need to differentiate between biblical commands which should be enforced versus possible implications or advice offered with a more cautious approach.

¹¹⁹ Beynon and Tooher, *Embracing Complementarianism*, 13–16.

¹²⁰ Beynon and Tooher, *Embracing Complementarianism*, 16.

¹²¹ Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual: The Practice of Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 16.

Even the purest motives to build fences that protect people from sinning often lead to the creation of rules that actually hinder believers in their ongoing fight against sin. David Garland presumes that the Pharisees initially wanted to help the Jewish people live righteously.¹²² However, he sounds a warning that seems similar to my misgivings about proscribing women from counseling men:

Christian communities also have an oral tradition that fills the gaps and directs them on what precisely they should and should not do. For example, someone may ask, Should we tithe on gross income or net income? . . . The answers to these questions usually do not come from explicit passages in the Scripture but from a tradition that tries to honor God's requirements and make things definite so that we know what we are to do and when we have done it. But we court danger when we treat decisions on such matters as sacrosanct and apply them rigidly.

Christian communities will also stress one thing or another to reinforce their identity over against others. Sometimes the stress will be on a particular practice; sometimes, a distinctive doctrine. In holding to this tradition, they want to make clear that they are this kind of people and not like "them" (whoever "them" may be.) The danger lurks that we may turn our distinctiveness and purity into an idol that supersedes the word of God.¹²³

While affirming the explicit biblical command for women not to teach men in the gathered assembly and for all believers to live above reproach, I nevertheless believe that churches should challenge the intrusion of human rules that infringe upon the joyful obedience of other divine commands.

In his letters to the Corinthians and the Romans, the apostle Paul likewise warns believers to exercise restraint rather than risk impinging on the Christian liberty of others (Rom 14:1–15:6; 1 Cor 10:23–31). As an application of these two passages for counseling, counselors should not infringe upon the liberty of counselees in a counseling setting; furthermore, complementarian churches should be reticent to restrict the freedom of women to minister to men and couples through biblical counseling.

¹²² David E. Garland, *Mark*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 279, Logos. Garland is commenting on Mark 7:14–23.

¹²³ Garland, *Mark*, 280–81.

1 Corinthians 10:23–31

Paul has much to say that speaks directly to the proper exercise of authority and liberty in the church. Prior to discussing the Corinthians' issue of eating meat sold in the market, he begins with, "‘Everything is permissible,’ but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible,’ but not everything builds up. No one is to seek his own good, but the good of the other person" (1 Cor 10:23–24). Schreiner explains that Paul is likely quoting and then refuting the Corinthians' claim to unlimited rights before commenting, "Other questions, however, must be asked, for one must determine whether the desired action is beneficial and whether it is constructive (*oikodomei*). An action may be permissible, yet it may prove to be unhelpful or even destructive for another person."¹²⁴

How do we translate a principle from the context of meat sold in the market to the question of same-gendered biblical counseling? While an egalitarian would likely demand the right to exercise gifts, a complementarian may alternatively fall susceptible to the easy path of simple compliance without critical engagement. My concern echoes two Scriptures: first, Proverbs 3:27, "When it is in your power, don't withhold good from the one to whom it belongs"; and second, James 4:17, "So it is sin to know the good and yet not do it." When the Lord calls and equips church members with biblical counseling skills and issues dozens of one-another commands without gender restriction, should other members needing their wisdom and skill unnecessarily be deprived of the gifts God grafted into the church? The counselor with the capacity to help a struggling brother or sister for their good should have the freedom to do so (1 Cor 10:23–24).

The center paragraph of the passage shifts gears: "Eat everything that is sold in the meat market, without raising questions for the sake of conscience, since the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it" (1 Cor 10:25–26). Paul repeats the instruction to not ask questions in verse 27 and references the conscience again in verses 27, 28, and 29. James

¹²⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 7 (London: InterVarsity, 2018), 214, Logos.

Davis comments, “Abruptly Paul turns to those who have gone to the opposite extreme and placed more restrictions than necessary on their freedom of conscience and behavior.”¹²⁵ Paul deems it necessary to warn believers to avoid overcomplicating situations and binding the conscience but instead to default to a disposition that seeks the best for others over oneself. The passage ends with the injunction, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or Greeks or the church of God. Just as I also try to please everyone in everything, not seeking my own benefit, but the benefit of many, so that they may be saved” (1 Cor 10:31–33). Schreiner helpfully summarizes and theologizes,

Rights and liberty are not the only or even the most important factors to consider in life. Believers must consider what is beneficial and particularly what builds up and strengthens others. In every dimension of life believers must live to the glory and honor of God, and living for the glory of God is closely tied to living for the benefit and salvation of others. Christians live for God’s honor and praise when they order their lives so that others are edified and encouraged in their faith. If believers know that food was offered to idols, they must not partake, whether the food is offered in the temple or on the open market. If believers do not know the origin of the food, they are free to eat it without asking questions.¹²⁶

Christian liberty seeks to bless others and advocate for the rights of others, rather than preserving claims to rights, power, and privilege for oneself. Biblical counseling, while surely not the only modality, represents one of the best ways for Christians to build up and strengthen one another in the faith.

Romans 14:1–15:6

It is not entirely clear what precisely prompted Paul to write to the church he had not yet had the longed-for opportunity to meet.¹²⁷ Commentators demonstrate a noticeable variety in choosing and titling textual units for discussion. The “welcome one

¹²⁵ James A. Davis, *Commentary on 1–2 Corinthians*, Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary: EBook Short Series (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2012), 63, Scribd.

¹²⁶ Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 218–19.

¹²⁷ Everett F. Harrison, *Romans*, in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, *Romans through Galatians*, ed. Frank Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 3.

another” in 14:1 and 15:7 seem to frame Paul’s concentration on the obligation of the strong toward the weak. This passage follows the command to obey civil authorities (13:1–7) and to walk in love and wisdom (13:8–14); it precedes the last portion of the body of the letter, coming right before the closing greetings. As Paul nears the end of the letter, he “deals with what is concrete and practical in the life of the believer and, more particularly, with his life in the fellowship of the church.”¹²⁸ These practical details likely correspond in some measure to issues in Rome that had been conveyed to Paul.¹²⁹

His response to the church in Rome bears striking resemblance to 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. However, in contrast to the situation in Galatia where the gospel was being distorted, Handley Moule observes, “*Here*, at Rome, the question was different; it was secondary. It concerned certain details of Christian practice.”¹³⁰ The question of what to eat was not of primary importance (1 Cor 15:3–4). Paul’s response to one preaching a different gospel was to “let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8b). To the church in Rome, his response evidences a different type of concern. Paul writes,

Accept anyone who is weak in faith, but don’t argue about disputed matters. One person believes he may eat anything, while one who is weak eats only vegetables. One who eats must not look down on one who does not eat, and one who does not eat must not judge one who does, because God has accepted him. Who are you to judge another’s household servant? Before his own Lord he stands or falls. And he will stand, because the Lord is able to make him stand. (Rom 14:1–5)

Paul instructs believers to exercise caution in judging matters that the Lord has reserved for his own judgment. Paul countenanced no spiritual snobbery nor dismissiveness. Dropping down a few verses, Paul adds, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (14:17) and “It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to

¹²⁸ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 172.

¹²⁹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 827.

¹³⁰ Handley Moule, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1975), 379, Logos (italics original).

stumble” (14:21). The concern goes beyond the outward act of consumption to the inward disposition to preserve unity and display love. The overarching theme respects the rights and responsibilities of believers to decide matters not directly addressed in Scripture.

As a matter of conscience, if a pastor and a woman in the church reach different conclusions about whether she may counsel men in the church, both will need to seek to understand each other’s perspective and perhaps persuade the other. If the pastor wants her to counsel men and her conscience prevents her from doing so, he should respect her convictions. If she believes that she may counsel men and that God has called and equipped her to do so and the pastor does not, she must submit to the pastor or change churches.

Conclusion

Applying multiperspectivalism to the role of female counselors underscores the need to consider the full breadth of Scripture’s themes rather than deciding the issue based upon a few prooftexts. Too often, complementarians focus on the male headship and the risk of sexual temptation to the exclusion and neglect of other responsibilities. Each biblical theme explored in this chapter contributes to the development of the role of female biblical counselors in complementarian churches. First, co-counseling recognizes human interdependence and guards against an individual counselor’s deficiencies. Elders are called to counsel, but they are not called to fulfill the ministry of counseling alone. One of the primary functions of elders is to equip the saints to do the work of ministry, so adopting the practice of training both men and women (who will later train other believers—men or women) while counseling members provides an excellent training opportunity for individuals desiring to learn how to counsel biblically. Second, of all people, complementarians should delight in employing both male and female perspectives when counseling in the church, recognizing the richness of the corresponding differences. Third, trained members multiply the elders’ ministry without

undermining their governing and public teaching responsibilities. Fourth, given the increased awareness of the prevalence of spiritual abuse occurring in churches, it is now incumbent upon churches to recognize and put safety measures in place to reduce the likelihood of abuse occurring within counseling relationships. Fifth, another way to help deter misuse of spiritual authority or influence and sexual impropriety is for the church to cultivate their sibling relationships. Sixth, the Lord calls believers to pursue and share wisdom without gender discrimination. Seventh, the Lord bestows spiritual gifts that he intends the saints to use to edify the church, and biblical counseling is an ideal delivery method to help each other mature in faith and Christlikeness. Eighth, God's design for his church incorporates Christian liberty and discourages believers from curtailing the freedom of others. Cumulatively, these themes demonstrate that trained female counselors should be free to serve both men and women in complementarian churches.

CHAPTER 5
BIBLICAL PRECEDENTS OF WOMEN
COUNSELING MEN

Having surveyed the literature, exegeted the gender-restrictive biblical texts relevant to the counseling ministry of women, studied the ministry of mutual Christian care passages, and explored eight related biblical themes, now I consider the biblical examples of Deborah, Huldah, Abigail, and Priscilla. These women taught, advised, and co-labored with men in a manner that resembles modern biblical counseling. Scripture portrays each woman's ministry to men positively; therefore, to the extent that their actions correspond to biblical counseling, women ought to still have the freedom to minister to men through biblical counseling. Biblical narratives sometimes merely describe what transpired rather than prescribing examples for believers to follow. Nevertheless, counselors and church leaders may glean insight from the handful of pericopes that resemble modern biblical counseling to some extent, to inform and shape the role of female biblical counselors in complementarian churches.

