**The Inclusion of Women in Church Leadership**

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**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

A lack of unity exists within the Christian religious community on the issue of women in leadership roles within the Church. Participation of women in church leadership roles in many congregations is limited. This capstone addresses this issue, including its background and context. Needed changes in beliefs, mindsets, and practices will be looked at to open leadership opportunities for women within the church. Impact on society will be introduced in this chapter.

**The Problem Addressed**

From creation, God intended that men and women work together, fulfilling His kingdom mandate to fill, maintain and lead planet Earth. Throughout history, practices and mindsets have challenged women's values, roles, and leadership that limit or prohibit women from participating in leadership roles (MacMillan, 2021, p. 8). The Christian religious community holds several viewpoints regarding the issue of women’s involvement in church leadership. Two primary viewpoints are complementarian and egalitarian, with diverse roles ranging from wholly patriarchal to fully matriarchal (Cole, 2020, pp. 82-83). The theological positions are critical in informing the outcomes regarding women’s role in church leadership and their level of involvement. This paper emphasizes the disunity that has produced much confusion and limited the ability of women to function at every level of leadership within the church, drawing on the basic theological tenets which inform these behaviors. Cole (2019) stated that within churches that allow women to lead, there have been challenges to the development and advancement of women, even for those with the education and credentials to do so. She explained that clarity of belief and practice must be reached to address these inequities and encourage women to step into more significant leadership roles.

What I want to call out, however, is the space between what your theology will allow a woman to do in your church and what she thinks she is allowed to do. Even if you have confidence that your stance is extremely clear, there have likely been mixed messages about how this has played out for her in your church and in her leadership. In my experience, most godly women are very aware there is a line somewhere, and because they are concerned about overstepping that line, they will often stay way below what you believe they have an opportunity to do. This gap is one of the places where you have incredible untapped leadership potential. ( p. 63)

**Background of the Problem**

Throughout history, mindsets and practices concerning women have shaped their ability to lead in both the secular and religious sectors. In their seminal book *Why Not Women*, Cunningham and Hamilton (2000) addressed the dominant perspective among the Greek, Roman, and Jewish cultures in ancient times. Male superiority was seen within the family regarding legal and moral contexts and in every leadership arena. "Contrary to the teaching of Scripture, the rabbis said that woman is more prone to sin than man. That is why many of the rabbis' laws concentrated on controlling women's supposed natural bent to lust" (p. 70). A woman's life was considered less valuable than a man's; "Many of their laws categorized wives together with slaves, cattle and other possessions." (p. 71)

In more recent history, similar mindsets and practices have resulted in a lack of freedom for women resulting in limited leadership possibilities. James (2011) addresses some barbaric practices resulting from perspectives devaluing women. Trafficking of young girls, honor killings, female genital mutilation, selective abortion of females, and limited rights and freedoms continue today, specifically in non-Christian nations (pp. 34-37). While such practices do not overtly occur in most Western countries, limiting mindsets and practices still happen. In a recent article by Pan Macmillan (2021), issues facing women, including lower wages, gaps in education and job promotion, inequality in childcare and household care disbursement, longer work hours, and sexual harassment, were noted (p.1). While the women's rights movement of the last century opened the door for women in many leadership arenas, the Church has been more restrictive (Williams, 2022). Williams (2022) provides a brief history from the early church fathers and ancient history to the present on the treatment of women within the church. He writes that the Church's view of women has slowly changed.

Perhaps this is the historical church's most pervasive and lasting sin: that up until the 1960s, the belief that women were essentially inferior to men was largely unchallenged. Only then, following the success of the Women's Liberation Movement, did society "discover" that women really do have equal intelligence to men and are just as capable of providing significant leadership. (p. 28)

The disparity of women leading outside and within the Church is still an issue. Wilde & Al-Faham (2018) discuss the complexity within various denominations concerning women in church leadership, highlighting the intersectionality of religion with race and class. (p. 2) James (2010) argued that everyone loses when half the Church is not allowed to function and the opportunity to promote change and forward the gospel mission is squandered. James (2010) uses the phrase “half the church” to express the limits of women’s involvement.

When half the church holds back – whether by choice or because we have no choice – everybody loses, and our mission suffers setbacks. Tragically, we are squandering the opportunity to display to an embattled world a gospel that causes both men and women to flourish and unites us in a Blessed Alliance that only the presence of Jesus can explain.

( p. 19)

Due to the advancement of women in secular society, many women would like to use their high-capacity marketplace skills to further the mission of the Church. Cole (2019) surveyed women to find their current professional roles. Roles ranged from attorneys, retail management, business owners/entrepreneurs, COO/CEO, educators, nurse practitioners, and military personnel. Cole noted that women allowed to serve in church leadership could use these tools and skills in Church leadership roles and provide positive momentum to promote change and solve problems. (p.38) In addressing this issue of service, the literature review describes the concept of 'the glass ceiling' (King et al., 2017, p. 196) and 'the sticky floor' (Cole, 2019, p. 54). According to these sources, both concepts limit women's involvement and contributions to the leadership arena. The glass ceiling limits women from breaking through to any leadership involvement. According to Cole, "If the women in your church are hesitant to step into higher leadership roles, accept a specific title, or take a seat at the table, there's a good reason" (p. 50). Cole further states,

"The glass ceiling is one thing, but the sticky floor is often just as limiting, especially in ministry circles. These are the attitudes and learned behaviors that women do to themselves that keep them from growing in their leadership abilities and opportunities for advancement (2019, p. 54).

Examples of the sticky floor are a need for more training, opportunity, and confidence. To address the problem, Cole proposed that men and women learn to work together, relying on the strength of diversity this brings to leadership (2019, p.30). Male allies are needed to intentionally create opportunities for women to lead and acknowledge the necessary changes in practice and mindset to open such opportunities. Madsen et al. (2020) stated that men recognized they could use their "clout" to ensure more representation of women. They state that people noticed when powerful men modeled advocacy, significantly impacting the organizational culture (p. 15).

