

## Women and the WELS

### Connecting Church Practice With Scriptural Teaching

Mention the Wisconsin Synod to a friend and the response might be, “Oh, that’s the church that doesn’t let women vote.” Ask a member of the WELS to explain the church’s position and the response is likely to be, “It’s complicated.” It must be. The WELS doctrinal statements on the subject, formulated at a time of growing radical feminism in America, are 36 in number. Have these statements adequately expressed the Bible’s teaching on the subject? God’s people can best answer that question by restudying God’s Word.

A reason for such restudy is that the WELS doctrinal statements can be a bit challenging to understand and apply. The second statement says: ***God established distinct male and female responsibilities for the man and woman. . . . These responsibilities involved headship for man and submission for woman.*** Statement #20 adds: ***Christians also accept the biblical role relationship principle for their life and work in the world.*** Should Christian women refuse to accept a role in business or the civic arena that places them in a position to which men report, a position that will require them to direct, discipline, and dismiss males?

The 34<sup>th</sup> statement reads: ***We reject the opinion that every woman is always subject to every man. Other scriptural role relationship principles and the injunction, “We must obey God rather than men” (Ac 5:29), also govern our actions.*** No such “other scriptural role relationship principles” are offered here, and there are no clear applications of this principle to women’s roles in the business world. *When* a woman is to be subject to a man outside marriage and the church is left unclear, binding the consciences of godly women in uncertainty. If a woman voting in the church violates this universal headship principle, how does voting in a civil election not violate the principle?

Statement #22 attempts to resolve this issue when it says: ***Because the unregenerate world is not motivated by the Gospel or guided by God’s will, we as Christians will not try to force God’s will upon the world.*** While the world may make it difficult for Christians to live out God’s will, Christians are not exempt from the will of God because the world rejects it. For example, Christian women will not abort babies even though the world makes that legal. Again, *how* are Christian women to apply the WELS doctrinal statements in their business, civic, and social relationships?

There are two distinct, though related, issues here. The first is the basis for understanding women’s roles and relationships with men. The second is how to apply what St. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy to what women can and cannot do in the life and worship of the church. There are several essays and Bible class materials that defend and explain the WELS position as defined by the officially adopted statements (which are available on the WELS website). What follows here addresses the issue from a different biblical viewpoint. As always, we seek to understand what Scripture teaches and listen to one another in love.

## The Underlying Basis for Man/Woman Relationships

The term “order of creation” has been the basis for the WELS doctrinal position. WELS essays have described this order of creation as “moral law.” The WELS doctrinal statements use the term “commands of God” in describing how this order of creation governs the roles and relationships of men and women in the world as well as in marriage and the church. The term “order of creation,” as a dogmatic principle, is apparently without much history. Use of the term in WELS essays seems to originate in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. An essay by Edward H. Schroeder, a professor of systematic and historic theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, contends that the term “order of creation” is not Lutheran but Reformed in origin and is not a biblical concept. He traces the term to an Austrian theologian named Fritz Zerbst early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Martin Luther did not teach such an “order of creation.” Rather, he described the way God ordered society with three “estates” – marriage, church, and government.

That provides a different organizing principle or basis for the roles and relationships of men and women, namely marriage. The Bible does not define roles for women in the world, only in marriage and the church. It is in marriage that the Bible uses the words “head” and “submit.” We can understand what St. Paul taught about a woman’s role in the church in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 and in 1 Timothy 2 as reflecting and reinforcing God’s will for marriage and the family, which the apostle defined clearly in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3. Even a casual look at what American culture has done to marriage and the family will underscore God’s concern.

What does Scripture teach about the roles and relationships of men and women?

### Genesis 1:26-31, Genesis 2:18-25, and Genesis 3:16-20

Genesis 1 describes the creation of mankind, male and female, in God’s image. God blesses them and directs them to be fruitful and increase in number, which God designed to occur within marriage. To both the male and female he gave the authority to rule over the rest of God’s creation.

Genesis 2 describes the creation of the first male, the first female, and the intended relationship of the two in God’s institution of marriage. Verse 24 tells us that God’s specific reason for creating Eve was to provide a suitable helper and complement for Adam in the marriage relationship. In verse 24 the *therefore* (ESV) to God’s creation of the first male and female was to establish marriage as the foundational relationship for the human race.

Note that the Hebrew word translated in verse 20 as *helper* (עֲזָרָה) is most commonly used in the Old Testament to refer to God (16 times). In addition, there are three other occurrences where עֲזָרָה refers to male leaders who are described as assisting other leaders. The meaning of the Hebrew word translated “helper” contains no thought of either inferiority or submissiveness.

In Matthew 19, Jesus quoted Genesis 1 as well as Genesis 2 in answer to the Pharisees’ question about whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife. Jesus understood that Genesis 1 was speaking about Adam and Eve as husband and wife, not simply as male and female. (In the

Large Catechism, on the Sixth Commandment, #208-209, Luther wrote: "Therefore God has also most richly blessed this estate [of marriage] above all others, and, in addition, has bestowed on it and wrapped up in it everything in the world. . . . Both the ecclesiastical and civil estates must humble themselves and all be found in this estate [of marriage].")

Genesis 3 describes how the perfect relationship between God and mankind was broken and how the perfect head/helper relationship between Adam and Eve was also broken. Genesis 3 also describes the resulting consequences to both relationships. In the case of Eve, the consequences of sin are described in terms of the negative impact on marriage and family life. There are no consequences identified, as a result of the Fall, to generic male and female relationships. Martin Luther's commentary on these verses makes the subjection of women to men a consequence of the fall into sin, not an "order of creation" (Luther's Works, 1958, vol 1, 203).

The head/helper teaching, as God designed it for marriage, is the foundational biblical teaching that guides man and woman relationships. It is on this marriage relationship that applications in the church are based. While some argue that an "order of creation" is implicit or implied in Genesis 1 and 2, doctrine should be based on explicit teaching and not implicit assumption. Do the first three chapters of Genesis clearly establish a moral law called the "order of creation" governing male/female relationships apart from marriage? The evidence seems weak.

## 1 Corinthians 11:1-16

First Corinthians 11 describes how the head/helper teaching applies in a worship setting within the Corinthian culture. The Greek words *ἀνὴρ* and *γυνή* can mean either husband and wife or man and woman. The immediate context of a verse and how Scripture uses these words elsewhere are keys to understanding the Holy Spirit's words.