Current practices and regulations regarding the roles of women in the church sometimes appear diminished when compared with the biblical examples. Robert Saucy acknowledges, "Scripture reveals a significant ministry of women among God's people, especially in the NT [New Testament] Church. This biblical picture of the activity of women seems often incompatible with the actual practice of the contemporary conservative church under the observance of the Pauline prohibition."¹ Saucy's

¹ Robert L. Saucy, "Women's Prohibition to Teach Men: An Investigation into Its Meaning and Contemporary Application," *JETS* 37, no. 1 (1994), 79. Saucy refers directly to 1 Timothy 2:12 to describe the Pauline prohibition and cites 1 Corinthians 11:3-12 and 14:34-35, Ephesians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:18, Titus 2:5, and 1 Peter 3:1, 5 as further indication of a woman's obligation to submit.

observation mirrors many women’s experience and frustration in complementarian churches when faithful women are stymied in their attempts to follow the example of women’s roles and activities presented in Scripture.² The conservative church’s desire to avoid the slippery slope leading to egalitarianism often results in an overcorrection that unintentionally precludes women from fulfilling God’s commands.

Without indicating disapproval of the women’s actions, the biblical authors reveal situations where Deborah, Abigail, Huldah, and Priscilla advised male leaders and where Deborah ministered directly to both men and women. Notably, in each of these examples, the setting involves at least the possibility, if not probability, of private instruction. In the case of Deborah and Huldah, the people came to the women; however, Abigail and Priscilla appear to have initiated an encounter with male leaders once they realized the men needed a course correction.

Deborah

The book of Judges marks the transition period for Israel between the conquest under Joshua and the establishment of the monarchy, a tumultuous era summarized by the refrain, “In those days there was no king in Israel, everyone did whatever seemed right to him” (Judg 17:6; 21:5). Deborah succeeds Shamgar as judge in Israel during the period when Israel disobeyed God and consequently endured twenty years of harsh oppression under King Jabin (Judg 3:31–4:4). The pericope opens, “Deborah, a prophetess and the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to settle disputes” (Judg 4:4–5). What activities and positions does Deborah’s multifaceted role as prophetess and judge entail? Deborah helps people resolve conflicts privately, conveys the Lord’s message to military leaders, and is one of the

² Jacki C. King, *The Calling of Eve: How the Women of the Bible Inspire the Women of the Church* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2022), 12.

Lord's chosen instruments to deliver Israel. The reader may tend to assume that Deborah is in a different category than that of judge or deliverer; consequently, attention must be given to the descriptions used for Deborah in comparison with the other judges named in the biblical book. To demonstrate that a woman was able, with Scripture's approbation, to settle disputes, relay God's message to male leaders, and exercise a degree of authority and leadership over men, I will (1) discuss lexical elements of the narrative, (2) analyze Deborah's multifaceted role, and (3) conclude with complementarian implications of the Deborah narrative for the role of female biblical counselors.

Lexical Considerations

In stark contrast to the debate surrounding Junia's gender in Romans 16:7, the biblical author leaves no doubt that Deborah is female. According to Robert Boling, the introduction to her story in English fails to capture the stress found in the Hebrew: "*She*. Not any one else. The emphasis is clear from the Hebrew word order, independent pronoun preceding the verb for emphasis."³ Kenneth Way concurs, "The narrator actually uses seven grammatically feminine words in a row to introduce Deborah into the story. By emphasizing her gender, the narrator may underscore her extraordinary role as an authority in a patriarchal society."⁴ What sort of authority or leadership did judges hold? How is the Hebrew word for judging applied similarly or differently to Deborah compared to the other judges? A brief look at the semantic range and usage helps answer these questions.

H. Tübingen Niehr categorizes the verbal and nominal usage of **שפ** as follows: as a verb, "(1) rule, (2) judge, (3) do justice," and "(4) dispute," and as a noun, "(1) ruler, (2) governor, (3) judge, (4) administrator of justice in Israel," and "(5) judges

³ Robert G. Boling, *Judges: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 5th ed., AB 6A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), 95 (italics original).

⁴ Kenneth C. Way, *Judges and Ruth*, Teach the Text Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 43.

of Israel.”⁵ After considering the etymology of the root term, Niehr further explains that the verb “denotes an act of ruling or the exercise of authority with further differentiation depending on the context.”⁶ More specifically, Temba Mafico explains, “The main task for which the judges were appointed was to maintain harmonious relations among the Israelites. The judge made legal decisions in civil disputes (Judg 4:5; 1 Sam 7:15; cf. 2 Sam 15:4).”⁷ Interestingly, Deborah is the only judge described as settling disputes in the book of Judges—a role similar to a biblical counselor. Echoing Niehr, Temba Mafico argues, “The best meaning of the term in every usage is determined only by paying close attention to the context.”⁸ In this case, surveying the usage of the term throughout the book of Judges creates a contextual understanding of how the term should apply to Deborah.

In the book of Judges alone, the root **טפֿשׁ** appears more than a dozen times, most often translated as “judge,” “judging,” or a close cognate. However, translators use different English terms for this root’s occurrence once in the account of Sampson and when referencing the Sidonians. Prior to Deborah and Barak’s story, **טפֿשׁ** is used five times: 2:16, “The Lord raised up judges”; 2:17, “But they did not listen to their judges”; 2:18, “Whenever the Lord raised up a judge”; 2:19, “Whenever the judge died, the Israelites would act even more corruptly than their fathers”; and 3:10, “The Spirit of the Lord came on him [Othniel] and he judged Israel.” Daniel Block explains that the term “is used as a general description for the leaders of Israel in 2:16–19, from which we may infer that the leaders described in the book may be so designated.”⁹ The introductory

⁵ H. Tübingen Niehr, “**טפֿשׁ**,” in *TDNT*, 15:411.

⁶ Niehr, “**טפֿשׁ**,” in *TDNT*, 15:415.

⁷ Temba L. J. Mafico, “Judge, Judging,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, H–J, ed. David Noel Freedman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 1105.

⁸ Mafico, “Judge, Judging,” 1106.

⁹ Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, NAC 6 (Nashville: B&H, 1999), 22.

formula in 2:16–19 foreshadows the cycle that unfolds in the remainder of the book— Israel sins, reaps bitter consequences, cries out to the Lord, the Lord provides a judge that delivers his people, they enjoy a period of peace while the judge lives, and the cycle repeats.

This root word occurring in Deborah’s story appears in 4:4 (“She was *judging* Israel at that time”) and 4:5 (“and the Israelites went up to her to *settle disputes*”), but the term does not appear in the poetic version of her story in Judges 5. Gideon’s story in chapters 6 through 9 omits reference to **שָׁפַט**. The author employs **שָׁפַט** frequently in the subsequent periscopes (italics added): 10:2, “Tola *judged* Israel twenty-three years”; 10:3, “After him came Jair the Gileadite, who *judged* Israel twenty-two years”; 11:27, “Let the Lord who is the *judge* decide today between the Israelites and the Ammonites”; 12:7, “Jephthah *judged* Israel six years”; 12:8, “Ibzan, who was from Bethlehem, *judged* Israel after Jephthah”; 12:9, “Ibzan *judged* Israel seven years”; 12:11, “Elon, who was from Zebulun *judged* Israel ten years”; 12:13, “After Elon, Abdon son of Hillel, who was from Pirathon, *judged* Israel”; 12:14, “Abdon *judged* Israel eight years”; 13:12, “Then Manoah asked, ‘When your words come true, what will be the boy’s [Samson] *responsibilities* and work?’”; 15:20, “And he [Samson] *judged* Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines”; 16:31, “So he [Samson] *judged* Israel twenty years”; and 18:7, “*living securely* in the same way as the Sidonians.” The concluding chapters (19–21) do not include **שָׁפַט**. English translations employ the participial form “was judging” for Deborah rather than “judged.” Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch explain,

Deborah is called **נְבִיאָה שֹׁפֵט** on account of her prophetic gift, like Miriam in Ex. 15:20, and Hulda the wife of Shallum in 2 Kings 22:14. This gift qualified her to judge the nation (the participle **שֹׁפֵט** expresses the permanence of the act of judging), i.e., first of all to settle such disputes among the people themselves as the lower courts were unable to decide, and which ought therefore, according to Deut. 17:8, to be referred to the supreme judge of the whole nation.¹⁰

¹⁰ K&D 2:219.

Only Deborah has both a prose and poetic version of her story preserved. Trent Butler suggests dual purposes for this variety: “The extensive introduction of Deborah underlines her importance to Israel’s history, but it also plays an important part in the narrative strategy of the story. The poem treats Deborah in a different way. It presents her as a national hero.”¹¹ Her story does not explicitly state that the Lord raised her up to judge. Butler understands this exclusion to convey that “God works behind the scenes” and further notes, “The editor appears to endorse Deborah as the savior who will supply the answer to the people’s cry. But she is a woman and already judging Israel.”¹² In summary, the use of the Hebrew term for judging does not appear to change meaning when applied to male judges or Deborah, the female judge.

Deborah’s Multifaceted Role

Deborah is unique among the judges—she is also a prophetess and already providing dispute resolution for the people before participating in the Lord’s deliverance. Since dispute resolution features prominently in biblical counseling, it is worthwhile to consider Deborah’s example from a variety of angles. Scripture’s brevity on the matter leads to speculation. Block indicates that the root טפֿשׁ has a meaning broader than the judicial sense: “These individuals were instruments of deliverance from external enemies; their purpose was not the settlement of internal disputes.”¹³ He explains that Judges 4:5 “describes the manner in which Deborah performed her professional duties and sets the stage in the reader’s mind for the call of the deliverer. Her posture is described as ‘sitting’ under the Palm Tree of Deborah.”¹⁴ Block argues that people sought Deborah’s wisdom

¹¹ Trent C. Butler, *Judges*, WBC, vol. 8 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 181.

¹² Butler, *Judges*, 90.

¹³ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 23.