**Significance of the Study**

Phipps Simone (2021) stated that opening the door to women would serve as a stimulus for personal transformation with a domino effect on a broader scale. Opening the door to women in church leadership has global, national, congregational, and family ramifications. As churches continue to question whether women should teach, lead, pastor, or govern within their walls, secular society wrestles with societal issues such as gender confusion, abortion, abuse, and trafficking globally. James (2010) details how gender inequality still exists in Western culture, although it is much higher around the globe. Globally, inequality is at a crushing level where women still face physical and emotional abuse (pp.29–31, 35). James (2010) further addressed the need for a global conversation about the Bible's message for women that is culturally acceptable for all women, even in less-than-ideal circumstances.

The Bible’s message for women doesn’t depend on ideal circumstances but applies fully to those who live in the brutal outskirts of society where poverty engulfs, education is nonexistent, women’s bodies are ravaged, and lives are in constant peril simply because they are female. (p. 37)

For the Church to be part of addressing the serious social issues previously mentioned, it must overcome the mindsets and practices that prohibit women from leadership or send the message that the Church agrees with these harmful practices. Leaders must acknowledge this perspective within the local and ecclesiastical structure for change to occur.

Spar (2020) noted that equality and inclusion benefit men and curiously bring their issues and needs into the open. It opens a conversation addressing men's and women's common practices and mindsets. When men and women lead together in religious or secular settings, the solutions are more inclusive and comprehensive. Spar (2020) stated:

By contrast, we know comparatively little about the issues men face and how their identities and roles are changing due to both technological and social change. We don’t know how men’s work can adapt to a world of working women because we haven't really probed yet. We don’t know how best to reconfigure home and workplace for a postindustrial, gender-neutral age. These are serious questions and ones that can only be addressed through the prisms of both men’s and women’s lives. Or to put it more bluntly: we can’t achieve gender equality for women without reconfiguring men’s roles as well.

( p.231)

That is why we must pursue solutions to build a partnership between the two genders that allows both parties to practice and improve in leadership capacities. Spar (2020) stated that if men believe in equality, expanding that belief to explicitly include women is not a leap of logic or an act of charity. He further says that men have been an obstacle to women's equality for a long time and that the time has come for them to be part of the solution (p. 222).

**The goal of the Research and Thesis Statement**

The goal of this research is not to further the inclusion of women in leadership by reducing the role of men in those roles. Instead, it offers what this researcher believes is a Biblicalperspective emphasizing the effectiveness and strength found when men and women work together at every level of church leadership, utilizing their strengths and diversity to bring change and advancement to society. Including women in every level of church leadership who work synergistically with other male and female leaders will promote unity, unleash creativity, and provide solutions for society. This inclusion is more than just participation in the weekly services and platform ministry. It is leading together from a place of understanding the value that God placed in both men and women when He created them in His image. It displays a willingness to examine prejudice and open dialogue that will lead to changes in mindsets and practices to release synergistic partnership between men and women.

**CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This literature review will cover the topic of the exclusion of women in church leadership and positive practices to encourage inclusion. Sources for the review were found using Google Scholar, ProQuest, and personal recommendations. Academic sources included current publications within the last five years (2017-Present) and sources published within the previous twenty years with significant seminal information and research. The themes covered include

* A brief historical overview of ecclesiastical positions
* Obstacles to the inclusion of women in church leadership
* Inclusion of women in church leadership, including analysis of Biblical texts and ministerial positions with needed mindsets and practices
* Best practices and recommended areas for further research.

**Historical Impact and Overview of Women in Church Leadership**

Throughout history, mindsets and practices concerning women in leadership have shaped their ability to lead in both the secular and religious sectors. In their seminal book *Why Not Women,* Cunningham and Hamilton (2000) explained the inclusion and exclusion of women in church leadership doctrinally and with Biblical examples from both the Old and New Testaments. Cunningham and Hamilton highlighted the groundbreaking nature of Jesus' example of including women as His followers and in His ministry to them in healing, teaching, and friendship. They also explained the negative mindsets toward women in ancient cultures and Jewish religious sectors, including the occasional female outlier who rose to prominence. Bosterud (2021) explained that examples from Scripture demonstrated how gender equality is something that Scripture allows and is also expected in corporate life, government, or family (p.2).

However, misogynistic tendencies still pervade various strata of our existence and, according to Nzeyo (2019), are vocally audible and visibly present within the political, economic, social, cultural, and religious spheres of our societies. He states that within Christianity, such mindsets affected the position of women within the Church and traced it to its roots during the period of the early church fathers, which has negatively impacted the ecclesiastical roles assigned to women in most churches. Barr (2021) joins this conversation with a detailed look at secular and religious history and the commonality of patriarchal mindsets and practices. Barr states that a gender hierarchy in which women rank under men can be found in almost every era and among every people group. Williams (2021) describes the differences in patriarchy, complementarianism, and egalitarianism and their progression throughout church history. Dzubinski & Stasson (2021) explain how many stories of women who contributed significantly to the Church's mission have virtually disappeared from historical records. One example that remains is from Behr-Sigel (1991). She recounts her experiences serving as a pastor of a rural parish from 1931-32 due to the lack of available men after World War I. She continued to serve in various capacities but shied away from entering into the controversy of women in ministry. It was not till the 1970s that she entered into a more public discussion of these issues.

***Summary of the Major Theological Views on Women in Church Leadership***

There are three major theological views on women in church leadership. Within primarily African American churches, there is a less-known addition. They are patriarchal, complementarian, egalitarian (Williams, 2022), and feminist womanism (AyyildizKocsoy2020). For the scope of this paper, only the first three will be addressed. Williams (2022), Cole (2019), and Cunningham and Hamilton (2000) detail the differences between the first three. More detail will be included in chapter three, highlighting the basic tenets of each and how they affect the inclusion of women in church leadership. Highland (2021) adds feminism to the descriptions and challenges the historical practices of exclusion within the Church. While this paper emphasizes church leadership, patriarchal mindsets' effects do not stop in ecclesiastical settings. It bleeds into the workplace, affecting women's behaviors and allowing discrimination and perceived inferiority (Toyin, Fang & Iwowo, 2020). Tandy (2019)  brings the conversation to the present by presenting testimonials from women currently serving in church leadership positions.