Verse 3 is central to understanding this section. Is this verse speaking about all men and women generically or about husbands and wives particularly? A recent synodical committee appointed to study translations narrowed their work to three: the NIV 2011, the ESV, and the Holman Christian Standard Bible. The ESV translates verse 3: "*I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.*" (Other translations such as the RSV and GW follow suit.) The Holman translation reads: "*the man is the head of the woman*" and suggests in a footnote an alternate translation: "*the husband is the head of the wife.*" The NIV translates: "*the head of the woman is man*" and in a footnote offers the alternate translation "*the head of the wife is her husband.*" So, does this verse imply an "order of creation" that makes men the head of women universally, or does this verse reinforce the biblical teaching that the husband is the head of his wife?

There are two reasons to prefer the latter:

1. How the Bible uses the word "head" is instructive. Virtually all English Bible translations translate Ephesians 5:23 as *husbands and wives*, not *men and women*. If *ἀνὴρ* and *γυνή* are translated as *husbands and wives* in Ephesians 5:23, why not here? There are no other passages in Scripture that describe men in general as the "head" of women.

2. The apostle uses the word “every” to universalize the headship of Christ, but he drops the adjective “every” when talking about the headship of a man/husband relative to a woman/wife, suggesting that the head of a woman is a specific man, namely her husband. Even when the translation is “man” and “woman,” the context indicates that the headship principle is in reference to marriage and the family. What verse 3 does **not** say is that *the head of every woman is man*.

It is easy to understand how, in verse 5, a woman with her head uncovered would dishonor her husband/head. It is more difficult to understand St. Paul’s words if a woman prophesying with her head uncovered is said to be dishonoring the male gender. Similarly in verse 7, that a woman is the glory of her husband is easy to understand. That a woman is the glory of men in general seems more difficult. The interpretive principle of “one simple sense” would suggest that the apostle has in mind the relationship of marriage when answering the Corinthians’ question regarding head covering.

Verses 8-12 are speaking of men and women by gender. That the apostle would mix husband/wife with man/woman is not surprising. He mixes the figurative and literal sense of the word “head” also in these verses. Verses 11-12 seem to say that we are not to make too much of the fact that Eve came from Adam and was created for Adam.

Note that in verse 5 a woman is not prohibited from praying or prophesying, only that she not do it with her head uncovered. The fact that both men and women are prophesying in worship is consistent with Joel 2:2-32 and Acts 2:17-21.

Note also that in verse 13, St. Paul invites the Christians in Corinth to determine for themselves what their practice should be regarding the propriety of a woman praying with her head uncovered. He is not insisting on a universal application of the headship principle with regard to head covering. Then, in verse 16, St. Paul states that, in regard to head coverings, “*we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.*” St. Paul seems to be saying that the Corinthians need to make a culturally informed application regarding the matter of head coverings, but that they also understand that in some other churches there was *no such* practice of a woman wearing a head covering in deference to her husband. The custom in Jerusalem, for example, was that men covered their heads in deference to God when in worship.

There are applications of the head/helper teaching that are neither universal nor essential. The culture and customs of a particular group of people, at a particular time and place, will help inform what the appropriate applications are of a scriptural teaching. Keep this in mind when the question of women voting in the church comes up later.

Whether to understand 1 Corinthians 11 as reflecting and reinforcing the headship principle in marriage or creating a universal headship of men over women in all walks of life seems, at the very least, an open question. To create a moral principle called the “order of creation” applying to male/female relationships in the business world on the basis of this verse would be biblically questionable.

## 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

This section of 1 Corinthians describes how the head/helper teaching was applied within the church in Corinth, whose worship had been tarnished by disorder—a disorder that involved the Lord’s Supper, speaking in tongues, and the abuse of the head/helper teaching. Understanding verses 34-35 is key to understanding this section. Are these verses concerned with men and women generically or with husbands and wives particularly? There are two reasons to prefer the latter:

1. The reference to women being subject or submissive in 1 Corinthians 14:34 is parallel to Ephesians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:18, and 1 Peter 3:1, where *ἀνὴρ* and *γυνή* are translated in each of these other passages as *husbands* and *wives*. Submission is something a wife does in relationship to her husband, not to men generically in Scripture. If *ἀνὴρ* and *γυνή* are understood as *husbands* and *wives* in Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, and 1 Peter 3, why not in 1 Corinthians 14?
2. In 1 Corinthians 14, St. Paul is addressing disorderly worship. It was disorderly, at least in part, because the head/helper teaching was not being properly applied (verse 34). St. Paul’s solution to the disorderly worship is found in the proper relationship between a husband and his wife (verse 35). The fact that St. Paul urges women to ask their husbands at home would seem to say that he has in mind the marriage relationship and family, not generic man/woman relationships, except as those relationships in the church reflect and reinforce God’s will for marriage.

In verse 34, the phrase “*as the law also says*” is difficult to understand. What law is St. Paul talking about? The word *law* has a wide range of meanings, from God’s moral and ceremonial law given through Moses to the first five books of the Old Testament. In the context of verse 35, “*law*” seems better understood as a reference to what the Scriptures teach about marriage—as Jesus speaks in response to what is *lawful* (Matthew 19) and as St. Paul describes as *law* in Romans 7:2—than that this is a vague reference to an “order of creation.”

Would St. Paul even have had to address the head/helper teaching had there not been abuse of it? We should keep in mind here the theological principle “that the abuse of something doesn’t negate its use.” In other words, the abuse of women interrupting their husbands and worship does not negate their speaking in normal settings. Again, 1 Corinthians 11, Joel 2, Acts 2, et al. teach us that both men and women were prophesying in the New Testament church.

## 1 Timothy 2:11-15

This section describes how the head/helper teaching applies in a worship setting. Understanding the relationship of verses 11-12 with the preceding verses (8-10) and with the following verses (13-15) is helpful in interpreting the apostle’s directives. While St. Paul is establishing role/relationship applications to men and women in worship, there are reasons to believe that it is marriage, not an “order of creation,” that is the basis for his teaching.

1. In verses 8-10, St. Paul uses the plural of ἀνὴρ (man/husband) and γυναῖκα (woman/wife). It is interesting to note the parallel between 1 Timothy 2:8-10 and 1 Peter 3:1-7. In both sections, men are encouraged in their prayer life and women are encouraged in terms of their dress and jewelry. In 1 Peter 3, the context is the relationship between husbands and wives. Is St. Paul also here thinking in terms of husbands and wives, since a woman's appearance in the church should not attract the attention of males who are not her husband?

Beginning with verse 11, St. Paul makes a shift from the plural to the singular. In verses 11-15, the audience is no longer men and women (or husbands and wives), but a man and a woman.

2. In verses 13-14, St. Paul restates the head/helper teaching from Genesis as God designed it for Adam and Eve. The most natural way of understanding these verses is that St. Paul is talking about the relationship of Adam and Eve as husband and wife. It is on the basis of this head/helper teaching that St. Paul makes the application in verses 11-12. Again, submission is something a wife does in relationship to her husband, not to males generically.