¹⁴ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 195.

for guiding the nation collectively rather than receiving personal counsel privately.¹⁵

While she did engage in military leadership matters, there is nothing in the text to suggest that providing private and corporate counsel are mutually exclusive. Mark Smith and Elizabeth Bloch-Smith describe the judicial aspect of Deborah's role with reference to the Pentateuch:

With the exception of Deborah in 4:4, the activity of the “major judges” is not legal (as in Deut 16:18–20; 17:9; 19:17) but military. . . . Individual cases of “judges” depart from the military model in a number of respects. First Deborah and Barak function as a team in Judges 4–5, which also acknowledges not only Deborah's judicial function but also her prophetic roles (4:4, 6) and her singing capacity (5:1, 12).¹⁶

The Smiths highlight Deborah's conformity to Moses's earlier instructions regarding appointing judges “to judge the people with righteous judgement” (Deut 16:18) and providing verdicts in cases brought to them (Deut 17:9). Their summary distinguishes Deborah's role relative to the other “major judges” by her partnership with Barak and how she more closely followed the judicial aspect of the role. Clinton McCann observes, “Deborah seems to be the only judge who clearly functioned in a legal capacity (until Samuel, whose story lies beyond the book of Judges).”¹⁷ He considers her a judge in the sense of one participating in God's orchestrated means of providing justice.¹⁸

The biblical text does not supply details regarding the judging activity depicted in Judges 4:5, and commentators vary in their interpretation. Way suggests,

The Israelites come up to her for “the judgment/decision,” which is probably ascertained through oracular means. This “judicial” function is evidently unique in the book of Judges since she offers only religious guidance and never directly engages in battle as do the other major leaders. Although her prophetic status is

¹⁵ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 195–96.

¹⁶ Mark S. Smith and Elizabeth M. Bloch-Smith, *Judges 1: A Commentary on Judges 1:1 – 10:5*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021), 4.

¹⁷ J. Clinton McCann, *Judges*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 51, Logos.

¹⁸ McCann, *Judges*, 51.

exceptional, it does not preclude her functioning as a judge (see 4:4): she brings justice to Israel *through* her prophetic status.¹⁹

Way's rendition indicates that Deborah engaged in "religious guidance" without engaging in the military battle. Though female in a patriarchal society, men sought her counsel on religious matters. However, in verse 6, Deborah's summoning Barak and relaying God's message extends beyond merely religious guidance: "Hasn't the Lord, the God of Israel, commanded you: 'Go, deploy the troops on Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the Naphtalites and the Zebulunites?'" (Judg 4:6). Arthur Cundall describes the situation, "At the time of the crisis Deborah was already established as a prophetess and a judge in the nonmilitary sphere; indeed, it was the demonstration of charismatic qualities in this realm which, in all probability, led the tribes to seek her assistance."²⁰ Because of her pre-existing role, in the moment of political crisis, Deborah initiates the call to battle on the human level.

Commentators vary in their assessment of Deborah's role in the narrative.

Citing tradition and referencing Hebrews 11:32, Andrew Wong credits Barak with being the "deliverer judge" and downplays Deborah's role as judge:

But Deborah's role within the narrative, primarily having to do with speaking (4:5–6, 9, 14), is more consistent with her being a prophetess (4:4) than a judge. In addition, although she is said to be "judging" Israel, this "judging" is immediately qualified in 4:5 as judicial in nature. As this is the only time within the book where the "judging" of one of Israel's leaders is so qualified, it may be intended to distinguish Deborah's judging from the kind of military deliverance associated with the book's other judges."²¹

Hebrews evaluates Barak and his male contemporaries positively: "And what more can I say? Time is too short for me to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, Samuel, and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises,

¹⁹ Way, *Judges and Ruth*, 43.

²⁰ Arthur E. Cundall, *Judges*, in *Judges and Ruth: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Donald J. Wiseman, TOTC 7 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 85, Logos.

²¹ Gregory T. K. Wong, *Commentary on Judges*, Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary: Ebook Short Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 25, Scribd.

shut the mouths of lions” (Heb 11:32–33). Deborah’s exclusion from mention in Hebrews should not be used to diminish her role as a judge. Wong’s assessment softens Deborah’s role as a leader who motivated volunteers that all received the Lord’s blessing (Judg 5:2), her role as a “mother in Israel” (Judg 5:7), and the fact that the narrative concludes with the statement, “the land had peace for forty years” (Judg 5:31).

In slight contrast to Wong, Butler affirms Deborah’s role but faults the absence of male leadership:

This special role seems to be so strongly emphasized to show not only her qualifications but also the absence of any man to fill the role, another way of showing the weakness of leadership in Israel. The text does not criticize Deborah implicitly or explicitly as it does the succeeding deliverers. Rather, the text implicitly criticizes the nation of Israel for having to rely on women to deliver them from danger and to fulfill the major roles in their society.²²

The text does not indicate a lack of available male leadership, nor the Lord’s “settling” for a woman. Instead, the familiar pattern is repeated: sin, “the Israelites again did what was evil” (Judg 4:1); bitter consequences, “so the Lord sold them to King Jabin” (Judg 4:2); cry for help, “the Israelites cried out to the Lord” (Judg 4:3); and the Lord’s answer to their cry by providing Deborah (Judg 4:4–5). She is the appointed deliverer, and the Israelites subsequently experience forty years of peace (Judg 5:31). The troops willingly follow Barak and Deborah into battle and emerge victorious. Furthermore, Deborah foretells that a woman will get the glory for the victory, and Jael fulfills that prediction (Judg 4:9, 22).

The interplay between Deborah, Barak, and Jael receives much attention with conflicting conclusions regarding male leadership, especially in complementarian and egalitarian literature. McCann counters the more common complementarian portrayal of Deborah and Barak’s relationship:

What the narrative does seem to rule out is the conclusion that commentators have sometimes reached—namely, that Deborah needed a man to do the fighting, and this

²² Butler, *Judges*, 93.

is Barak's role. Although Deborah does seem to disappear from the action after verse 14, we have been told at least three times that Deborah went *with* Barak (twice in v. 9 and again in v. 10; see also v. 8).²³

McCann's rebuttal of other commentators' evaluation of Deborah and Barak's joint efforts aligns more closely with the poetic description: "On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang: When the leaders lead in Israel, when the people volunteer, blessed be the Lord" (Judg 5:1–2).

Deborah's multifaceted role defies simple categorization to neatly fit a theological position. She was an uncommon leader that Israel desperately needed. Barry Webb provides a more complete analysis of her role:

She is a *prophetess*, and hence the agent by which Yahweh's word will enter the story to summon Barak to fulfill his role as a savior. Hence for the first time "judging" and "saving" are clearly distinguished from one another. While the two functions may be combined in one person, judges are not necessarily saviors, and saviors are not necessarily judges. However, Deborah does play a crucial role in the saving of Israel, in two senses: by settling disputes (*the Israelites went up to her for judgment*) she saves it from trouble within, and by commissioning Barak to deal with Jabin and Sisera she saves it from trouble from without.²⁴

Webb's explanation integrates the dual role ascribed to Deborah in the introduction—she functioned both as prophetess and as judge with both internally and externally facing responsibilities.

Complementarian Analysis for Counseling

Complementarians discuss the Deborah narrative from a variety of perspectives when responding to egalitarian critique and defending enduring restrictions on the role of women in the church. Wayne Grudem emphasizes the public-private distinction and denies that Deborah held a leadership role: "Deborah affirmed male leadership over God's people. . . . The text does not say that Deborah ruled over God's

²³ McCann, *Judges*, 52 (italics original).

²⁴ Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 183 (italics original).

people or taught them publicly or led them militarily.”²⁵ He reasons, “The Bible views Deborah’s judgeship as a rebuke against the absence of male leadership”; Grudem further warns, “We must use caution in drawing examples to imitate from the book of Judges.”²⁶ To support his view of the narrative’s implied rebuke towards the lack of male leaders, he cites the emphasis on Deborah’s gender in 4:4, the prophecy that a woman would receive glory rather than Barak in 4:9, and the absence of the explicit announcement that the Lord raised her up as a judge.²⁷ Similarly, John Piper and Grudem argue, “Deborah, a prophetess, judge, and mother in Israel (Judges 4:4; 5:7), along with Jael (Judges 5:24–27), was a living indictment of the weakness of Barak and other men in Israel who should have been more courageous leaders.”²⁸ However, Deborah’s story is the exception to Grudem’s otherwise accurate observation that the book of Judges provides little in the way of positive role models to imitate. The New Testament does not denigrate male leadership during the time of the judges; rather, the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah merits inclusion in the “hall of faith” (Heb 11:32–34).

While affirming continuing role distinctions, James Borland acknowledges, “The fact that an occasional judge (Deborah, Judges 4–5), or ruler (Athaliah, 2 Kings 11:3) was a woman also demonstrates that female leadership was possible.”²⁹ Though female leadership was relatively rare in the Old Testament, women exercised their gifts for the benefit of the community. Thomas Schreiner indicates,

One of the strongest arguments for full inclusion of women in authoritative positions of leadership stems from the prophetic role women played in the Scriptures. Deborah, as we have seen, stands out as an authoritative messenger of

²⁵ Wayne Grudem, *EFTB*, 132–33.

²⁶ Grudem, *EFTB*, 134–35.

²⁷ Grudem, *EFTB*, 134–35.

²⁸ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, “An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers,” in *RBMW*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, 72.

²⁹ James A. Borland, “Women in the Life and Teaching of Jesus,” in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 120.

Yahweh. Nevertheless, the evidence from prophecy indicates a supportive and complementary role for women.³⁰

He adds that she “has no military function” and that “Deborah did not prophesy in public. Instead, her prophetic roles seems to be limited to private and individual instruction.”³¹ Citing agreement with Grudem, Schreiner distinguishes prophecy from teaching and considers prophecy to be less authoritative, concluding that “those women who had the authoritative gift of prophecy in the Old Testament did not exercise it in a public forum as male Old Testament prophets did.”³² Citing Origen, William Weinrich likewise emphasizes the private nature of the Old Testament prophetesses’ speeches.³³

While much of the content of Judges depicts examples to avoid, Deborah’s story incorporates elements worthy of emulation. She receives the most praise and least criticism of all the judges in the book of Judges as she wisely communicates the Lord’s instructions to his people. Faithful scholars interpret the many aspects of her role differently. However, Deborah demonstrates that a woman could assist men and women in settling disputes as well as relay the Lord’s instructions to his people with some degree of leadership and authority without violating male headship.