**Current obstacles to the inclusion of women in leadership**

***The glass ceiling and sticky floor***

The glass ceiling and sticky floor concepts regarding women's obstacles in the workplace are not new. The glass ceiling posits an invisible barrier preventing women from reaching top organizational positions (King, Maniam & Leavell, 2017). They compare it to the glass escalator concept, which indicates benefits for men that enhance their ability to advance even in fields dominated by women. Brown et al. (2020) add the idea of the sticky floor, which keeps women from rising within the workplace due to lack of training, opportunities, and confidence. They define it as a metaphor describing an inequitable architectural feature of career paths, and its potential impact on individuals is profound. Saleem, Rafiq & Yusaf (2017) promoted empirical evidence to confirm the existence and provide solutions for removing these obstacles. They advocate for more opportunities for women's advancement in leadership roles. Some of the other barriers described are

***Misalignment of beliefs and practices.***

Cole (2019) describes the disparity between theological beliefs and actual practices in many church leadership circles. Even in churches that advocate for the inclusion of women, the mindsets, vocabulary, and opportunities are not aligned. Cole states, “To have clarity, and therefore confident and productive leaders, what your church says you believe and what your church does with those beliefs have to match” (p.21). Gatenby & Humphries (2019) speak about the unspoken nature of the practices that keep women out of leadership and advocate open dialogue to encourage change.

***Lack of Opportunity, Development, and Training.***

Women need more training and development to result in fewer missed opportunities and risk-averse tendencies toward advancement as women avoid applying for higher positions or taking risks in their roles (Durque & Pluut, 2018)—Risk adverse speaks to the tendency to avoid risk and have a low-risk tolerance. Player et al. (2019) discussed the disproportion of women to men offered positions of advancement.

***Disagreement on Biblical theology of women's role***

The church's theological position directly influences the opportunities and practices that would allow women to lead in the Church. Cole (2019) and James (2011) highlight the practices and mindsets that prevail even in churches with a stated position allowing women to lead. James (2011) adds a global perspective and addresses the social, political, family, and religious problems that accompany a theology adverse to women functioning in leadership roles.

***Stereotypes of men and women as leaders***

Prejudice towards women in leadership occurs as women are stereotyped. Saint-Michel (2018) noted that male leaders are generalized as agentic, displaying assertiveness, striving for achievement, and competitiveness. Female leaders are contrasted as communal with characteristics such as nurture, benevolence, and personal caring for the individual. Men were considered less effective in transformational leadership, irrespective of their strengths. Gaddini (2021) noted the mixed effect of media in highlighting women in leadership. While it brought women's role into the public eye, it also reinforced stereotypes and prejudice by portraying them as unable to exert needed strength and assertiveness in their leadership practices.

***The adverse effects of the exclusion of women from church leadership***

James (2011) believes that the myriad of problems that exist on a global scale would be positively addressed if half of the Church was not excluded from participation in church leadership. Cole (2019) believes that misunderstanding, disunity, and ineffectiveness exist in church leadership due to the lack of clarity and open resistance to women's inclusion on the leadership team. Wiliams (2022) addresses the ramifications, including a rising 'body count' of women adversely affected by their exclusion from church leadership. He advocates further study and dialogue to bring change and inclusion for women in the ecclesiastical realm.

**Inclusion of Women in Church Leadership**

***Clarity and alignment of beliefs and practices***

Cole (2019) shares eight best practices designed to align the stated acceptance of women in church leadership roles with real-time practices. These are:

* Seek to understand - The need to understand the theological positions concerning women in leadership as well as the problems faced by women in church leadership roles
* Clearly define what you believe - The need to define the practices and bring clarity and focus to the role of women in church leadership
* Mine the marketplace - The need for better placement and utilization of women who lead in the marketplace
* Integrate Spiritual Formation and Leadership Development - The need for intentional formation and development of women to equip them for effective leadership within the church
* Be an “Other”- The need for male mentors, male sponsors, and female coaches in developing female leaders
* Create an environment of safety - The need for creating a safe environment in the workplace free of sexual and other harassment by rethinking practices, policies, and procedures.
* Upgrade your people practices - The need to examine practices including compensation, job descriptions and titles, benefits, education and training opportunities, metrics, and reviews for equality with men and women
* Take on your culture - The need to address the specific culture of your leadership teams, including language, vocabulary, boundaries, icons, and overall atmosphere.

Tandy (2019) highlights positive results from women involved in church planting and leadership teams.

***Biblical understanding and support***

**Creation plan and order.**

 James (2011) and  Williams (2022) state that God's original pattern from Creation was for man and woman to work together to fulfill God's plan on earth. They both believe God's view of women and traditional historical views do not agree and need to be studied and aligned. The Hebrew word *ezer* used to describe the woman is the same word used to describe God as our helper. *Kenegdo* speaks of the woman as a counterpart, a perfect face-to-face match. This does not fit the often-used description of women as lesser. The Creation plan and order related to women’s leadership roles will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

**Jesus' inclusion of women.**

Jesus' treatment of women showed value, respect, and ability to be His disciple, build His Church and make disciples (Cunningham & Hamilton, 2000). His actions made a loud statement in the patriarchal world to which He came.  Almirzanah (2022) recounts examples of Jesus' relationship with women and his treatment of them as disciples (pp. 7-12). Examples include the account of Mary receiving praise for sitting at Jesus’ feet to learn (Luke 10:38-42) and Jesus instructing the women to go to the disciples with the news of His resurrection (Luke 23:49, 24:10). Akmirzanah (2022) concludes:

To be a Christian is to pursue and act in accordance with Jesus Christ as the Way

(immitatio Christi). It means to go after him where he is and to act, behave, bear, and manage our lives like him. Orthopraxy or correctness of action has a preference over orthodoxy, but both have to be performed contextually. With reference to Jesus’ perspective on women, the gospel accounts elaborated above reveal that Jesus advocated equal rights for both women and men. (p. 12)

**Pauline writings and the early church practices.**

There is much to learn from the Pauline writings and early church practices, which are often used to promote the exclusion and silencing of women in the Church. Connor (2003) provides extensive examples and exegesis of Pauline writings that silence women in the Church. Branch (2019) gives the example of Phoebe in the Pauline writings to demonstrate women's ability to lead. The fulfillment of Joel's prophecy in Acts 2 released both men and women to equal participation in the formation and growth of the early Church, according to Yong (2020). Bosterud (2021) summarized the involvement of women in leadership roles within the Christian community historically, including during the Roman times of the New Testament era.