Martin Luther agrees with this understanding of verse 11 in his commentary on 1 Timothy. He wrote: "Here we properly take 'woman' to mean wife, as he reveals from his correlative phrase in verse 12 'to have authority over man,' that is, over her husband. As he calls the husband 'man,' so he calls the wife 'woman'" (Luther's Works, 1973, vol 28, 276).

3. Verse 15 adds a note about childbearing, which God designed to occur within marriage. Again, the context suggests that verses 13-15 have in mind the relationship God established for husband and wife as the basis for male and female relationships in the church. It should be noted that the NIV translates in verse 15 a verb form which is singular as though it were a plural. Such a translation implies that St. Paul is speaking about women generically. Yet, as the ESV translates, the verse literally says: "*Yet she will be saved (or kept safe/ delivered) through childbearing.*" It isn't until the final phrase in the verse that St. Paul reverts to a plural—"*if they continue in faith, love and holiness, with self-control*" (ESV). Does "they" generalize "she" or is "they" referring to a husband and wife continuing in faith, love, and holiness? The latter seems a simpler understanding.

In all of these sections of Scripture, the context is key, both the immediate context and the wider context of the Bible. From these Scripture passages, we conclude that the headship principle is based on marriage when it is applied to the relationship of men and women in the church. That there is a headship principle taught in Scripture is established by the passages cited previously. That this head/helper principle expresses God's will for marriage is clear. That St. Paul applies the headship principle governing marriage to men and women in the church, particularly in worship, seems also clear. The role relationship of men and women in the church, whether married or single, is to reflect and reinforce the role relationship of men and women in marriage.

Significantly, Scripture nowhere applies a so-called order of creation to society, the workplace, or civic life. Rather, the Bible consistently establishes headship in marriage and the family and bases the roles and relationship of men and women in the worship and life of the church on the headship principle God established for marriage. It goes beyond Scripture to suggest that another man is the “head” of your wife, simply because he is a man and she is a woman.

Proverbs 31 describes a woman who respects her husband as the head in her marriage and yet interacts in the business world without any implied deference to businessmen. If this example of roles and relationships is offered by Scripture in a culture that severely restricted a woman’s position in society, ought we in our culture suggest that a so-called order of creation limits how a woman functions in the business or political world?

Note that in verse 12, the word translated with the English phrase “to exercise authority” (KJV—“usurp authority”) is ἀϋθεντεῖν. This word only occurs once in the New Testament. Its basic meaning is “to control in a domineering manner.” The word is stronger than just an exercise or position of authority. It indicates an unwarranted presumption of authority that exhibits itself in a domineering way. Based on the headship principle God established for marriage, St. Paul directs that women neither teach men in the church from an attitude and position of authority nor presume to lord it over men in the church. The application of this teaching is the subject of the second issue in this study.

## How to Apply the Apostle’s Teaching to a Woman’s Role in the Church

Several essays in WELS circles have attempted to parse legitimate roles for women in the church. Can they sing Scripture as a soloist in worship but not read Scripture to the congregation? Can women vote at a teachers’ conference or a parachurch agency’s convention but not in a congregational voters meeting? Can they serve on a committee but not a board? Can a woman teach men in a college setting as long as the subject matter is not theology? And how does that square with the synod’s doctrinal statement #31 that *rejects the opinion that in the church assemblies only matters pertaining to the Word of God are authoritative*? (The seeming contradiction, then, is that the prohibition of authoritative teaching applies only to subjects related to theology, while voting is an exercise of authority no matter the subject of the vote.) Applying 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is challenging, especially in the light of St. Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 11:5 about a woman praying and prophesying so long as she has a “sign of authority” on her head (a head covering).

The translation and understanding of the Greek word ἀϋθεντεῖν in 1 Timothy 2:12 is important, especially since the word “authority” in our day may mean earned respect and the right to lead rather than a position of power over others. *Authentein* carries the connotation of “domineering over someone” according to the Greek lexicon by Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich. The related noun, ἀϋθέντης, means “master” of a servant. Thayer’s Greek lexicon says that Greek usage of the verb in the first century meant “to exercise dominion over” and that the related noun meant “one who acts on his own authority” or “autocratic.” This is considerably stronger than simply “to have authority.” Louw and Nida, in their lexicon based on semantic domains, list as the definition “to control in a domineering manner.” (Each of these lexicons has been used at

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.) The word *authentēin*, therefore, implies more than a position in an organizational chart or the democratic process of decision-making by voting. This is an attitude of superiority, a dictatorial stance, an attempt to impose one's will on another person.

Martin Luther understood the Greek word ἀθεντεῖν in just this way. In his commentary on 1 Timothy 2:12 he wrote: "To have authority – that is, she ought not take over for herself the heritage which belongs to a man so that a man says to her: 'My Lord.' She wants her own wisdom to have priority, that whatever she has said should prevail and whatever the man says should not . . . that she should be right and have the last word, that in the church her word ought to appear wiser and more learned and thus of greater authority than that of her husband" (Luther's Works, 1973, vol 28, 277).

Is voting an "assumption of authority over" (let alone an "exercise of dominion over") another person? While one vote may cancel out the vote of someone who disagrees, no one vote overrules the vote of another person. The practice of forbidding the vote to women in WELS churches is based on the argument that the *result* of a vote is "authoritative." That begs the question. How is the vote of a woman an exercise of authority over a man, let alone from a controlling or domineering stance?

Is a woman reading Scripture in worship exercising domineering authority over a man? Is a woman serving on a board in the church exercising domineering authority over a man? The pastor of the congregation has the called position of teaching authority in matters of doctrine and practice. Men and women of the church are asked to submit to that authority (Heb 13:17). These are questions worth revisiting.

While the *descriptive* (what took place) in Scripture cannot be made *prescriptive* (what must take place), how the church of Acts applied the headship principle is instructive. When in Acts 1:14-26 the church chose a replacement for Judas, it is apparent that both men and women were involved in the process. A man must replace Judas, but the church made no distinction between men and women in the process of calling him. This appears to be the case also in chapter 6, when the seven ministry assistants were chosen and again in chapter 13 when the church in Antioch responded to the Holy Spirit's directive to send Paul and Barnabas as missionaries to the Gentiles. Philip's four daughters prophesied, according to Acts 21:9. St. Paul calls Phoebe a "deacon" in Romans 16:1. While Scripture doesn't create a "model constitution" for the early church, it does give women a vital role in the church's ministry.

What constitutes *authority over men* in the church? Prescriptively and descriptively, Scripture limits authoritative teaching (such as the role of a pastor) to men. Beyond that there is no clear direction for roles such as board membership or actions such as voting. These are judgments the church makes in applying biblical principles, judgments that may change with differences in cultural context, as 1 Corinthians 11 teaches. (Recall page 4.)