Huldah

Deborah’s fellow Old Testament prophetess, Huldah, ministers amid Josiah’s reign in Judah during the period when Hilkiah finds the book of the law (2 Kgs 22 // 2 Chr 34). Upon hearing the words of the law read aloud, Josiah sends a contingent of men with these instructions: “Go and inquire of the Lord for me, the people, and all Judah

³⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching,” in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 215.

³¹ Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership,” 216.

³² Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership,” 217.

³³ William Weinrich, “Women in the History of the Church: Learned and Holy, but Not Pastors,” in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 275.

about the words in this book that has been found. For great is the Lord's wrath that is kindled against us because our ancestors have not obeyed the words of this book in order to do everything written about us" (2 Kgs 22:13). The young king is desperate for the Lord's guidance, but the text does not indicate that Josiah names Huldah as his preferred instrumental means of the Lord's instruction rather than Jeremiah or Zephaniah. The Chronicler's version of the charge to inquire of the Lord also omits reference to Huldah by name, though the succeeding verse in each account indicates that Josiah's emissaries go to seek Huldah's guidance: "So the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the prophetess Huldah, wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem in the Second District. They spoke with her" (2 Kgs 22:14). Huldah replies to their inquiry with the unwelcome oracle of impending judgment for the nation:

She said to them, "This is what the Lord God of Israel says: Say to the man who sent you to me, 'This is what the Lord says: I am about to bring disaster on this place and on the inhabitants, fulfilling all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read, because they have abandoned me and burned incense to other gods in order to anger me with all the work of their hands. My wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched.'" (2 Kgs 22:15–17)

Her oracle is directive and authoritative, telling the king what to do, and the men obey her prophetic word: "Then they reported to the king" (2 Kgs 22:20b).

Like present-day seekers of biblical counseling, Josiah and the Israelites seek instruction to help them obey the Lord. In this case, their need for godly counsel extends to the nation. Richard Nelson observes, "The large size of the committee sent to Huldah signals the seriousness of the situation. Huldah's careful identification undergirds the authenticity of the message she delivers. It emphasizes that she was a real person in real time."³⁴ Why does the group go to Huldah rather than Jeremiah or Zephaniah? Though he believes that later scholarship demonstrates the theory likely incorrect, Marvin Sweeney

³⁴ Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox, 1987), 255–56, Logos.

comments, “Rabbinic tradition maintains that Josiah consulted Huldah because a woman would be merciful.”³⁵ Scripture provides few additional clues. Carl Keil and Franz Delitzsch agree, “Nothing further is known of the prophetess Huldah than what is mentioned here. All that we can infer from the fact that the king sent to her is that she was highly distinguished on account of her prophetic gifts, and that none of the prophets of renown, such as Jeremiah and Zephaniah, were at that time in Jerusalem.”³⁶ What does Huldah contribute to the understanding of the role of women in Old Testament times? Pauline Viviano argues, “It is impossible to determine from this isolated case the characteristic roles of female prophets in Judah or their frequency, but we have evidence of the existence of female prophets in Mari and Assyria.”³⁷ Though Scripture preserves more information about the life and ministry of male prophets, God called, gifted, and led women to prophesy as well.

Once again, complementarians assess Huldah’s prophetic ministry positively with emphasis on the private versus public ministry. Piper and Grudem suggest, “Huldah evidently exercised her prophetic gift not in a public preaching ministry but by means of private consultation.”³⁸ Five men, including a priest, seek the prophetess’s counsel on religious matters at the king’s bidding. Schreiner confirms the acceptability of Huldah’s compliance with the king’s request: “She did not publicly proclaim God’s word. Rather, she explained in private the word of the Lord when Josiah sent messengers to her. She exercised her prophetic ministry in a way that did not obstruct male headship.”³⁹ Huldah provides another indication that women’s privately instructing men that seek their

³⁵ Marvin A. Sweeney, *I and II Kings: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: John Knox, 2013), 445, Logos.

³⁶ K&D 2:340.

³⁷ Pauline A. Viviano, “Huldah,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, H–J, ed. David Noel Freedman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 321.

³⁸ Piper and Grudem, “An Overview of Central Concerns,” 72.

³⁹ Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership,” 216.

guidance is compatible with affirming male headship.

Abigail

Abigail was married to Nabal, a man that was “harsh and badly behaved,” “worthless,” and prone to “folly” (1 Sam 25:3, 17, 25). She was called and equipped to exercise wisdom and leadership in her home, and she demonstrates love towards Nabal by doing what is best for him and their entire household, even when it counters his will. The days of preparation have culminated in a bountiful feast. Despite the hardship of her marriage, this is a day where she can taste, see, and smell the goodness of the Lord. Suddenly, a servant bursts on the scene with the news that once again her husband had lived up to his moniker, “fool.” This time, her husband had refused to share the excess provisions for the sheep-shearing feast with David and his men. Abigail springs into action to rectify her husband’s stinginess and rudeness. Abigail speaks honestly about her husband’s foolishness without dishonoring him. Her wise generosity and humble appeal to David is the exact opposite of her husband’s response, in every respect. As a result, the life of every male in her household, including her husband, is spared that day.

The David and Abigail narrative in 1 Samuel 25:1–42 opens with the disclosure that Samuel has died. J. Robert Vannoy explains, “This notice is not a piece of irrelevant information; it is a notice telling us that David was particularly vulnerable to the onslaughts of the evil one because he had lost his most important counselor.”⁴⁰ Additionally, Abigail’s story falls between the two easy opportunities David had to kill Saul while Saul was on a mission to kill David. In the previous chapter, David had repented over the mere thought of dishonoring Saul by cutting off the corner of the king’s robe (1 Sam 24:5). While Saul and Nabal both dismissed David’s good will and benevolent actions towards them, Saul had been anointed by God as Israel’s king; Nabal

⁴⁰ J. R. Vannoy, *1–2 Samuel*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary 4a (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2009), 225, Logos.

had not.⁴¹ David had resisted his men's urging to kill Saul precisely because Saul was God's anointed (1 Sam 24:6; 26:9), but David plans to kill Nabal with far less provocation. Vannoy observes, "David's confrontation with Nabal was not in a 'battle of the Lord.' It was a personal affront that provoked David to take personal revenge. Abigail became God's instrument for providing David with a way of escape from serious temptation."⁴²

Abigail demonstrates exemplary wisdom and discernment in her difficult circumstances. Despite his master's railing at David's men, the servant knew he could appeal to Abigail: "Now therefore know this and consider what you should do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his house, and he is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him" (1 Sam 25:17). She promptly and accurately assesses the situation, and her response is perfectly appropriate and timely. She knows when to speak and when to remain silent (1 Sam 25:19, 36; Eccl 3:7b). Abigail outdoes everyone in showing honor to David as God's anointed successor to Saul (Rom 12:10).

Abigail faces a difficult conversation as she seeks to prevent harm to her household because of her husband's harsh rejection of David's request. She approaches David with humility and first acknowledges her own unwitting complicity in the situation saying, "On me alone, my lord, be the guilt" (1 Sam 25:24). It probably was not the first time Abigail had to extricate herself from being guilty by association but not by actual activity or intent. Abigail is forthrightly honest about her husband's character as she makes her appeal to David: "Let not my lord regard this worthless fellow, Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his name, and folly is with him. But I your servant did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent" (1 Sam 25:25). She does not pretend that

⁴¹ A. Graeme Auld, *I and II Samuel: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: John Knox, 2012), 296, Logos.

⁴² Vannoy, *1-2 Samuel*, 226.

her husband is righteous, because he is not. Abigail recognizes that her husband does not have the wisdom or desire to respond wisely, and she conveys that to David for their mutual benefit.

What do complementarians say about Abigail? Piper approves of Abigail's approach: "A beautiful example of non-directive leadership is when Abigail talked David out of killing Nabal (1 Samuel 25:23–35). She exerted great influence over David and changed the course of his life, but she did it with amazing restraint and submissiveness and discretion."⁴³ Schreiner posits, "Abigail was not a prophetess and had no other official ministry that we know of. Nevertheless, her humble and gentle advice to David persuaded him not to kill Nabal."⁴⁴ He concludes, "Surely, Abigail 'taught' David in the passage we looked at in 1 Samuel 25, but no one would say she had a position of leadership over men."⁴⁵ Abigail's intervention and overturning her husband's command demonstrates that submission and affirming male headship have varied faithful expressions.

Abigail's story reinforces the scriptural propriety of women counseling men. Her servants know that Abigail will discern the right way to respond, and she does (1 Sam 25:17–18). Abigail acts quickly and generously (1 Sam 25:18–23). She assumes responsibility for her husband's failures and yet sees, acknowledges, and affirms the Lord's work in David (1 Sam 25:23–28). Recognizing the Lord's plan for David, she chooses to honor David's calling as a future king and wants to spare him from being a man of bloodshed, contra to what godly kings should be (1 Sam 25:26–31). Abigail models biblical counseling as she combines wise words with wise deeds, graciousness,

⁴³ John Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible," in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 51–52.

⁴⁴ Schreiner, "The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership," 210.

⁴⁵ Schreiner, "The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership," 214.

and kindness. Furthermore, her example demonstrates the possibility of a woman counseling a man—even a future king, despite being married to an unbelieving Nabal.

Priscilla

The apostle Paul mentions Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila in his letters more often than any other coworkers except Barnabas, Timothy, and Luke (Rom 16:3–4; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19), while Luke mentions the couple three times in the eighteenth chapter of Acts.⁴⁶ Each time Paul or Luke mentions either Priscilla or Aquila, they name both husband and wife. The fact that the biblical authors sometimes name Priscilla before her husband may indicate she had a higher social status or a more prominent role in the church.⁴⁷ The narrative snippet where Priscilla and Aquila take Apollos aside corresponds closely to a modern-day biblical counseling situation. Luke introduces the couple on the heels of Paul’s Areopagus address: “After this, he [Paul] left Athens and went to Corinth, where he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontius, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul came to them, and since they were of the same occupation, tentmakers by trade, he stayed with them and worked” (Acts 18:1–3). To demonstrate the parallels between Priscilla’s ministry and biblical counseling, I will (1) discuss the people engaged in Acts 18:24–26, (2) discuss lexical elements of the narrative, and (3) conclude with the complementarian implications for female biblical counselors.

Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos

Since Luke and Paul omit reference to Aquila and Priscilla’s conversion, the

⁴⁶ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul and the Early Church*, vol. 2 of *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 1426, 1434.

⁴⁷ vanThanh Nguyen, “Migrants as Missionaries: The Case of Priscilla and Aquila,” *Mission Studies* 30, no. 2 (2013): 200.

pair likely arrived in Corinth as Christians.⁴⁸ Luke explains why they left Rome but not what drew the couple to relocate to Corinth. The text provides little background information beyond Aquila's place of origin and their shared occupation with Paul. Matthijs den Dulk explains that Aquila's hometown is significant "because the gentile would have invited associations entirely opposite to those of 'Alexandrian.' While the stereotype concerning the latter [Alexandria] was one of learning and cultural sophistication, the common prejudice about people from Pontus was that they were uneducated and dim-witted barbarians."⁴⁹ Despite possible cultural prejudices regarding the couple's erudition, the rhetorician Paul evidently resides and works with them while they all three remain in Corinth. Whether in time spent plying their shared trade or simply serving and worshipping so closely with Paul, the couple fills up whatever they may have previously lacked in Christian education.

Without further explanation, Luke records that Priscilla and Aquila accompany Paul to Ephesus where they remain, though Paul continues his journey on to Jerusalem and Antioch (Acts 18:18–21). Their tentmaking or leather working business apparently generates sufficient income for them to afford a home large enough to host the church while in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:9).⁵⁰ In this context, Luke describes the couple's encounter with Apollos:

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native Alexandrian, an eloquent man who was competent in the use of the Scriptures, arrived in Ephesus. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately about Jesus, although he knew only John's baptism. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. After Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the way of God to him more accurately. When he wanted to cross over to Achaia, the brothers and sisters wrote to the disciples to welcome him. After

⁴⁸ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 5 (1980; repr., Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 310, Logos.

⁴⁹ Matthijs den Dulk, "Aquila and Apollos: Acts 18 in Light of Ancient Ethnic Stereotypes," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139, no. 1 (2020): 180.

⁵⁰ Guy Manuell, "Prisca and Aquila: Exemplary Models of Gospel Obedience," *Reformed Theological Review* 80, no. 3 (December 2021): 228.

he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating through the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah. (Acts 18:24–28)

Apollos, though catechized, competent in his use of Scripture, and fervent in his speech, still required additional instruction for ministry effectiveness.

Lexical Considerations

In an ironic upsetting of stereotypes, the educationally advantaged Alexandrian receives instruction from an unlikely source. Den Dulk describes how their contemporaries might have viewed the scenario: “Contributing to the absurdity of the situation is that Priscilla and Aquila were manual laborers (see Acts 18:3), a class generally despised by Greco-Roman elites, and that it is Priscilla, a woman, who is mentioned first when Luke describes the couple giving additional instruction to Apollos.”⁵¹ The couple exercises discretion and diplomacy. As noted in chapter 3 of this dissertation, *προσλαμβάνω* (often translated “receive”) is rendered here as their taking him aside from a larger group for a specific purpose.⁵² They seek to remedy unspecified deficiencies in Apollos’s theological understanding.

Instead of *διδάσκω* (teach), Luke employs the verb *ἐκτίθημι*—“to elaborate—to give an account and clarify the meaning of something through discourse.”⁵³ The third person plural of this verb confirms the active participation of both Priscilla and Aquila in explaining what Apollos previously had not understood.⁵⁴ Guy Manuell observes, “They had sufficient knowledge and authority to gain his respect and accept the correctness of their message. The successful results of their knowledgeable instruction of Apollos are

⁵¹ Den Dulk, “Aquila and Apollo,” 186.

⁵² Rick Brannan, *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), s.v. “προσλαμβάνω.”

⁵³ Brannan, *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, s.v. “ἐκτίθημι.” This term only appears in the book of Acts.

⁵⁴ Grudem, *EFTB*, 75.

evidenced by his activities in Ephesus (Acts 18:27–28). The text clearly presents Prisca and Aquila teaching Apollos together.”⁵⁵ Manuell highlights the respect Apollos accorded to the couple and references teaching and instruction as though ἐκτίθημι is a reasonably close synonym of διδάσκω. Apollos had arrived in Ephesus eloquent in speech, and he departs more doctrinally informed as a result of Priscilla and Aquila’s instructive counsel.

Does the change from διδάσκω to ἐκτίθημι signify a substantially different activity than teaching or instructing? Luke uses ἐκτίθημι earlier in Acts with the other sense of being exposed in 7:21 (referring to Moses), and with the elaboration sense when Peter recounts his Joppa vision to the other apostles: “Peter began to *explain* to them step by step” (Acts 11:4). In the last chapter of Acts, Luke again employs the term: “After arranging a day with him [Paul], many came to him at his lodging. From dawn to dusk he *expounded* and testified about the kingdom of God. He tried to persuade them about Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets” (Acts 28:23). Robert Saucy suggests, “The term [*ektithēmi*] thus indicates something different from ‘teaching’ in the sense of *didasko*. Priscilla and Aquila simply explained ‘the way of God more accurately’ to Apollos without the aim at the will and change of life that is found in the *didasko* biblical teaching.”⁵⁶ However, given Luke’s other usage of ἐκτίθημι with Peter and Paul as well as the positive, quantifiable effect that the couple’s elaboration had on Apollos, Saucy’s suggestion fails to convince.

Patrick Schreiner infers that instruction occurred in the Apollos vignette:

Verse 26 has been discussed greatly in terms of implications for women teaching. This topic is not Luke’s point. However, implications can still be drawn. Though the word “teach” (*didaskō*) does not occur (Luke uses the term “explain,” [*ektithēmi*]), the inference is some sort of instruction. Many note that Priscilla is listed first,

⁵⁵ Manuell, “Prisca and Aquila,” 235.

⁵⁶ Robert Saucy, “Paul’s Teaching on the Ministry of Women,” in *Women and Men in Ministry: A Complementary Perspective*, ed. Robert L. Saucy and Judith TenElshof (Chicago: Moody, 2001), 301.

thereby putting her in a more prominent role. This instruction does seem to be in private (but not necessarily in a home) since they take Apollos aside.⁵⁷

Patrick Schreiner concurs that Luke's change in terminology from διδάσκω does not deny that instruction occurred, though he does not speculate about whether their instruction intended to change Apollos's will or way of life. Nothing in the biblical text indicates that Priscilla's participation in the private instruction of Apollos violated any principle of male headship or church leadership authority.⁵⁸

Complementarian Analysis for Counseling

On the contrary, the importance of the private versus public setting of the couple's instruction to Apollos garners more discussion in the complementarian literature than Luke's choice of ἐκτίθημι versus διδάσκω. The private nature of the setting is more about the number of people involved than a particular structure or location.⁵⁹ The Bible does not explicitly state a public or private distinction, nor does it provide a limit on the number of men present when women are permitted to verbally instruct. Judith TenElshof and Saucy raise but do not fully answer the obvious question, "If there had been another person along with Apollos, would Priscilla's instruction no longer have been private, or would another person have prohibited her from participating with her husband in that ministry?"⁶⁰ Complementarians' answers will vary based on their position on the complementarian continuum.

All complementarians affirm that when the church is gathered for worship, where it would be appropriate to observe the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11), women should

⁵⁷ Patrick Schreiner, *Acts*, Christian Standard Commentary (Brentwood, TN: Holman Reference, 2022), 637, Scribd.

⁵⁸ Grudem, *EFTB*, 75.

⁵⁹ Judith TenElshof and Robert Saucy, "The Complementary Model of Church Ministry," in Saucy and TenElshof, *Women and Men in Ministry*, 319.

⁶⁰ TenElshof and Saucy, "The Complementary Model of Church Ministry," 319.

ensure that their apparel reflects feminine modesty and that their attitudes and actions reflect submission to male authorities, including refraining from teaching (1 Cor 11; 1 Tim 2). Even broader complementarians affirm that a married couple may jointly instruct a man based on the Priscilla and Aquila example. Wayne Grudem concludes regarding the instruction of Apollos, “Therefore *this passage gives warrant for women and men to talk together about the meaning of biblical passages and to ‘teach’ one another in such settings.*”⁶¹ Though he cites a home Bible study as an example in this reference, as noted earlier, Grudem includes a woman’s counseling a man in his list of permissible activities.⁶² It is reasonable to infer that in a typical biblical counseling setting a female counselor could counsel with an individual, couple, family unit, or a few people in a conflict, and she would still fall within the category of private instruction rather than the prohibited public teaching. Saucy and TenElshof highlight both Priscilla and Abigail’s positive contributions, observing that “communication skills is also one of the primary ways women influence. Research shows women to be far more verbal than men, and in Scripture we see women’s communication skills being a tool God uses for His purposes.”⁶³ Priscilla’s role should guide complementarian churches to encourage women to use their communication skills along with other gifts to biblically counsel both men and women, rather than limiting such ministry based on gender.

Priscilla’s participation in teaching Apollos looms large in the complementarian versus egalitarian debate. Though mentioned above in reviewing the literature in chapter 1, exegeting the gender restrictive texts in chapter 2, and surveying the ministry of mutual care passages in chapter 3, complementarian understandings of Priscilla’s role bear revisiting, because the Priscilla example most closely resembles

⁶¹ Grudem, *EFBT*, 75 (italics original).

⁶² Grudem, *EFBT*, 85–96.

⁶³ TenElshof and Saucy, “The Complementary Model of Church Ministry,” 335.

modern biblical counseling. The overarching complementarian position argues that the private setting of Priscilla and Aquila's instruction does not violate the proscription of women teaching or exercising authority over men in 1 Timothy 2:12.

Once more, I will survey the contributors to *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, this time focusing only on how the authors interpret Priscilla's role and apply it to the role of women in complementarian churches. Piper and Grudem present four summary observations: they (1) deny that Priscilla's role validates authoritative teaching roles for women, (2) agree that she "corrected" Apollos, (3) applaud "the delicate and sensitive preservation of personal dynamics that honor the headship of Aquila without squelching the wisdom of Priscilla,"⁶⁴ and (4) "admit that there are ambiguities in separating the Priscilla-type counsel from the official teaching role of 1 Timothy 2:12."⁶⁵ While countering the feminist objection that women in Ephesus lacked education, Piper and Grudem argue that Priscilla lacked no education, especially with her proximity to Paul for years, and yet even she was not "allowed to teach men in the public assembly of the church."⁶⁶ They endorse Priscilla's perceived submissive approach and private instruction and commend women to emulate her submissiveness to male headship.