They did not follow the cultural umwelt but introduced a revolutionary

culture of gender sensitivity. As highly visible women in the Bible have been awarded important and crucial roles on all levels of society, we may draw inspiration and guidance from the biblical texts today for supporting gender equality on all levels and realms of organization, corporations, and society. (p. 8)

**Best Practices that Promote the Inclusion of Women in Church Leadership**

***Cultural Adaptation and Training for Women in Leadership***

While culture is not the basis for including women in leadership roles, it provides examples of successful adaptation and training for women allowing them to move into leadership roles within the Church. Steeves (2017) interviewed 44 women who are serving in ministry within the Church and shared insights and experiences, both positive and negative. Women must lean into leadership roles and be open to training and new mindsets that allow them to lead well (Phipps Simone & Prieto, 2021). Roedel (2021) highlights perspectives and practices in communication, leading teams, dealing with difficulties, and promoting a healthy work environment. These should lead to promotions, better compensation, and better assignments allowing women to display their work.

***Practical Benefits for Church and Society***

Many practical benefits occur when women are allowed to function at a leadership level within the Church. Women's diverse leadership skills are utilized in secular and corporate arenas and church leadership teams, unleashing societal benefits and change (Cole, 2019). Effectiveness is multiplied when men and women are released to work and lead side by side, utilizing their unique gifts and abilities to achieve change locally and globally (James, 2011). When the empowerment of women in the Bible is used to encourage women within the Church today, it can advance the mission of Christ (Mudimelli et al., 2019).

***Male Allies and Mentors***

When male leaders resolve the theological beliefs, cultural norms, and behavioral practices that exclude women from leadership, they can significantly promote women's inclusion in church leadership. Cole (2019) believes that for women to lead within the Church successfully, male leaders must be willing to address the inequities, make room for their skills, and advocate for their placement and voice. Male allyship provided to women through opportunities, training, advocacy, and inclusion will advance women and increase their performance in the workplace(Madsen, Townsend & Scribner, 2020). When male leaders step up to challenge ingrained behaviors and mindsets within their organization concerning women's roles, it increases awareness. It allows them to become part of the solution rather than the problem (Rimmer, 2019). Spar (2020)  reminds women that allowing men to join in the fight for gender equality should advance the issues and solutions more effectively than if women isolate themselves in the struggle.

***Communication and cooperation***

Communication and cooperation must take place in many ways. Issues such as the continued disparity in the ratio of men and women in senior leadership roles must be addressed (Lawson, Martin, Huda & Matz, 2022). Awareness and understanding of the underlying beliefs concerning roles will require clarity and conversation to improve the work experience for men and women (Longman et al., 2018). Church leadership must take the time to look at God's original intent regarding the value and roles of both men and women. Cole (2019), James (2011), and Williams (2022) all advocate such honest study, as well as a willingness to admit bias and be willing to change mindsets and practices within the Church concerning women’s role in church leadership.

 Rovira-Asenjo et al. (2017) advocate Male-Female partnerships in the leadership arena. With honest study, conversation, and a willingness to understand one another's perspectives, men and women can dialogue and define God's place for men and women in leadership within the Church (Cole, 2019). James (2011) believes that understanding God's intent should not elevate either men or women at the other's expense but should release fresh unity and effectiveness as they work together to bring needed change. Women bring their ability to create cohesive teams, which can aid the partnership and release the skillsets of both men and women for effective leadership (Rovira-Asenjo et al., 2017). When men advocate for the inclusion of women, it provides an atmosphere of understanding and promotes partnership and synergy (Rimmer, 2019).

**CHAPTER 3**

**SUMMARY OF RESEARCH AND CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW**

The inclusion of women in church leadership is a broad subject. Studying the problem from secular and religious history, observing the theological and cultural obstacles, as well as personal experience and observation, support the need for inclusion and confirm that the issue requires further resolution. In this chapter, the comparison of theological positions will be observed through a comparison of several controversial portions of Scripture. Examples from Biblical history will be used to confirm that inclusion is complementary to a Christian worldview. In addition, a summary of the research is included through a Christian worldview filter.

**Summary of Research**

In reviewing the literature concerning the inclusion of women in church leadership, the preponderance of information came from those researching the history of women's exclusion from leadership in the Church and those seeking solutions and a greater understanding of the issue. The historical filter, analysis of Biblical texts and ecclesiastical positions, and current mindsets and practices worked together to provide a macro perspective from which analysis and solutions can be formed.

 The overall tone of the research suggests that much of the Christian community is still grappling with this issue. Even in settings where the decision has been made to include women in leadership, the mindsets, practices, and scope of their involvement must be addressed. Male leaders who advocate for women's involvement and provide opportunities, conversation, and training lead the way in bringing needed change and understanding to this issue.

**Christian Worldview Analysis**

***Theological positions***

The patriarchal, complementarian and egalitarian, or mutualist positions interpret the Scriptures concerning women's role differently, specifically in how they apply to their inclusion in church leadership. The shift from a patriarchal to a complementarian position came in the late 1980s. (Williams, 2022, pp. 48-49) Williams (2022) refers to the Danvers statement, a doctrinal treatise about gender roles developed by theologians Wayne Grudem and John Piper, along with a small group of pastors who met to discuss the Biblical role of women. They chose the term complementarianism to stress equality and mutually beneficial differences. Williams (2022) states, “Indeed, complementarianism has been such a powerful and effective movement that for most churches influenced by it, even to entertain other views on the matter seems like obvious folly or heresy” (p. 49).

Kadi Cole (2019) speaks about the necessity of clarity on your theological position. Cole (2019) references one's view on the Trinity and how the members of the Godhead relate to one another. One view sees the members of the Trinity as equal in value and importance, with their relationship marked by mutual submission. This view lends itself to the egalitarian position. The other holds that Jesus' submission to the Father while on earth was not temporary. Although the members of the Trinity are equal in value, there is a hierarchy in their roles and how they function. This view lends itself to the complementarian and patriarchal views. Cole (2019) also believes that variations in each of the major positions lead to various mindsets and practices. In summarizing the research, we will look at the primary beliefs of each position with their interpretation of several vital Scriptures. Williams (2022) relates the history and beliefs of the above positions but primarily compares the complementarian and egalitarian positions. He prefers the term mutualism to describe egalitarianism (p. 46). He notes that most complementarians reject the view of women as inferior but still advocate for male headship in the church and home (p.47). Cole's descriptions of each are clear and are used here for a synopsis of each position.