The synod's 35<sup>th</sup> statement says: ***We reject arbitrary applications of the principle of the role relationships which do not take into account that customs which reflect these relationships as well as conditions of life may change (1 Co 11:6,16).*** Customs and conditions of life certainly have changed in America. Women no longer sit on one side of the church and men on the other.

Women in America were granted the right to vote with the Constitution's Nineteenth Amendment that was ratified in the year 1920. Women hold CEO positions in global corporations. Refusing the vote to women in the church was a clear cultural application of the headship principle in 19th-century America. It is not so clear an application in the culture of the 21st century. For women to vote in an American church prior to 1920 would have been viewed as challenging the headship of a husband and order in the church. Not so today. May our current practice regarding women voting in the church be a judgment based on an American culture that no longer exists?

In the early 20th century, women wore hats to church, and a woman wearing pants at church would be viewed in somewhat the same way that a 1st-century woman in Corinth without a head covering was viewed. These were applications of the headship principle. Today that seems merely old-fashioned. In the 1960s a WELS pastor could state that dancing was sinful without fear of contradiction. Today Lutheran high schools sponsor dances. What changed? Culture changed, and how the church applies timeless truth to culture changed accordingly. We want to be sure that our applications of the Bible's headship principle are faithful to that principle and that they are not determined by cultural perspectives from a bygone era, going beyond what God's Word requires.

If refusing the vote and board membership to women is a *necessary* or *essential* application of the headship principle, we will resist any effort to compromise that principle no matter what contemporary culture says. However, if these are not necessary or essential applications, we may be forfeiting the gifts and wisdom that the Holy Spirit has entrusted to women in our ministry and creating unnecessary barriers to those outside the church who do not know the Savior. By *necessary* or *essential* is meant that all congregations *must* make this application in their practice of ministry. St. Paul's term "disputable matters" in Romans 14:1 argues that there are practices of biblical principles on which Christians in unity may disagree. Voting seems an application of the headship principle that is like head covering in Corinth, which may be different from one cultural setting to another, while the restriction of the pastoral office to men is an essential application of 1 Timothy 2.

## In Summary

There are two different approaches to man/woman relationships. One views Scripture as establishing a universal "order of creation" that subjects women to men in every arena of society on the basis of their gender. The other views Scripture as establishing the headship of husband to wife in marriage and applies this headship principle to man and woman relationships in the church.

There are two different understandings of St. Paul's directive to women in 1 Timothy 2:12. One interprets the Greek verb ἀθροεῖν as prohibiting any position or action (such as voting) that could be understood as "authority." The other, more literally, prohibits domineering attitudes and actions of women seeking to impose their will on their husbands or other men in the church, as well as positions that would encourage such arrogant behavior.

We respectfully ask the elected leaders, pastors, teachers, and members of the WELS to reexamine the synod's position on women's roles and relationships with men by going back to Scripture anew.

Dr. Bruce Becker and Dr. Paul Kelm  
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## Scripture References English Standard Version (ESV)

### Genesis 1:26-31

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

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." <sup>29</sup> And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food." <sup>30</sup> And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. <sup>31</sup> And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

### Genesis 2:18-25

<sup>18</sup> Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." <sup>19</sup> Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup> The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. <sup>21</sup> So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. <sup>22</sup> And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup> Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called Woman,  
because she was taken out of Man."

<sup>24</sup> Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. <sup>25</sup> And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

### Genesis 3:16-20

<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said,  
"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children.

Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,  
but he shall rule over you.”

<sup>17</sup> And to Adam he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife  
and have eaten of the tree  
of which I commanded you,

‘You shall not eat of it,’

cursed is the ground because of you;

in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

<sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;

and you shall eat the plants of the field.

<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face

you shall eat bread,

till you return to the ground,

for out of it you were taken;

for you are dust,

and to dust you shall return.”

<sup>20</sup> The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

### **1 Corinthians 11:1-16**

<sup>1</sup> Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

<sup>2</sup> Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. <sup>3</sup> But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. <sup>4</sup> Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, <sup>5</sup> but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. <sup>6</sup> For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. <sup>7</sup> For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup> For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. <sup>9</sup> Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. <sup>10</sup> That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. <sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; <sup>12</sup> for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. <sup>13</sup> Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? <sup>14</sup> Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, <sup>15</sup> but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. <sup>16</sup> If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.

### **1 Corinthians 14:26-40**

<sup>26</sup> What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. <sup>27</sup> If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. <sup>28</sup> But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. <sup>29</sup> Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. <sup>30</sup> If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. <sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, <sup>32</sup> and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. <sup>33</sup> For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

As in all the churches of the saints, <sup>34</sup> the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. <sup>35</sup> If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

<sup>36</sup> Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? <sup>37</sup> If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. <sup>38</sup> If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. <sup>39</sup> So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. <sup>40</sup> But all things should be done decently and in order.

### **1 Timothy 2:8-15**

<sup>8</sup> I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; <sup>9</sup> likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, <sup>10</sup> but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. <sup>11</sup> Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. <sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve; <sup>14</sup> and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. <sup>15</sup> Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.



## Scriptural principles of man and woman roles

### Introduction to the Scriptural Principles

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed many changes in the attitude and practices of American society concerning male and female roles in life. These developments naturally led to questions being raised concerning the practices of the church in this matter. In response to such questions and to encourage a careful scriptural evaluation of the practices of our synodical schools, the Commission on Higher Education in April of 1978 adopted theses entitled "The Role of Man and Woman According to Holy Scripture." With the approval of the Conference of Presidents (COP) these theses and an exposition of them were submitted to the 1979 WELS convention. The convention, in turn, encouraged the districts of the synod to study them.

As a result of feedback from this study, the 1981 convention directed the COP to prepare a pamphlet addressing this subject. A committee of ten pastors, one from each district of the synod, was appointed to produce that pamphlet. The pamphlet which they produced, "Man and Woman in God's World," was published in 1985 with the approval of the COP. In 1987 "Man and Woman in God's World—An Expanded Study" was made available to provide more detailed exegetical background to the first pamphlet.

All three of these studies concluded that Scripture teaches that already at creation God established differences in male and female roles for this life on earth and that these differences in roles are still applicable today. A number of voices were raised in the synod, however, questioning whether such an "order of creation" was actually taught in Scripture.

The 1989 synod convention received a memorial requesting that "Man and Woman in God's World" be adopted as an official doctrinal statement of the synod and a counter-memorial suggesting that the pamphlet not be adopted as an official doctrinal statement since Scripture itself serves as an adequate statement of the doctrine. The convention resolved to receive "Man and Woman in God's World" as a correct exposition of the scriptural teachings in this matter. It urged the COP to prepare a brief, formal doctrinal statement for consideration at the 1991 convention.