Citing Paul's references to Priscilla and Aquila as fellow workers, Thomas Schreiner indicates that "such ministry by Priscilla does not seem to be a one-time affair."⁶⁷ Acknowledging that the Bible does not specify the extent of Priscilla's teaching Apollos, he contends, "Even if Priscilla did all the teaching, this is not the same thing as teaching publicly in an authoritative position of leadership." He cautions, "More is often

⁶⁴ Piper and Grudem, "An Overview of Central Concerns," 69.

⁶⁵ Piper and Grudem, "An Overview of Central Concerns," 76. In a later section dealing with periodic and occasional teaching, they indicate that Priscilla provided "unofficial" guidance (85).

⁶⁶ Piper and Grudem, "An Overview of Central Concerns," 82.

⁶⁷ T. Schreiner, "The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership," 212.

established from the example of Priscilla and Aquilla than is warranted from the text.”⁶⁸ Though certainly egalitarians and feminists make too much of this text and remove all gender-based teaching restrictions, some complementarian churches and biblical counselors make too little of this text and impoverish the church through restricting women from privately instructing men.

In their contributions to the volume, Paige Patterson and Dorothy Patterson comment on the missionary couple. Paige Patterson opines, “No legitimate question exists with reference to either the adequacy or the acceptability of a woman serving in some teaching roles. Apollos profited not only from the instruction of Aquila but also from that of Priscilla.”⁶⁹ Dorothy Patterson praises the biblical couple:

The most outstanding ministering couple in the New Testament is the dynamic duo Aquila and Priscilla, who traveled the apostolic world together, sharing the gospel and expounding the Word more fully (Acts 18:2–3, 18, 26). Priscilla must have been a diligent and discerning student of the Word of God, or she could never have impressed the learned Apollos.⁷⁰

Together, the Pattersons confirm the appropriateness of Priscilla’s participation in the private instruction of Apollos.

Once more, complementarian scholars confirm that what Luke records in Acts 18:24–26 does not violate what Paul commands in 1 Timothy 2:12. After restating that Priscilla’s participation in teaching Apollos does not open the door for women to teach men publicly, Grudem summarizes his position as follows: “It is specifically in situations where the whole church is assembled that Paul restricts governing and teaching activities to men (see 1 Corinthians 14:33–36; 1 Timothy 2:11–15; see also the qualifications for

⁶⁸ T. Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership,” 218.

⁶⁹ Paige Patterson, “The Meaning of Authority in the Local Church,” in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 256.

⁷⁰ Dorothy Kelley Patterson, “The High Calling of Wife and Mother in Biblical Perspective,” in Piper and Grudem, *RBMW*, 376. Robert Saucy and Clinton Arnold make a similar case regarding Priscilla’s knowledge in their chapter: Robert Saucy and Clinton Arnold, “Woman and Man in Apostolic Teaching,” in Saucy and TenElshof, *Women and Men in Ministry*, 125.

elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1). The example of Priscilla and Aquila instructing Apollos privately in Acts 18:26 does not contradict this.”⁷¹ Paul’s limitation on women teaching men pertains to the authoritative teaching of church leaders in the gathered assembly. In three epistles, Paul endorses Aquila and Priscilla’s ministry: “Give my greetings to Prisca and Aquila, my coworkers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life. Not only do I thank them, but so do all the Gentile churches” (Rom 16:3–4). Paul also conveyed messages to and from the couple and the churches they were associated with: “Aquila and Priscilla send you greetings warmly in the Lord, along with the church that meets in their home” (1 Cor 16:19), and “Greet Prisca and Aquilla, and the household of Onesiphoros” (2 Tim 4:19). Paul calls out Euodia and Syntyche for relational discord in Philippians 4:2, giving evidence that he corrected women as well as men when needed. It seems unlikely that Paul would have refrained from correcting Priscilla if her ministry were unacceptable. Rather, Paul lived, worked, and ministered alongside Aquila and Priscilla and consistently commended them to the churches.

Since Paul restricts women from teaching men in 1 Timothy 2:12, yet Scripture gives every reason to believe that Paul knew about and approved of Priscilla’s participation in teaching the gifted Apollos “the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26), we must look at the context of both passages in order to understand what would otherwise appear as contradictory instructions and practice. In 1 Timothy 2:12, the context is the gathered assembly, while in Acts 18:26, the setting is more private. The egalitarian argument that Paul intended only a temporary disbarment of female teachers in Ephesus because the women in Ephesus were uneducated fails to persuade since Priscilla demonstrates that at least one woman in that congregation had the depth of knowledge and wisdom to meaningfully teach an eloquent, catechized man.

Many complementarian churches so emphasize the prohibition of women’s

⁷¹ Grudem, *EFTB*, 179.

teaching in 1 Timothy 2:12 that they prevent women from following Priscilla's example in Acts 18:26. Patrick Schreiner makes the pointed observation,

Thus, while not overturning anything specific in 1 Tim 2, Luke portrays a culture where women instruct adult men in certain spheres. If this is not possible, nor the case in more complementarian churches, then the question needs to be asked of how consistently "biblical" the church is on this debated issue. The gift of teaching and instruction is not specific to one gender. Individual churches must create structures that allow proper spheres for women to exercise their gifts of instruction.⁷²

Schreiner confirms the validity of women's instructing men in ways not specifically limited by Scripture; further, he challenges how "biblical" churches are if they preclude women from teaching adult men in every sphere of church life.

Conclusion

The biblical narrative texts rightfully receive less individual weight than the New Testament didactic imperatives when discerning the role of female biblical counselors in complementarian churches. Cumulatively, though, these examples demonstrate that at the very minimum God permits women to instruct men within the community of faith in some settings or circumstances—forcing the question of which settings or circumstances. What do these stories have in common, and what can be deduced from the differences between them?

Deborah settles disputes under a tree and declares the Lord's plan for his people's deliverance. Scripture does not delineate the number of witnesses or onlookers in attendance for either situation, yet we may reasonably conclude that neither activity coincides with public worship. Huldah instructs an Israelite king's delegation about how to obey the Lord—corresponding directly to the definition of biblical counseling. Notably, the priest Hilkiah is among the party sent to the prophetess. While others may have been present, at a minimum, she instructs a group of five men in a venue inconsistent with public worship.

⁷² P. Schreiner, *Acts*, 637.

Abigail's story includes an element not found in the others—she acts in direct opposition to her husband's desire—confirming that submitting to male headship is neither an absolute nor a license to withhold good that is in one's power to do. She approaches a future God-appointed king without direct invitation and convinces him to change his plans from dishonorably killing her husband and male servants to honoring the Lord. Her male servants likely remain in close proximity to their respected mistress during her appeal, so the degree of privacy cannot be dogmatically determined. Still, the setting and circumstances coincide with life outside the time reserved for public worship.

Priscilla, unlike the preceding Old Testament examples, ministers with her husband. Scripture explicitly mentions that their private encounter follows Apollos's accurate teaching about Jesus in the synagogue, presumably a relatively public evangelistic outreach (Acts 18:24–26). Together, Priscilla and Aquila instruct Apollos in advanced theological matters that enable Apollos to have a more effective ministry.

Each of these four women were married—one ministered with her husband, one ministered despite her husband, and two ministered independently of their husbands. Each of these women engaged in instructing men of significant status and rank within their faith community about urgent matters, and in Deborah's case, male and female Israelites, not just male leaders. These women's ministry included applying God's precepts to the male leaders' present circumstances—paralleling the ministry of biblical counseling. Nothing in the biblical narrative indicates that the women acted outside God's boundaries in teaching and advising male leaders. These examples confirm Patrick Schreiner's observation: churches that effectively prohibit or even discourage women from instructing men in every sphere by overextending the restriction in 1 Timothy 2:12 fall short of being biblical in this area. Therefore, the church bears an obligation to align the boundaries of women's teaching activity within the church to match the entire canon. For many complementarian churches, this distinction between public proclamation in the

gathered assembly versus the private ministry of the Word calls for reexamining the role of female biblical counselors and allowing what the Bible both permits and lauds.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The role of female biblical counselors in complementarian churches, under the shepherding oversight of the elders, is to teach, instruct, admonish, encourage, comfort, edify, hear and prompt confession of sin, pray, accept, pursue peace, and express mutual care in action and presence to sisters and brothers in a joint effort to pursue Christlikeness. In other words, their role is to counsel both men and women. The purpose of this project was to present and defend a biblical case for women to have the freedom to serve both men and women through biblical counseling within complementarian churches by exegetically demonstrating that Scripture encourages and does not forbid women from counseling both men and women.

Chapter Review

Chapter 1 introduced this study by presenting the thesis: complementarian churches should permit women to counsel both men and women according to their giftedness and training. Three distinct pillars of biblical exegesis and reasoning support this conclusion. First, Scripture reserves for qualified men both the office of elder and the function of public, authoritative teaching in the gathered assembly, but Scripture neither precludes nor exempts women from the private ministry of the Word. Second, God calls men and women to use their spiritual gifts and ministry skills in various “one-another” ways without indicating a gender restriction. Third, Scripture commands believers to refrain from impeding other believers’ obedience and infringing upon other believers’ Christian liberty.

Second, I established the methodology for this study as an exegetical evaluation of the following: the gender-restrictive passages, “one-another” passages that overlap with biblical counseling, eight additional biblical themes that support women counseling men, and positive biblical examples of women advising men. Third, I outlined the remaining chapters detailed below. Fourth, I surveyed the literature from two angles: biblical counseling in complementarian literature and complementarianism in biblical counseling literature, including a brief history of the modern biblical counseling movement for context.

In chapter 2, I described the complementarian spectrum and exegetically evaluated the gender-restricted texts often associated with limiting the role of female biblical counselors.