Patriarchal: Men are superior to women and should lead in all areas of life, including the home and the Church. If married, a woman should not work outside the home, and some question her need for education (Cole, 2019).

Complementarian: Men and women are equal in value but different in their roles. The man is considered the "head," and the woman is the "helpmeet." In the home, the man is to be a servant leader and primary breadwinner. The woman is to be submissive and manage the home and children until they are adults. In the Church, men hold all roles of leadership and authority. The only exceptions are ministry to children and other women. Women are not allowed to teach or lead any man. She usually will only work in the home. There are varying degrees of this view that allow for the limited ministry of women in a team format as long as she is under the covering of the men (Cole, 2019).

Egalitarian: Men and women are equal as home, church, and work partners. In theory, all roles are equally open to men and women, although there are varying degrees of this in practice. Roles are based on personal giftedness and preference, with a high emphasis on teamwork. Some groups have a combination of complementarian and egalitarian views, with a preference for male headship in the highest levels of church leadership (Cole, 2019).

A differing interpretation of the Bible supports each of these positions. Extensive research has been done in this area by theologians of each persuasion. For the scope of this paper, a brief look at a few key passages and Biblical accounts will be given to demonstrate how each position maintains its views.

**Creation and the Fall – Genesis 2 & 3.**

The patriarchal and complementarian positions interpret these passages similarly. Their main points are listed with a subpoint explaining the egalitarian/mutualist position.

* The woman was created second, which makes men superior and women inferior and subordinate.
  + If this line of argument were valid, then the second person of the Trinity would be inferior to Father God. The animals were created before  Adam. John the Baptist came before Christ. This is the Divine Order of Creation, not a statement of value or worth. (Cole, 2019, pp. 24-26)
* The woman was created for Adam as a helper.
  + The Hebrew word used for helper is the word *ezer* and is the same word used to describe God as our Helper. The Hebrew word *knegdo* speaks of a counterpart of the same image. There is no suitable English word to convey this well. Genesis 1:26 – 27 ESV says God made both male and female in His image. Both were instructed to be fruitful, multiply and take dominion over the earth. (James, 2011)
* The woman derives her existence from the man, as she was built from his rib. Thus, she is subordinate to man.
  + Adam was created from the dust of the earth yet is not subordinate to the ground. God created Eve in His image; He used Adam's rib as He had used the earth. He created both of them equal in His image.
* The woman does not give names to the animals.
  + Genesis 1:28 states that dominion was given to both man and woman.
* The woman was not put in charge of the Garden.
  + The woman was given responsibilities with Adam, and both were given dominion over the earth.
* The woman sinned first, and part of her judgment was that man would rule over her.
  + This point does not imply that there was subordination to the man before the Fall. It was after the Fall that the judgment from God was that the man would rule over his wife. This point will be looked at in more depth in the overview of I Timothy 2:13-15. Many men take it from this portion that ALL men are to rule over ALL women. This is not so. God is speaking primarily to the husband/wife relationship and is not a general rule for male rulership. It is also important to note that God said the woman's desire would be for her husband, and he would rule. "It is absolutely important to note that when God said, 'Your desire will be to your husband, and he shall rule over you,' this was not a command of God to the man. It was simply prophetic of what would happen, of what the man would do to his wife. It was a statement of a future fact. It is the same as when Jesus told Peter he would deny Him three times. Jesus did not command Peter to deny Him. It was a prophecy. It was a fact that Peter would deny" (Conner, 2003, p.30; Giles, 1985;).

James (2011) states that Genesis 2 is where the description of the woman narrows from that of image bearer to "helpmeet" (thanks to King James), from the woman as ruling and subduing the whole earth to the woman as wife, mother, and homemaker, from leader to follower. James clarifies that about 50% of American women over 15 are married. This number drops to 40% when the age is under 15. If the Church concentrates its primary message for women on marriage, then approximately 60% of women have no purpose. Stating this is not meant to demean the honorable role of wife and mother; it is simply to drive home the point that God's purpose for women is not solely to fulfill these roles. Much more can be added to this section, and it deserves much research and dialogue to increase understanding of God's purpose and heart for both men and women.

**New Testament Scriptures on a woman keeping silent in the Church**

I Corinthians 14:34-35 and I Timothy 2:11 -12 are two primary Pauline passages often used to "silence" women in the Church. Proper interpretation of these verses is key to understanding and applying Paul's words. Connor (2003) expresses the importance of using proper hermeneutics to exegete the Scriptures. Connor references the four significant gaps that must be bridged: historical, geographical, cultural, and linguistic. He also references several essential principles of Biblical interpretation, including the context principle and discerning the difference between whether a passage is a Biblical command, principle, or custom. The redemption order must also be considered in all of these passages.

"The challenge is: Do we see one another, man and woman, 'in Adam,' or 'in Christ?' Jew and Greek, slave and free, circumcision and uncircumcision, male and female, Barbarian or Scythian, ALL are one in Christ. All, as persons, are redemptively equal…The issue is the old creation order and the new creation order. These are the two' railway lines' of Pauline theology that must be kept in position and tension to avoid disaster in the Church, the people of God" (Conner, 2003, p. 81).

The Patriarchal and complementarian positions hold that these verses were meant for all

women in most or all areas of ministry in the Church and, in some cases, in society. There has been extensive exegesis of these Scriptures by scholars, present and past. Those that believe these verses were not meant to silence women or exclude them from ministry within the Church or society believe it is not a fair treatment of Pauline thought to use these verses to silence all women in all churches for all times from public ministry (Conner, 2003, p. 101). They believe this was Paul dealing with a local situation of disorder within the Corinthian Church. It was specifically speaking for wives to not speak to their husbands with questions and disrupt the service. Paul would contradict himself when he instructs men and women to pray and prophesy in I Cor. 11:4-5. In I Corinthians 14:26, Paul spoke of everyone coming to the assembly with a psalm, a tongue, or a hymn. It is a viable option to assess that Paul was not giving a command but a principle speaking to order in the Church.