In response the COP appointed a committee of five pastors to draw up such a statement. A preliminary draft of the statement was published in the *Northwestern Lutheran* with a request for comments and suggestions. A revised edition of the statement entitled "Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles" was submitted to the convention by the COP. The convention accepted the statement as a correct exposition of scriptural doctrine and asked that members of the synod be

given additional opportunity to suggest refinement of wording. It also asked the COP to authorize the preparation of study materials to help members of the synod study this issue in Scripture.

The committee responded by gathering additional suggestions for refinements in wording, and the COP submitted a revised edition of the statement to the 1993 convention, which adopted the reworded statement as a correct exposition of scriptural doctrine. The convention also requested a "brief, practical statement with a positive tone."

In response to the request of the 1991 synodical convention for study material, Prof. John Brug prepared a ten-lesson Bible study with teacher's manual entitled "A Bible Study on Man and Woman in God's World," which was published in 1992. In response to the request of the 1993 convention for a brief, practical statement, Pastor Walter Beckmann prepared "The Spirit in Which We Apply the Scriptural Roles of Man and Woman," which appeared in 1994.

"Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles" is, thus, based on well over a decade of study by three different study groups. The doctrinal substance of its conclusions was adopted by three successive synodical conventions. This statement was not intended to be a comprehensive statement about scriptural roles for men and women. It is a brief doctrinal statement which addresses, both in a positive and negative way, specific issues which were points of controversy at the time the statement was composed. It strives to give balanced attention both to the spiritual equality which men and women share in Christ and to the different roles which God assigns to men and women in this earthly life. It emphasizes that the principles governing these different roles were established by God at creation and remain valid.

### **Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles**

In order to express our harmony in doctrine and practice with what God teaches in the Holy Scriptures about man and woman, we present the following statements as our confession:

#### **Creation**

1. God created man and woman in His own image. The divine image gave man and woman spiritual equality in their relationship to the Creator (Ge 1:26,27; Col 3:10; Gal 3:28).
2. In love God established distinct male and female responsibilities (Ge 2:7,18,22) for the man and woman to whom He had given spiritual equality. These responsibilities involved headship for man and submission for woman. These roles demonstrated God's unchanging will for the

complementary relationship of man and woman with each other. Two New Testament passages attest to this: 1 Co 11:3,8,9 and 1 Ti 2:12,13.

3. God established roles for man and woman in His creative plan before He united them in marriage and before they fell into sin (Ge 2:7,18,22; 1 Co 11:3,8,9). Therefore God's assigned roles apply beyond the marriage relationship and in every period of history.

### **The Fall**

4. All commands of God and all roles established by God are for our good (1 Jn 5:3; Ps 19:8,11). To ignore or reject them harms our relationship with God and with each other (1 Pe 3:7; Eph 6:3; Ro 13:2-4).

5. When they sinned, man and woman lost the image of God and their perfect relationship with their Creator (Ge 5:1-3; Isa 59:2). Man and woman also lost their holy and harmonious relationship with each other (Ge 2:16,17; 3:12,16).

### **Restoration**

6. God loved all men and women so much that He sent and sacrificed His Son to reestablish the holy relationship they once had with Him—Justification (Ro 5:8; 2 Co 5:18,19,21; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).

7. Men and women enjoy equal status in their reestablished relationship with God when He brings them to faith in Jesus (Gal 3:26-29; Eph 6:9).

8. The restoration of God's image in us is a gradual process which goes on throughout our earthly lives—Sanctification (2 Co 3:18; Eph 4:12-16). The Holy Spirit accomplishes this restoration by the power of the Gospel (Jn 17:17; 1 Th 3:13).

### **Headship**

9. As God restores His image in us, we grow in our ability to live in our God-assigned roles for Jesus' sake (Eph 5:21-6:9; Col 3:18-4:1; 1 Pe 3:5-7).

10. Scripture teaches that headship includes authority (1 Co 11:3,10; Col 1:18; 2:10; Eph 1:22; 1 Ti 2:11,12). Authority should not be used to dominate but to serve others (Mt 20:25-28).

11. Christ exercised His headship with sacrificial love (Eph 5:25), humility (Php 2:5-8), and service (Eph 5:28,29), and asks all believers to carry out their roles of authority in the same way (Mt 20:25-28).

12. In applying the principle of role relationship, the church will emphasize the duties and responsibilities of men. God holds Christian men accountable for the use of the authority He has given them and will grant His blessings when men exercise this authority out of love for Christ (1 Pe 3:7; Col 3:19).

13. Believers in Christ live under His headship with willing submission, respect, obedience, and love toward those in authority (Eph 5:21–6:9).

### **In the Home**

14. The role relationships of man and woman find their fullest expression in the close union of marriage. In a Christian home a husband and wife are partners and co-heirs of God's gracious gift of salvation (Eph 5:22-33; 1 Pe 3:1-7).

15. Since God appointed the husband to be the head of the wife (Eph 5:23), the husband will love and care for his God-given wife (1 Pe 3:7). A wife will gladly accept the leadership of her husband as her God-appointed head (Eph 5:22-24).

16. As the head of the wife and family the husband has the prime responsibility for the spiritual instruction of the family (Eph 6:4).

### **In the Church**

17. The biblical principle of role relationship applies also to the gatherings of the church. All believers, men and women, will participate at gatherings of worship, prayer, Bible study, and service. The scriptural applications that a woman remain silent (1 Co 14:34) and that a woman should not teach a man (1 Ti 2:11,12) require that a woman refrain from participating in these gatherings in any way which involves authority over men.

18. In church assemblies the headship principle means that only men will cast votes when such votes exercise authority over men. Only men will do work that involves authority over men (1 Co 11:3-10; 14:33-35; 1 Ti 2:11,12).

19. All Christians, men and women, are to use their God-given gifts to serve each other (1 Pe 4:10). Women are encouraged to participate in offices and activities of the public ministry except where the work involves authority over men.

## **In the World**

20. Christians also accept the biblical role relationship principle for their life and work in the world (1 Co 11:3; Eph 5:6-17). Christians seek to do God's will consistently in every area of their lives. We will therefore strive to apply this role relationship principle to our life and work in the world.

21. Scripture leaves a great deal to our conscientious Christian judgment as we live the role relationship principle in the world. In Christian love we will refrain from unduly binding the consciences of the brothers and sisters in our fellowship. Rather, we will encourage each other as we seek to apply this principle to our lives in the world.