First, the Danvers Statement demarcates complementarianism but does not capture or delineate the wide range of positions on its spectrum (varyingly described as broad/narrow, thick/thin, hard/soft, and full/partial) or address biblical counseling. Second, the ACBC standard of conduct regarding humanity represents one but not all of the viable positions consistent with the Danvers Statement related to limiting women’s counseling ministry in the church.¹ Third, I exegeted and applied the four directly relevant passages cited by ACBC to support the aforementioned standard: (1) Genesis 1:26–27, (2) 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, (3) Galatians 3:28, and (4) 1 Timothy 2:9–15. First, concerning Genesis 1:26–27, complementarians across the spectrum affirm both genders’ shared divine image-bearing, equality, and differentiation. In agreement with narrower complementarians, and in contrast to some broader complementarians, I concluded that the creation account did not invoke role distinctions that would prohibit women from counseling men. Second, complementarians agree that 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 affirms

¹ Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, “Standards of Conduct: V. The Commitment to Humanity,” accessed December 1, 2022, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/about/beliefs/positions/standards-of-conduct/#humanity>.

male headship and female submission. However, Paul regulates the apparel rather than the function of men and women while praying or prophesying in the gathered assembly; therefore, the passage does not support the assertion that women should not counsel men. Third, believers' union with Christ relativizes but does not eliminate gender distinctions; male headship with female submission in marriage and church leadership compatibly coexists with gender equality. Galatians 3:28 highlights the balance necessary to avoid an overemphasis on either male headship or gender equality to the neglect of the other. This verse does not overturn 1 Timothy 2:12: women may not teach in the gathered assembly or serve as elders. At the same time, it reinforces that women should be free to minister in all the other ways not explicitly prohibited by Scripture. Fourth, 1 Timothy 2:12 is the singular verse in Scripture restricting women from teaching men. Complementarians regularly distinguish the public, authoritative type of teaching restricted to men in 1 Timothy 2:9–15 from the kind of explanation proffered by Priscilla to Apollos in Acts 18:26. Therefore, women should be free to counsel men and couples.

In chapter 3, I defined significant terms related to the role of female biblical counselors in complementarian churches, described biblical counseling essentials, and evaluated the usage of the “one-another” commands, arguing that biblical counseling is the coalescence of these mutual ministry imperatives given without gender restriction.

First, a complementarian church, at a minimum, affirms equality between the genders and limits the office and function of elder and pastor to qualified men. Second, definitions of biblical counseling ironically exclude reference to authoritative teaching, the proffered reason for why women should not counsel men. Third, biblical counseling essentials, including the distinctive goal of forming Christlikeness in counselees, parallel the objective of the ministry of mutual care.

Fourth, I exegeted representative one-another verses and related uses of the verbs expressing mutual care primarily through spoken words, considering seven lexical forms used as one-another imperatives: (1) διδάσκω (teach and instruct); (2) νοουθετέω

(admonish); (3) παρακαλέω (encourage and comfort); (4) οἰκοδομέω (edify); (5) Ἐξομολογέω and εὐχομαι (confess sin and pray); (6) προσλαμβάνω (accept); and (7) διώκω εἰρήνης (pursue peace). First, the crux of whom women may counsel revolves around the permissibility of women’s teaching men. Paul uses διδάσκω in 1 Timothy 2:12 to restrict women from authoritative doctrinal instruction in the gathered assembly. In contrast, Paul uses διδάσκω in Colossians 3:16, possibly even in the context of the corporate worship service, to encourage all believers to teach one another without including a gender restriction. From the distinction in how διδάσκω is used in the Pastoral Epistles versus in Colossians 3:16 and in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20), I concluded that both men and women are commanded to teach one another to love and obey Christ without regard to gender, except in the context of the public, authoritative teaching in the gathered assembly. Second, all believers are required to νουθετέω (admonish or instruct) one another in both Colossians 3:16 and Romans 15:14, from a depth of goodness and knowledge, again, without gender restriction. Third, Paul uses παρακαλέω (comfort, entreat, exhort, console, encourage) in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 and 14 as well as 2 Corinthians 2:3–7 to call all believers to the regular ministry of entreating, comforting, and encouraging one another, again with no gender limitations.

Fourth, Paul employs οἰκοδομέω to exhort the Romans, Thessalonians, Corinthians, and Timothy to build each other up in the faith both individually and corporately, again, without gender restriction. Fifth, in James 5:16, the combined exhortation using Ἐξομολογέω and εὐχομαι parallels biblical counseling’s emphasis on prayer, confession of sin, and repentance. Sixth, Christians bear the obligation to προσλαμβάνω (receive) one another in a distinctly Christian way that includes giving and receiving advice for living in more God-pleasing ways (Rom 5:7; 14:1). Luke uses προσλαμβάνω in Acts 18:26 to describe how Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos aside to explain “the way of God more accurately.” Seventh, Jesus commanded believers to διώκω εἰρήνης, “be at peace with one another” (Mark 9:40, echoed in Romans 12:16, 18; 14:19),

indicating that the expected outflow of the gospel indicatives culminates in peace-filled relationships in the church, yet often believers need the help of wise counselors to restore peace. In summary, biblical counseling embodies the combined ministry of mutual care expressed primarily through words: teaching, admonishing, encouraging, edifying, confessing sin and praying, accepting, and pursuing peace with one another—commands given to all believers without gender limitation.

Fifth, in chapter 3, I explored the ministry of mutual care expressed in three action categories: (1) greeting, (2) eating and sharing, and (3) extending hospitality and serving one another. First, the command to greet one another with familial affection and warmth initiates the biblical counseling session and extends to life in the faith community. Second, eating and sharing with one another, and third, extending hospitality and serving one another, delineate another separation between biblical counseling and secular counseling. In biblical counseling, dual relationships are expected and celebrated rather than forbidden. The fellowship in a complementarian church provides the optimal setting for both more formal and less formal biblical counseling, without gender restriction.

Sixth, I evaluated the private and corporate aspects of the ministry of mutual care expressed by presence, noting the necessity of relational presence and the benefit of physical presence in both the church and counseling spheres. Even the less applicable one-another categories of action and presence are issued without gender restriction. Lastly, I argued that biblical counseling is the coalescence of the ministry of mutual care expressed in words, actions, and presence. These one-another commands have no gender limitations and appear much more frequently in the New Testament than the restrictive texts (1 Cor 11:2–15; 1 Tim 2:9–15). These factors indicate that the normal pattern is members counseling one another without gender restriction, while simultaneously observing Paul’s prohibition of women teaching in the corporate worship setting.

In chapter 4, I employed John Frame's perspectivalism and identified eight biblical themes that churches should consider when determining the role of female biblical counselors.

First, I described Frame's method and concept that integrates limited perspectives of a situation to create a multiperspectival view, which is indispensable for biblical counselors in their quest to see situations as God does and represent God's view to the counselees. Second, I employed Frame's method by looking at the role of female biblical counselors through eight biblical themes: (1) interdependence and co-counselors, (2) gender complementarity, (3) exclusive elder authority, (4) spiritual abuse, (5) family relationship, (6) wisdom as learned skill, (7) spiritual gifts, and (8) Christian liberty. First, God's creational design for humanity includes divine dependence and human interdependency. Co-counseling increases efficacy, reduces the risk of sexual impropriety and spiritual abuse, provides training opportunities, and helps more church members practically fulfill many of the one-another commands. Second, complementarians celebrate God's creational design for humanity, including gender complementarity with corresponding differences that extend beyond physicality. Male and female perspectives enrich the counseling experience beyond simply the presence of a second counselor. Third, while arguing that the private ministry of the Word through biblical counseling is not the type of teaching restricted to qualified men in 1 Timothy 2:12, I also acknowledge the similarity in activity between elders and non-elders when engaged in biblical counseling. I concluded that a woman or male non-elder does not usurp elder authority by counseling, even though a counselor may develop significant spiritual influence. Rather, incorporating women more comprehensively into the counseling ministry by allowing women to counsel men and couples in addition to women and children allows elders more time to exercise their authority and fulfill their corporate functions. The authority that God has given exclusively to elders is a property that they hold by right of office and

the related responsibilities of shepherding the church through teaching sound doctrine, leading church discipline efforts, and governing the corporate body.

Fourth, unfortunately, spiritual authority and influence can be misused in a way that inflicts spiritual abuse or harm, a risk receiving heightened scrutiny and requiring more safeguards than in the past. Team counseling, especially with male and female co-counselors, is a strong safeguard to prevent and detect spiritual abuse in counseling. Fifth, I explored the biblical theme of family relationship, noting the frequent references to the church as the family of God and the emphasis on believers' sibling relationship. Inculcating a familial posture toward other church members would lessen the risk of sexual impropriety and spiritual abuse and allow women and men to counsel each other without gender limitation, as they do in the family of origin. Sixth, biblical counseling embodies the Bible's frequent imperative to pursue wisdom, recognizing wisdom as learned skill taught to others for skillful living. Proverbs limits sharing wisdom with fools, not based on gender, so wise women should have the freedom to impart their wisdom to men and couples. Scripture commends the wisdom of seeking multiple counselors: another reason to prefer team counseling when possible. Seventh, none of the spiritual gift lists indicate a gender-based restriction. By the Spirit's decree and choosing, all believers receive at least one gift for the edification of the congregation. Women are neither excluded from receiving nor excused from using the gift of teaching; they are simply restricted from using it in the context of the gathered assembly. Eighth, complementarianism is a second order doctrine, and counseling methods fall in the tertiary level—the sphere of Christian liberty. Churches must challenge the intrusion of human rules that hinder joyful obedience of other divine commands both in the counseling sessions and in the structure of the counseling ministry.

In chapter 5, I surveyed and evaluated the practical examples of four women in the Bible who instructed men with Scripture's approbation as a model for how women should still be free to minister.

First, Judges 4–5 presents the female judge and prophet, Deborah. The lexical usage of שפוט indicates that Deborah is no less of a judge than her male counterparts. She is the only judge noted to “settle disputes” as outlined in Deuteronomy 17:8–13, in addition to participating in the nation’s deliverance that resulted in four decades of peace. Though some temper Scripture’s praise of her and suggest that her service indicated a lack of male leadership, Judges 4–5 does not say so; further, the inclusion of Barak in Hebrews 11:32 is compelling evidence to the contrary. Though married, Deborah alone is mentioned as resolving conflict, presumably for both men and women.

Second, I considered the female prophet Huldah, who ministered during Josiah’s reign in Judah (2 Kgs 22 // 2 Chr 34). I noted the parallel between Josiah’s goal and the goal of biblical counseling—discerning how to please the Lord. The king’s delegation included a priest and four other men seeking instruction from Huldah rather than Zephaniah or Jeremiah, indicating that a woman may instruct five men, including a religious leader. Though married, Huldah alone is mentioned as relaying the Lord’s message to the king through his envoy. Huldah’s story validates women’s privately counseling men about how to please the Lord without violating the principle of male headship.