The passage in 1 Timothy is similarly open to differing views, with the patriarchal and complementarians viewing Paul's words as universal commands vs. specific instructions for that time and place. Timothy was pastoring in Ephesus, which maintained some of the strongest goddess worship in history (Conner, 2003, p. 106). The scope of this paper leaves little room for extensive explanation. Still, in summary, the word silence is better interpreted as "stillness" and speaks to a posture of learning, not a complete and forever silencing. The authority spoken of is with the husband and wife and not all men to all women. As discussed earlier, one must look at the redemptive order of all believers, male and female, as "in Christ."

"Paul is not laying down law for all times and churches in all nations. Paul is encouraging Timothy to stop those men and women (elders and women teachers) who were disrupting the services, teaching false doctrine, and being domineering and authoritarian in the Church in Ephesus. It is a local situation, not a universal situation. The principle will apply in all situations, anywhere and everywhere. Men and women are to flow together in a meek and quiet spirit, evidencing Christian character, submission, and obedience to Divine authority. Men and women maintain their distinct roles in the home and in the Church as they walk "in Christ" and evidence the Christian lifestyle in the midst of a heathen society" (Conner, 2003, p. 137).

**Biblical examples of the inclusion of women in leadership roles**

It is important to note that each position interprets the inclusion of women noted in the Old Testament differently. Highfield (2017) notes the main differences between the three. The patriarchal position asserts that God created man as superior to woman. Thus he was to rule over women, and in extreme cases, by any means necessary, including violence. They assert that men were created with greater strength and wisdom, and so are the natural rulers over women, children, and enslaved people. (p. 59) Complementarians assert the equality of men and women in relation to God’s love but not in role and leadership opportunities. Their position is that men should lead but lovingly treat women with dignity and respect (pp. 61-63)

We believe Scripture’s restrictions were intended for the good of women and men and for the welfare of the whole church. They were designed to affirm the goodness of the created differences between male and female, to protect women from bad men, and to keep the ecclesial order aligned with the natural family order. And we believe these truths and goals are just as important and obligatory today as they were in the First Century. Women are not the natural rulers of men. Men know this, and women know it too. Hence the church must maintain some form of role differentiation to make sure that the church’s social order does not contradict the natural and created order. To be specific, we don't think women should be appointed to ruling offices, whatever those happen to be in your denomination. (Highfield, 2017, p.65)

The Egalitarian position is that men and women were created “with equal status (that is, equal in power and privilege) of men and women in society, church, and family.” (Highfield, 2017, p.35) The following examples from the Old and New Testaments are used to support the inclusion of women in leadership roles and are used by Egalitarians to support their position.

***Old Testament***

The Israelite world of the Old Testament was patriarchal, and women's primary place of influence was in the home (Conner, 2003, p. 37). However, women were included in many spiritual services, ministries, and functions. This included:

* Male and female prophets
  + Miriam (Exodus 15:20)
  + Huldah (2 Kings 22:12-20),
  + Isaiah's wife
  + Anna (Luke 2:36-38),
* Male and female judges
  + Deborah (Judges 4-5)
* Men and women worshiped the Lord, attended the Feasts, and could take the Nazarite Vows.
* Examples of Godly women who served in various capacities: Eve, Rahab, Ruth, Naomi, Miriam, Esther, Sarah, and Rebekah, to name a few.

***New Testament***

The prophet Joel (quoted by Peter in Acts 2) spoke that God's Spirit was coming to ALL FLESH, both men and women. This prophecy speaks to the change that would come after the cross. Before the cross, the Holy Spirit came upon a select few, mainly men. After the cross, the Holy Spirit was poured out on all flesh, and as Galatians 3:28 states, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Jesus came to a "male-dominated Jewish culture where the value and status of women were generally one of male domination and suppression (Conner, 2003, p. 54). In light of this, His treatment of women was revolutionary. He treated both men and women with dignity and equal value in the sight of Father God. The fact that He chose 12 male disciples is not debated due to cultural norms. However, His teachings, interactions, and inclusion of them are significant. A few examples of this are:

* The Genealogy of Jesus mentions five women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary (ESV, 2018, Matthew 1)
* He healed women such as the woman with the issue of blood, Jairus' daughter, and a Gentile woman's daughter, as well as speaking into the issue of adultery in His compassionate treatment of the woman brought before Him as an adulteress. He honored marriage and spoke against divorce as being allowed because of the hardness of the heart.
* Women were the chief witnesses of the incarnation, the crucifixion, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus. They were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb, and they were part of the 120 that waited in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Giles (2018) calls Jesus the best friend women ever had. He stated that Jesus subverted the prevailing view of women held by the Jewish leaders of His day. Jesus’ words and actions affirmed mutual and respectful relationships between men and women and excluded any devaluing of women. (p.77) Giles also references the hermeneutic that Jesus used specifically in discussing marriage and divorce.

We should also note the hermeneutic Jesus uses. He allows that not every text in Scripture has the same theological weight. He makes the creation ideal given in Gen 1 and 2 weightier than a comment given by Moses dealing with the realities of life in a fallen world. Jesus’ teaching on divorce is hugely important. He wants his disciples to make the creation ideal their ideal for their marriages; a lifelong union between a man and a woman who have the same responsibilities, rights, and privileges. (p. 82)

The early Church was also a place where women were treated differently. The Apostle Paul, while credited with some of the most challenging passages to reconcile, was also the author who declared a redemption order where men and women, slave and free, Jew and Gentile, were equal at the foot of the cross and able to function freely in various roles and functions. Before the cross, men and women were "in Adam" and under the curse of sin. Through the cross, all humanity was brought into freedom "in Christ." (Highfield, 2017, p.38) Paul also served alongside various women leaders, including Priscilla and Lydia.

Women who followed Christ and functioned in various roles within the Church are recorded throughout the New Testament. A few examples are:

* Phoebe was recorded as a deacon in the Church of Cenchrea and is thought to have carried the epistle of Romans to the Church there. (Branch, 2019) Branch notes that Phoebe was called a servant, deacon, or leader known for her great gifts and character.
* Priscilla served with her husband Aquilla as servants with Paul. They were leaders and held a church in their home.
* Junia is listed with Andronicus as an apostle. Many scholars believe that Junia was a woman. Lin (2020) presents a survey of the counterarguments of the primary dissenting scholars Wolters, Huttar, and Burer. Lin then presents the scholarly arguments confirming Junia as a female and a prominent apostle.