22. Because the unregenerate world is not motivated by the Gospel or guided by God's will (1 Co 2:14), we as Christians will not try to force God's will upon the world (1 Co 5:12). We will seek to influence and change the world by our Gospel witness in word and deed (Mk 16:15; Mt 5:16).

Since we affirm the preceding statements as biblical truths, we maintain that the propositions rejected below are contrary to the Word of God:

23. We reject the attempt to define male-female role principles only on the basis of biblical examples of human conduct because doctrine must be drawn from simple, direct statements of God's will.

24. We reject as a confusion of Law and Gospel the opinion that our spiritual equality before God restored by Christ (Gal 3:28) sets aside our distinctive responsibilities as guided by God's Law (1 Co 11:3).

25. We reject the opinion that relationships of headship and subordination are incompatible with a state of holiness (1 Co 11:3; 15:28). All New Testament passages regarding the role relationships are addressed to reconciled and sanctified men and women.

26. We reject the opinion that 1 Corinthians 11:7 teaches that only man, not woman, was created in God's image (cf. Ge 1:26,27).

27. We reject the opinion that distinct roles for man and woman were first ordered after the Fall in Genesis 3:16 (cf. Ge 2:7,18,22).

28. We reject the opinion that male headship and female submission apply only to marriage or only to marriage and the church (1 Co 11:3; 1 Ti 2:12).

29. We reject the opinion that the principle of role relationships taught in the New Testament was culturally conditioned and is not applicable today.

30. We reject the opinion that the principle of role relationships applies only to some people, only for some periods of history, or only to certain aspects of Christian life.

31. We reject the opinion that in the church assemblies only matters pertaining to the Word of God are authoritative.

32. We reject the opinion that the mutual submission encouraged by Scriptures for all believers (Eph 5:21; Mt 20:25-28) negates the exercise of male headship.

33. We reject the opinion that the word "head" as applied to Christ and man in the New Testament does not include authority.

34. We reject the opinion that every woman is always subject to every man. Other scriptural role relationship principles and the injunction, "We must obey God rather than men" (Ac 5:29), also govern our actions.

35. We reject arbitrary applications of the principle of the role relationships which do not take into account that customs which reflect these relationships as well as conditions of life may change (1 Co 11:6,16).

36. We reject the claim that the biblical statement "women should remain silent in the churches" (1 Co 14:34) forbids all speaking by women in the assemblies of the church.

With these statements of what we confess and what we reject we offer the prayer as Christian men and women that God will fill us with His Holy Spirit, giving to each of us a better understanding of and appreciation for our God-assigned responsibilities, that in loving service to Him and to each other we hallow His name and share in His mission in every God-pleasing way.

## A Response to “Women and the WELS”

Originally presented to a pastors’ conference in 2015, an essay authored by Dr. Bruce Becker and Dr. Paul Kelm which was ultimately entitled “Women and the WELS: Connecting Church Practice with Scriptural Teaching,” has generated much discussion in our church body. This discussion has value. Each generation of WELS pastor-theologians must re-examine our doctrinal statements to make them their own. There were a number of strengths in the essay in this regard. For example, the essay called for a closer look at the applications articulated in the WELS doctrinal statement “Scriptural Principles of Man and Woman Roles,” especially as those applications touch upon the role of women in society, what constitutes authority over men in the church, and the matter of female suffrage in the church. These are key issues with which our church body must wrestle as we seek to apply what the Scriptures say in this area of Christian life.

Applications of Scripture cannot really be discussed, however, when there is no agreement on what the Scriptures say. The WELS doctrinal statement expounds on the biblical teaching sometimes referred to as the “order of creation.” The essay questions that this doctrine exists in Scripture and thus denies that it can be used as the basis for a man/woman principle which is to be applied in our Christian lives. Faulty exegesis and hermeneutics are employed to make the case against the presence of the order of creation teaching in Scripture.

The purpose of this response is to shed light on hermeneutical and exegetical errors in “Women and the WELS” in order to defend a biblical doctrine and to promote faithful hermeneutics and exegesis among us. In no way is this response a questioning of the Christian faith of Dr. Becker or Dr. Kelm or the Christian spirit with which they wrote their essay. Nor is this response a repudiation of the fact that these two men have been a blessing to our church body.

### *Hermeneutical Weaknesses*

1. The fundamental thesis of the essay is stated on page 2: “[The] organizing principle or basis for the roles and relationships of men and women [is] marriage.” While the essay speaks of distinct man and woman roles in the church, the essayists contend that the church roles should only be understood as extensions of what God intended for the marriage relationship. In an effort to raise marriage to the position of magisterial role relationship, it is stated on page 2: “It is in marriage that the Bible uses the words ‘head’ and ‘submit.’” Biblical evidence, however, demonstrates that this statement cannot be supported. The context of 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, as well as 1 Timothy 2, is clearly the assembling of Christian women and men for worship. In this church context, not marriage, the apostle is inspired to use the word “head” (κεφαλή, 1 Cor 11:3,5) in reference to the Christian man and the words “submit” (ὑποτάσσω, 1 Cor 14:34) and “submission” (ὑποταγή, 1 Tim 2:11) in reference to Christian women. To say, then, that the Bible only uses the words “head” and “submit” in the context of Christian marriage is simply not accurate.

2. The essayists deny that God created Adam and Eve and the interdependence between them in a way that goes beyond marriage. Adam and Eve are never seen as mankind or church, only as marriage. “Do the first three chapters of Genesis clearly establish a moral law called the ‘order

of creation' governing male/female relationships apart from marriage? The evidence seems weak" (page 3). However, that the Genesis creation account establishes an order for man/woman relationships beyond marriage is confirmed by Paul's writings in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. He draws upon the creation account in 1 Corinthians 11:8,9; 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:13,14 to show that the way God ordered the creation of human beings has a decided impact on the way Christian human beings conduct themselves in relationships beyond marriage. In other words, God's New Testament revelation illumines and interprets the full teaching in his Genesis account. When we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, we see how God's original ordering of mankind does, in fact, govern male/female relationships apart from marriage.

3. A number of times (pages 4,5,6), in order to support their claim that God's creative order for human beings only had to do with marriage, the essayists argue for understanding *ἀνὴρ* as "husband" and *γυνή* as "wife" in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 and 1 Timothy 2. Certainly, in context, those Greek words may be understood as "husband" and "wife" (rather than "man" and "woman," their first meanings), as is the case in Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3. However, the essayists do not appeal to context to read these words as "husband" and "wife." Instead, they seem to appeal to the fact that *ἀνὴρ* and *γυνή* mean "husband" and "wife" in other parts of the Bible. It is intimated, therefore, that *ἀνὴρ* and *γυνή* could mean "husband" and "wife" every time they occur in the New Testament. Interpreting the original Greek by means of what is known in the study of hermeneutics as an "illegitimate totality transfer" – the false assumption that what a Greek word means in one place it always means in every place – leads to an improper understanding in that it fails to take into account the all important matter of context in determining the meaning of the Greek New Testament.