Third, Abigail’s petition to David changed the trajectory of both of their lives (1 Sam 25). Countermanding her husband’s orders, Abigail demonstrates that a woman’s required submission to her husband’s desires has limitations. I concluded from this pericope that a woman may counsel a man despite being married to a foolish unbeliever.

Fourth, Priscilla, together with Aquila, took Apollos aside “and explained the way of God to him more accurately” (Acts 18:26). The lexical implications of ἐκτίθημι cohere with the type of instruction inherent in biblical counseling. Complementarians offer the compelling argument that Priscilla’s participation in instructing Apollos in the private setting did not violate the prohibition of women teaching men in the gathered assembly in 1 Timothy 2:12. Paul’s close vocational and residential relationship with

Priscilla and Aquila and his threefold affirmation of their ministry mean that women may counsel men in less public settings.

In conclusion, the biblical examples of Deborah, Huldah, Abigail, and Priscilla receive Scripture's approval; these women instructed prominent men about urgent and important matters, including doctrine. Though all four were married, only Priscilla ministered with her husband present, affirming that women may counsel men with or without their husbands' participation. Scripture does not specify the number of men permitted to be present when a woman teaches; at least five were present when Huldah explained how Josiah and the people of Judah should obey the Lord. God permits women to counsel and instruct men in settings outside of the assembly gathered for worship.

Research Implications

The role of female biblical counselors in complementarian churches should include the freedom to counsel men and couples in addition to women, youth, and children. While the role of female counselors should resemble the role of male counselors (not currently serving as an elder), each ministry context will shape the role differently. A robust ministry that is biblically permissible and biblically commanded remains available for women equipped to counsel. Female counselors obey the one-another ministry commands under the shepherding oversight of male elders. When they counsel, female biblical counselors do not violate the prohibition regarding women teaching men in 1 Timothy 2:12, but elders fail in their Ephesians 4:11–12 responsibilities when they neglect equipping and shepherding women. Elders should prioritize equipping members to exercise the ministry of mutual care, overseeing the counseling ministry, and shepherding the counselors. The roles of counselors and elders are distinct yet

intertwined. Though difficulties abound, elders must set aside substantial time to meet regularly with counselors; they cannot delegate and abandon the counseling ministry.²

As elders and counselors work together to equip more saints to counsel biblically, they will need a system to support those counselors. The structure should include a care coordinator, meaningful case analysis conducted by counselors and elders, ongoing training, and administrative resources. Additional structural considerations include shared appointment calendars, video-only cameras, and the proximity of other people to counseling rooms as safeguards for counselees and counselors' reputations.³

Another research implication is that robust communication is vital to developing the role of female biblical counselors. Counselors and elders must jointly set expectations for timing, frequency, and depth of information shared. Counseling oversight and case review conversations should prioritize the elder(s)' and counselors' mutual strengths by conveying their biblical assessment and care plan in theological categories.⁴ For example, rather than focusing on historical data points in a counselee's story, the counselor could concisely summarize why she concluded that the counselee is like a helpless sheep without a shepherd. If she does so, pauses, and asks for the elder's opinion of her diagnosis, they are more likely to have a meaningful exchange ensuring that the counselor's care aligns with the elder's assessment and expectation.⁵ Likewise, elders must regularly and consistently convey how they view counseling fitting within the church. Brad Hambrick notes how "roles determine rules" in different contexts:

² Alasdair Groves, interview by author with participation by Robert Jones, Zoom, June 2, 2023. Alasdair Groves holds an MDiv in counseling and serves on the faculty and as the Executive Director of Christian Counseling Education Foundation (CCEF).

³ Jason Kovacs, interview by author, Zoom, January 31, 2023; Angela Shelton, interview by author, Zoom, August 24, 2023.

⁴ Alasdair Groves, interview by author with participation by Robert Jones, Zoom, June 2, 2023.

⁵ Alasdair Groves, interview by author with participation by Robert Jones, Zoom, June 2, 2023.

“Friendships (informal relationships) don’t have roles—there is not a helper and helpee—so this isn’t needed. Moral guidance—don’t gossip or slander—is all that is needed. But, as a church has more formal helping ministries where people make more vulnerable disclosures, the need for greater clarity increases.”⁶ While it might seem simpler to adopt the secular model of forbidding dual relationships between counselors and counsees, that is neither wise, practical, biblical, necessary, nor even possible in the church. Instead, elders and counselors need to consider that whichever “role the helper is in when information is shared determines how that information should be handled.”⁷ While the church is not under secular therapy guidelines, a degree of professionalism and deep respect belongs in the church counseling ministry.

Another practical outflow from this study is recognizing the inherent benefit of incorporating women into mixed-gendered co-counseling. Churches should consider a team counseling approach for counseling individuals and a mixed-gendered co-counseling approach when counseling couples. A team counseling approach embraces human interdependence, increases counseling efficacy, provides training opportunities, and decreases the likelihood of spiritual abuse within the counseling relationship. Since complementarian churches restrict both the office and function of pastors and elders to men, avoiding an echo chamber in the elders’ quarters takes forethought. Michael Kruger recommends an avenue to lessen the likelihood of spiritual abuse: “One way to add independent, outside voices to the leadership structure is to invite women to participate. As already noted, women typically have very different perspectives on the church than

⁶ Brad Hambrick, “Roles Determine Rules: Exploring the Relationship between Counseling Ethics and Formality of Care,” *Biblical Counseling Coalition Grace and Truth* (blog), July 17, 2023, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2023/07/17/roles-determine-rules-exploring-the-relationship-between-counseling-ethics-and-formality-of-care/>.

⁷ Hambrick, “Roles Determine Rules.”

the men, and their voices aren't always heard.”⁸ Grafting women into the leadership of the biblical counseling ministry provides one viable means to this end. Churches are not acting biblically when they bind consciences and restrict ministry where Scripture does not. Leaders should consider the kingdom impact if churches utilize more women in the counseling ministry. Complementarian women may not fill the vacant pulpits, but their service in the counseling ministry can free qualified men to devote their efforts to pulpit ministry and governing responsibilities.

Another research outflow of this study is helping church leaders understand that *complementarianism* and *biblical counseling* represent spectrums, not concrete bounded sets. Each elder group and church need to consider their preferred point on each spectrum and their latitude for deviation in either direction. They will need to decide which training and certification paths to encourage and perhaps support with financial resources. Churches with limited budgets will find it more difficult to consider a female candidate for a counseling position, especially their first staff position, if the counselor may only serve one half of the congregation.

Areas of Future Research

Having summarized the contributions of my project, I now submit three considerations for future research.

One of the more significant areas of future research involves clarifying the benefits of incorporating gender complementarity in the church where it is biblically permissible. Though the topic of gender complementarity is related to this project, the scarcity of rich theological resources devoted to the merits of complementarity precluded the full development of this angle of inquiry for shaping the role of female biblical counselors. Complementarian resources grant that gender complementarity is God's good

⁸ Michael Kruger, *Bully Pulpit: Confronting the Problem of Spiritual Abuse in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022), 120.

design and gift. However, they devote most of their attention to ensuring that women know what they are *not* permitted to do rather than how the whole church benefits when women are equipped and freed to do all that God commands and gifts them to do.

Another significant research area relates to gender roles both in the church generally and in counseling ministry particularly. Churches and biblical counselors could learn from secular therapeutic models to deter sexual impropriety in counseling. Whether as a matter of respect, professionalism, or prudent practice, secular counseling therapy practices seem to have fewer headlines about sexual misconduct. A study comparing and contrasting the actual sexual misconduct incident rates in church counseling ministries versus secular therapy practices may help to identify systemic weaknesses and suggest biblically viable safeguards for the church. Further analysis of churches' responses, both helpful and unhelpful, would help churches protect vulnerable sheep and have a better reputation among those outside the church.

Lastly, while this text-based work lays a theological foundation for the role of female counselors, it also highlights the need for a qualitative study exploring the various models and examples of practical ways that pastors and female biblical counselors function together in a complementarian church.

Final Thoughts

As I argue for the appropriateness of women counseling men, I want to be clear: I am not suggesting that women usurp the elders' and pastors' unique functions or office. Since a female biblical counselor shares the same responsibility to use her spiritual gifts and wisdom for the edification of the body as the male members, she should have the same freedom as men to obey the "one-another" commands combined and expressed through biblical counseling. Many North American churches seem to unduly restrict women from fully and appropriately exercising their gifts. I believe churches should

involve more women and expand their biblical counseling ministry as part of an overall strategy to fulfill the Great Commission.

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF FEMALE BIBLICAL COUNSELORS IN COMPLEMENTARIAN CHURCHES

Cynthia Anne Gierhart Lowery, PhD
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In this dissertation, I argue that the role of female biblical counselors in complementarian churches is to minister to men and couples in addition to women and children, under the shepherding oversight of the elders. To defend my thesis, I exegetically evaluate gender-restrictive texts, “one-another” commands, eight additional biblical themes, and women who instructed men with Scripture’s approbation.

Chapter 1 presents the need for this research, my thesis, and a survey of existing literature at the intersection of biblical counseling and complementarianism. Chapter 2 describes complementarianism and provides my exegetical analysis of the gender-restrictive texts, particularly 1 Timothy 2:12. In this verse with continuing applicability, Paul prohibits women from teaching men in the gathered assembly and from serving as elders, thereby exercising governing authority over the church; these roles are not equal to the private ministry of the Word. Chapter 3 sets forth descriptions of biblical counseling and argues that biblical counseling is the coalescence of the “one-another” commands given without gender restriction. Chapter 4 explores the relevance of the biblical themes of interdependence, gender complementarity, the authority exclusively reserved to elders, spiritual abuse, family relationship in the body of Christ, wisdom as learned skill, spiritual gifts, and Christian liberty. Chapter 5 considers the positive way Scripture presents Deborah, Huldah, Abigail, and Priscilla instructing men in how to honor the Lord. Chapter 6 summarizes my conclusions, incorporates insight to

help churches begin to develop the role of female counselors, and offers suggestions for additional research.

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