**The application of a Christian worldview**

Christians must model a Godly position towards women to properly present Kingdom culture. Society today is filled with confusion regarding personal identity, male and female roles, sexuality, and equal rights for all. Christians have a unique opportunity to speak and display a Biblical model where men and women function equally, honoring and respecting their God-given differences and living effectively together as productive citizens. Cole (2019) discusses the confusion as churches grapple with including women in leadership roles. A clear understanding of the theological positions and their implications and aligning beliefs and actions is essential.

When churches keep women from functioning in leadership and service roles within the Church, it signals that Christianity represses women. The Scriptural examples in the previous section confirm that God created men and women in His image, equal in value and diverse in giftings, with a clear mandate to make the earth more like heaven. Jesus modeled a lifestyle of inclusion and respect for women that allowed them to be involved with establishing the early Church. Women prayed, prophesied, evangelized, sat at Jesus' feet as students, contributed financially to the furthering of the kingdom, opened their homes, did works of service, and led in various capacities within the local Church. Lack of inclusion keeps women from using their God-given gifts to address significant societal issues and contribute to their sphere's overall well-being. Inclusion begins to heal the pain women have experienced through oppression and suppression and brings hope to women that God has a place and purpose for them. Such placement goes a long way toward producing strong families, strong churches, and a stronger society marked by healthy interactions and contributions by both men and women. Society is plagued with complex and diverse problems. Leaders promote change, and when the base of leaders is increased with both men and women, there will be an increase in solutions and societal change. James (2011) cites a few examples of this.:

* Global issues concerning women will be addressed and improved, such as physical and emotional oppression, equality and representation, clarity of communication, and practices in business, family, and the religious sector.
* Opportunities for the advancement of women in secular and religious leadership roles will be increased, opening the door for progress in research, finances, and leadership.

Godly families that demonstrate mutual submission and clear roles and functions contribute to the success and well-being of a culture. Such families allow society to see a demonstration of how the kingdom of God works. It goes a long way to silencing the critics of God's plan for the home and allows order and discipline to be maintained in an atmosphere of love and respect.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**CONCLUSION AND INTERPRETATION**

The examination and research concerning women's inclusion in church leadership have been encouraging and discouraging. It is encouraging, as much research, dialogue, and information concerning this vital issue exist. It is discouraging as there is still polarization and prejudice on a broad scale within the church community. Including women in church leadership requires thoughtful Biblical and historical research with a willingness to reexamine long-held positions concerning women – their value, role, and calling. Alice Matthews (2017) emphasizes the need for a scholarly hermeneutic that considers the historical and grammatical interplay of linguistics, grammar, and history and the sociopolitical, geographical, and cultural factors of Biblical times. She compares the debate over slavery within the Church and the hermeneutics and misreading of Scripture that allowed a pro-slavery mindset and practice to coexist – abolitionists vs. non-abolitionists. Sadly, beliefs concerning women have allowed similar oppression and treatment on a global scale. The same patience, wisdom, and bravery that were required to abolish slavery are needed in this day to bring freedom and value to women and promote healthy interaction between men and women within society, but especially within the Church.

In looking at the complexity of the various ecclesiastical positions concerning women, their inclusion in church leadership is not a one-step process. Scholarly research, open dialogue, personal observation, and thought are required to break open the broad question and examine the mindsets and practices that allow prejudice and devaluing of others, including women. Once these practices occur, the church must move from the research and dialogue phase to the action phase of including women in various leadership positions. Mudimeli & van der Westhuizen (2019) believe the church has a vital function in empowering women within the church. They recommend that churches encourage women to study theology and allow them to serve in leadership positions, not only as leaders of other women or as pastors to the children but also as pastors to the church. This process was necessary for the Church where I have served as a co-pastor for 40 years. Women had been functioning in various ministry roles, but the ordination of women and the scope of ministry still needed to be determined. The mindsets and practices of men and women working together on the leadership team were also studied. The Senior pastor led the way in asking for input from the women on the team regarding their experiences and treatment within the local Church and the greater organization of churches. He provided research materials, interviewed leaders from differing positions on this question, asked the eldership board to study independently, and welcomed position papers, questions, and dialogue on the issue. After months of study, a forum was held to compile the research and dialogue and to vote on the position our local Church and the growing movement of churches would adopt. Included was a decision on the ordination of women. While the outcome was for full inclusion of women in leadership, including ordination and the ability to hold senior leadership positions, the process was equally important. Even if a different outcome had been decided upon, the willingness to do the hard work of examination and research was a victory.

The decision was a partial step in the process. Then came the action recommended by Mudimeli & van der Westhuizen (2019) of encouraging women to study theology and prepare and participate in leadership and pastoral roles. It was interesting to note that it was only when both the decision was reached, and action was taken to encourage and include women in leadership that the deeper dialogue and examination of the mindsets and practices concerning women in leadership, interaction, team building with men and women, training, and best practices were examined. Cole (2019) and Williams (2021) examine the mindsets and practices in the Church concerning women in leadership roles. They advocate for men and women to work together and do the hard work required *after* the initial research. Crucial conversations are necessary. Gatenby & Humphries (2019) discussed women's silence in the workplace because they did not feel safe speaking. Cole (2019) coined the phrase "lovingly ignorant" to describe the expectations, comments, and questions she has experienced from high-level male leaders, whom she describes as amazing men. Her research and knowledge mirror others endeavoring to highlight the issues and help leaders think critically about what they believe and how they can be even more intentional about elevating and empowering the female leaders who serve on their teams or sit in their congregations.

It is interesting to note that from God's viewpoint, man and woman were created in His image to fulfill His purpose of dominion, fruitfulness, and multiplication. After sin entered the world, division, oppression, and confusion began. Jesus came to break down the wall of separation between God and man and between humans - man and woman, man to man, woman to woman. When prejudice of any kind is unquestioned, the result is oppression, misunderstanding, ineffectiveness, and fruitlessness. James (2011) challenges both men and women to do the hard work. "Now is the time to ask ourselves – both individually and collectively- where we are on track with God's vision both for us and his world, where we've lost our way and how we need to change and correct course." (pg. 177) She advocates for men and women to come together as intended by our Creator and fulfill His Kingdom's purpose and plan.