4. Failure to recognize a specific context also surfaces in the essayists' use of terms like "in general" (page 4) and "generically" (pages 5,6). Scriptural terms like "head" and "submission" are said never to be used in reference to men and women "in general," but only to husbands and wives. Such an assertion fails to recognize that the context of passages like 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 and 1 Timothy 2, places in the Bible where the terms "head" and "submission" are used, is neither generic nor marriage. The context of these passages is the gathering of Christian women and men *as the church*, a context to which Paul applies the universal principle God wove into his creation of male and female. Therefore, in context, Paul is not telling every generic man to be every generic woman's head, nor is he telling every generic woman to submit to every generic man. And to characterize WELS doctrinal statements as understanding those Scriptures "generically" is an inaccurate caricature. Our doctrinal statements understand those Scriptures as Paul's applying a universal head and helper principle to specific situations within the life of the church.

5. When Paul's words to men and women in the church are said not to be a clear application of God's order of creation, but instead a reflection of God's institution of marriage, the message to unmarried women and men in the church is unclear. If each *ἀνὴρ* and *γυνή* in the aforementioned passages, where the context is clearly church life, is to be understood as "husband" and "wife," one wonders what Christian men who are not husbands and Christian women who are not wives are to take away. If, for instance, Paul's reasoning in 1 Corinthians 11 is to compare "every man" (verse 3) with "every wife" (verse 5), what is the Christian woman who is not a wife left with? Indeed, why would the apostle speak only of wives to the Corinthian

congregation as it worships when it surely also included virgins of marriageable age and widows? The context of the three New Testament passages in question is clearly the gathering of all the believers (female and male, unmarried and married). To limit Paul's creation-based principles to the establishment of marriage is forced, awkward, and blind to the context.

### *Exegetical Weaknesses*

1. The essayists refer to Paul's mention of women being submissive in 1 Corinthians 14:34 as a "parallel" to statements on submission in Ephesians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:18, and 1 Peter 3:1 (page 5). Since the context of the Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Peter passages is clearly marriage, it is natural to understand *γυνή* as "wife" in those passages. The essayists argue that *γυνή* should also be understood as "wife" in 1 Corinthians 14:34, since it is a parallel reference to the other passages. Exegetically there is no parallel, however. First, Paul takes great pains to establish the context of 1 Corinthians 14:34 as the church, not the home. Note his references to *ἐκκλησία* in verses 33 through 35. The most natural meaning of *γυνή* in a non-home context is "woman," not "wife." Paul is not speaking of a willing submission that takes place in the home in 1 Corinthians 14:34. He is speaking of a willing submission that takes place as Christians gather together as a church. Second, the linguistic markers that force us to take *γυνή* as "wife" in Ephesians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:18, and 1 Peter 3:1 find no parallel expression in 1 Corinthians 14:34. There is no *τοῖς [ἰδίοις] ἀνδρασιν* to be found in 1 Corinthians 14:34, as there is in the other passages (and even in 1 Corinthians 14:35), by which we would be forced to understand Paul's reference to *γυνή* as "wife." In the essay the absence of these linguistic markers in 1 Corinthians 14:34 is ignored in an effort to have all man/woman role relationships be seen through the prism of marriage rather than the order of creation.

2. Another questionable exegesis in connection with 1 Corinthians 14:34 may be found in the essay's treatment of Paul's phrase "the law" (page 5). While it is true that Paul uses the Greek word *νόμος* to refer to many different things in his writings (e.g. The Ten Commandments; ceremonial law; governing principle; the Pentateuch; Old Testament Scriptures), his meaning for the word in any particular circumstance must be determined by the context. Earlier in 1 Corinthians 14 (verse 21) Paul used *νόμος* to introduce a passage from Isaiah. In the same way, he refers to the Old Testament Scriptures as *νόμος* in 14:34. Paul connects the willing submission of Christian women in church settings to God's revelation in the Old Testament. In 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2 Paul does the same thing. He explains his instructions on headship and submission in the church by clearly alluding to what the Old Testament Scriptures (*νόμος*) say. He finds his basis for man and woman roles in church in the way God ordered things at creation. Once again in an effort to distance man and woman roles in church from God's creation of male and female human beings, the essayists interpret Paul's use of *νόμος* in 1 Corinthians 14:34 by means of "marriage law" references in Matthew 19:3 and Romans 7:2. There is no need to impose these remote thoughts on what should be a clear way of referring to the Old Testament Scriptures, in keeping with Paul's line of thought and use of *νόμος* in 1 Corinthians 14. What is more, the essayists offer the English word "lawful" in Matthew 19:3 to explain Paul's use of *νόμος* in 1 Corinthians 14:34 even though the Greek word rendered "lawful" in Matthew 19:3 (*ἔξεστιν*) does not stem from the *νόμος* root.

3. Marriage, rather than the order of creation, is said to be the basis for Paul's instructions to women and men as they worship in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 (page 6). Once again the essay fails to recognize the absence of any linguistic markers that would cause us to understand ἀνὴρ as "husband" (1 Tim 2:8, 12) and γυναῖκα as "wife" (1 Tim 2:9-12, 14). Once again a parallel is drawn to a section of Scripture which clearly addresses husbands and wives (1 Peter 3:1-7) even though the Greek words ἀνὴρ and γυναῖκα are not being used in parallel ways. That Paul's point in bringing up Adam and Eve is God's creation plan for Christian men and women as they worship can be clearly seen by the adverb/verb/adverb combination in 1 Timothy 2:13 – πρῶτος ἐπλάσθη εἶτα. Paul is telling us that the way God ordered the creation of man and woman in the beginning impacts the way Christian men and women serve in his church today. "For Adam *was formed first, then Eve*" does not speak to their marriage; it speaks to their creation. And while the essay holds out the possibility that the "they" of 1 Timothy 2:15b is a husband and a wife, that third plural subject had already been identified as Christian women in verses 9-12.

4. The essay's discussion of ἀυθεντεῖν in 1 Timothy 2:12 (page 8) is misleading. There is no question that there is disagreement over the meaning of this *hapax legomenon*. However, just because some lexicons include definitions that lean negative (e.g. "to domineer"), there is nothing in the patristic evidence to suggest that we must understand ἀυθεντεῖν as an action that communicates "an attitude of superiority, a dictatorial stance," as the essayists state. Armin Panning's study of the word is quoted as evidence that what Paul is prohibiting of Christian women is a sinful attitude of superiority and self-serving bossiness. Upon closer examination, however, Panning's findings painted a more neutral picture of ἀυθεντεῖν: "thrusting oneself forward, asserting oneself." While these actions certainly *could* be done with an attitude of superiority and a dictatorial stance, they do not have to be. To have or use authority is not a negative act in and of itself. Christians have a legitimate challenge in a church body like ours agreeing on what the authoritative acts in the church prohibited of Christian women are according to 1 Timothy 2:12. To artificially turn a neutral term into a negative one is not the way to meet that challenge.