This research, personal ministry, and life experience bring a personal conclusion supporting the inclusion of men and women in all levels of church leadership. The creation model of bringing their unique gifts, strengths, and weakness together will work in all spheres of society. When God created man and woman as His image bearers, He looked at all His Creation and said it was very good. (Genesis 1). Williams (2021) states that diversity leads to greater growth and productivity, yet notes it also leads to greater complexity and misunderstanding. Including women in leadership roles will only be with both of these realities. As noted in the literature review, greater training, continued research, conversation, the assistance of male allies, and cooperation of women are necessary to break both the glass ceiling and sticky floor experienced by women in the workplace- secular and religious. It is hard work but necessary if unity with a diversity of men and women is to be realized. Every woman, or for that matter, every man, does not want to be included in leadership roles. However, every human was created with value and gifting. An atmosphere of honor and dignity is crucial for every human being to fulfill their God-ordained purpose.

**CHAPTER 5**

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

Including women in church leadership appears more critical and necessary than ever before. Within the scope of the research, the rightness and benefits outshine the contradictory viewpoints and challenges. Much work must be done to end the inequalities that have resulted in half the Church being excluded from significant leadership contributions. Williams (2021) described the growing cognitive dissonance he experienced that pushed him to explore his complementarian viewpoint. He suggests that one of the first ways to assess your church culture in this area is to ask gifted and called women some probing questions, such as:

* What does it feel like to be a female leader in this Church?
* What, if anything, deters a woman from being more fully deployed?
* How could we improve all this?

He suggests that the men new to working with women take the time to grow in understanding as they listen without interruption, ask clarifying questions, and trust the women new to the leadership table. Take the Church on the theological journey that causes them to release women into leading and preaching. In doing so, the Church can be guided to receive women's ministry, and the culture will change. A historical example is the Salvation Army, led by William and Catherine Booth. They saw themselves as pioneers for female leadership and publicly appointed women to the same leadership offices as men. They allowed women to preach, teach, and function in the same role the men. (Williams, pg. 295)

While many of the resources included in this study advocated for the inclusion of women in leadership, many focused on the need and benefits yet did not give a clear path for change. Many listed a few good ideas and practices to promote successful inclusion but needed a comprehensive action plan. Brown et al.020) and Darouei & Pluut (2018) challenged the glass ceiling and sticky floor. They advocated for women to take more significant risks and for the removal of barriers to advancement. Barr (2021) and Bosterud (2021) used examples of women in the Bible to advocate change. These examples speak to the continued need for further voices to advocate for change through scholarly research and coed teams committed to working together for strong, cohesive leadership, especially within the Church.

The scope of this paper only allowed for a depth of research in some areas pertaining to the inclusion of women in Christian ministry. Some suggestions for future research and discussion would be:

* Co-leading – Husbands and wives serving together as senior leaders (wecolead.com/Danny and Jamie Schulz)
* Complementarians who are changing their position and moving towards more inclusion of women in church leadership.
* Roles and relationships of men and women within the home (This would include a study on Ephesians 5:21-33 and mutual submission)
* Expanding the study of crucial Biblical passages related to women in leadership
* The global treatment of women and how it relates to a proper view of women from God's perspective
* The history of the women's movement and its effect on women in church leadership

Further study of these would add depth to the present discussion and bring greater understanding between those with differing positions.

It is important to note that those on both sides of this issue within the Church – complementarian and egalitarian – are endeavoring to approach this sensitive subject with honest scholarship. It is a complicated debate that can polarize and confuse men and women alike. Along with the theological and cultural perspectives, there is the reality that many women are single, widowed, or childless. The roles proposed in some circles leave them with a minimal circle of influence. James (2011) shares her position as she navigates this minefield.

From what I can see, women and girls are a rich goldmine – a powerhouse of blessing and gifts for the Church, of strength and wisdom for our brothers, and enormous good for the world. After all, women do hold up half the sky…I make no apology for advocating the Blessed Alliance of male and female image bearers. Rich, collaborative, interdependent relationships between God's sons and daughters are vital to both genders and make the body of Christ stronger. The Blessed Alliance fuels the kingdom of God and must not be displaced by an atmosphere of tension, fear, and mistrust. (Pg. 160)

There is so much to gain from humble, honest questioning of the status of women within the Church. There is so much to lose without it. "The debate itself may take place in an ivory tower – in scholarly disputations, in books, in theological papers, in wranglings over Greek words, and a few hotly contested sentences in Paul's letters. But it plays out in our lives and is anything but academic." (James, 2011, pg. 161) The decision to include women in church leadership cannot be pushed back for another time. The clock is ticking now, with real lives and situations hanging in the balance. There is enough information on the table to make a clear and competent decision one way or another. Clarity allows both men and women to decide where to worship and serve with clarity and focus. This decision has repercussions for women locally and globally. It has implications for young and old , families, churches, non-profits, and secular industries.

Alice Matthews (2017) is a godly 86-year-old woman who has been married for 65 years as a Christian. Through trial and error, she and her husband, Randall, discovered that tasks in marriage could be assigned by giftedness, not gender. She echoes those advocating for the inclusion of women in leadership based on the Creation Mandate with these observations:

Two startling realities stand out in the Creation Manifesto: The first is that God created humanity in two forms (male and female), and both are bearers of the Divine image. The second is that the man and woman together were given two major tasks: populating the new world and subduing the earth…If gender-based hierarchy is allowed to continue destroying lives and disrupting God's work of redeeming a broken world, it plays into Satan's hand…We cannot shrug off church history as if the millions of women's blighted lives did not matter. The enmity between the serpent and the woman (Gen. 3:15) is ongoing. It is here. How will we respond to the challenge it presents? (pg. 226,234,238)

If this were a boardroom and her words were given as a motion for agreement to fulfill the Creator's mandate, I would second the motion. Let us move forward and invite men and women to work together for inclusion and unity in purpose and practice. The stakes are high; the needed change to effectively double the workforce is accessible and available.

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