Dr. Becker and Dr. Kelm have raised several important questions in their essay about the way WELS Christians live scriptural truth. Their call to a re-examination of our applications is completely appropriate, and a blessing. Nevertheless, in their essay they have denied that the scriptural doctrine known as the "order of creation" has any place in the discussion of woman and man's interdependence. The hermeneutical and exegetical principles used to base what the Bible says about man/woman role relationships on marriage, rather than the order of creation, are often faulty. May the Lord of the Church lead WELS to apply Scripture's doctrines faithfully and clearly, to the glory of God and the blessing of God's people.

## A Reaction to Pastor Daniel Leyrer's Paper Entitled *A Response to "Women and the WELS"*

In May 2018, we authored and published an essay entitled "Women and the WELS: Connecting Church Practice with Scriptural Teaching." Since then, the Southeastern Wisconsin District presidium commissioned Pastor Daniel Leyrer to write a response to our essay. While we respect Pastor Leyrer as a pastor and theologian, his response contains both straw man arguments and circular reasoning. What follows is our reaction to his paper.

### Under *Hermeneutical Weaknesses*

- #1. Pastor Leyrer's argument begs the question. His argument *assumes* that 1 Corinthians 11:3 should be translated "woman" rather than "wife." Most current translations of the Bible are ambivalent on the question, with several translations using the word "wife."
- #2. The argument again begs the question by *assuming* there is only one way to translate the Greek words, "aner" and "gune." There is no consensus among Bible scholars on how to translate these two words. The argument further *assumes* that Adam and Eve must be understood as representative of male and female genders when they were, in fact, husband and wife.
- #3. This argument misrepresents our essay, "Women and the WELS," which never "intimated" that the Greek words "aner" and "gune" should be understood as husband and wife "every time." Further, our essay **does** repeatedly point to context as critical, as even a casual reading of the essay will note.
- #4. Pastor Leyrer seems to overlook the fact that the WELS doctrinal statements **are** applied to life beyond marriage and the church and, in that sense, make man and woman "generic" in interpretation.
- #5. This argument misunderstands our essay, "Women and the WELS," significantly. Our essay acknowledges that single women and men **are** addressed in St. Paul's words to the church. Our essay does **not** suggest that 1 Timothy 2 only addresses married men and women. At issue is *why* the apostle makes his case. It is legitimate to suggest that it is God's concern for marriage—not gender—that his injunction regarding men and women in the church is to "reflect and reinforce" his concern for marriage.

### Under *Exegetical Weaknesses*

- #1. 1 Corinthians 14:35 **does** have the linguistic marker "idious" (translated "their") for husbands (not "men") and is universally so translated. So how does the context of verse 35 not impact verse 34?

- #2. Bible scholars virtually universally admit that we cannot know for certain what St. Paul intended with the word “nomos” (translated “law”) in 1 Corinthians 14:34. Our essay, “Women and the WELS,” merely suggests that an understanding of the word as marriage law is as likely as other understandings.
- #3. Regarding linguistic markers, an “Exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:11-15” by the faculty of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary makes this observation: “When the noun appears without an article it is indefinite” (therefore signifying “woman” or “man” rather than “wife” or “husband”). It should be noted, then, that in 1 Corinthians 11:3 there is an article with “aner,” suggesting that the word be translated “husband” and by extension “wife” for “gune.” This is, in fact, how several translations render the verse.

When there are linguistic markers such as the article or the word “idios,” it is clear that the translation should be “husband” and “wife.” This does not mean that only when there is such a linguistic marker should the translation be husband and wife. In other cases the context should guide the translator. Examples of passages that do not have the linguistic marker and yet seem clearly to refer to husband and wife include: Luke 14:20, 1 Corinthians 7:27,29,39, 1 Corinthians 9:5, and 1 Timothy 5:9. In each of these cases, the context demands understanding husband and/or wife. Our essay, “Women and the WELS,” attempted to demonstrate that context argues for an understanding of husband and wife in 1 Corinthians 11:3—the critical verse to this whole subject.

- #4. While Pastor Leyrer makes the argument that the “hapax legomenon” (a word used only once in the New Testament), namely “authentein,” in 1 Timothy 2 *could* be translated as neutral, he wisely does not argue that it *should* be so translated. From Martin Luther to nearly every lexicon in use today there is no basis for arguing *should*. Even the quotation Pastor Leyrer adduces from Armin Panning’s study is forceful—“thrusting oneself forward, asserting oneself.” This meaning of the word, let alone the more forceful “control” or “domineer” that lexicons suggest, can hardly justify the application which denies women a vote in congregations.

#### Further Observations

- a) Pastor Leyrer does not address the issues of application in the WELS doctrinal statements. The applications of 1 Timothy 2 which deny women the vote and other roles in the church was one of the two main issues raised by our essay, “Women and the WELS.”
- b) There is no attempt in Pastor Leyrer’s “response” paper to justify the WELS doctrinal statements’ application of a so-called “order of creation” to roles and relationships in society. This was also a concern in our essay, “Women and the WELS,” and it remains vital to how Christian women live and work in a contemporary culture.
- c) The response paper does not address several other issues raised in our “Women and the WELS” essay. Among these are:

1. The fact that an “order of creation” is a relatively recent doctrinal discovery (if this is a doctrine, wouldn’t it have been recognized earlier than the mid-1900s and by a Lutheran rather than Reformed theologian?).
2. The fact that Martin Luther’s writings agree with most of what our essay, “Women and the WELS,” asserts.
3. The fact that nearly all current Bible translations are uncertain whether 1 Corinthians 11:3 should be translated as wife and husband or woman and man.

### In Conclusion

Pastor Leyrer’s response paper raises some legitimate questions. We believe that they should be addressed in a broad study within the WELS of man/woman roles and relationships. Our essay, “Women and the WELS,” does not make the claim that it is the only way to understand the issue and the passages under question, only that there are legitimate alternatives to the basis for and wording of the WELS doctrinal statements.

Like a criminal conviction, doctrine should be “beyond a reasonable doubt.” The so-called “order of creation” doctrine does not pass this test. And the application of this assumed doctrine, which restricts the use of women’s gifts in the church, certainly does not pass such a test either.

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