



# **Complementary Gender Roles**

*A position paper for Creekside Community Church*



# INTRODUCTION

In the past few generations of Western Christianity, the conversation around gender roles in the home and church has commanded more attention than almost any other single issue. This has been the case for good historical reasons. For centuries up to and including today, men in leadership have built unnecessary fences around roles or functions out of fear that women might accidentally get put into a place they shouldn't be. This has led to the systematic marginalization and dismissal of female Christian voices in the West. Too often in the church, complementarianism has been a practice of fear. And Creekside has not been immune to this temptation.

However, it is our belief that the well-documented failure of the church should not cloud the beauty of God's very good creation order. Rather than throwing the proverbial baby out with the bath water, we are inclined to ask what Scripture demands of us, both in our doctrine and in our practice, and how men and women can both flourish within God's design. This paper exists to that end. We will explore the relevant passages and attempt to understand what prevailing prescriptions exist for the church today and how those prescriptions can be embodied in a spirit of love for the glory of God.

We have not been given a spirit of fear when it comes to proclaiming the goodness of God's design for creation. Rather, we must move toward one another in brotherly and sisterly love, encouraging each other to use our God-given gifts within the roles available to us, so that the church will be edified and the glory of God will flow from us to the nations. More than simply labeling certain roles as reserved or open, we see it as our responsibility to raise up both men and women to be qualified for the roles and functions available to them. We long to create such an environment at Creekside, where fathers and mothers in the faith are raising up the next generation to lead the church.

Before looking at the passages relevant to this conversation, we will acknowledge two assumptions and define some terms. It is our prayer that this paper would provide clarity on the biblical foundations for our church governance and practices, all of which exist to glorify God.

## Authority of Scripture

Creekside is a church fully submitted to the authority of Scripture. Article 2 of our Statement of Faith reads:

We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.<sup>1</sup>

Given our submission to the authority of Scripture, we are primarily concerned with what God's Word has to say about gender-specific roles within the home and the church. We should expect that, in a fallen world, certain values and beliefs of every culture will be challenged by the revealed Word of God. In those instances, we should trust that God's design is better than any alternative. We have done our best to anchor our complementarian stance and practice clearly in God's Word, and we encourage the reader to examine these Scriptures to see if what we're saying is biblically accurate (Acts 17:11).

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<sup>1</sup> "The Bible." Article 2 of The EFCA Statement of Faith. For full statement, visit [creekside.com/our-beliefs](http://creekside.com/our-beliefs). See 2 Timothy 3:14-17; John 17:17; 1 Peter 1:23; Psalm 119:44-45, 165.



## Doctrinal Rank

Scripture lays out a coherent, logical description of God, His world, and His plan to save His world from the effects of sin. That said, we do not believe that every true statement that could be said about these things is of equal value or authority. Some doctrines are matters of first importance, such as the Trinity, the exclusivity of Christ, or substitutionary atonement. These are among the core truth claims of Christianity because the Bible speaks clearly and unequivocally about each. Other doctrines are of second importance. Such doctrines answer questions where God's Word isn't as clear as it is on first-order doctrines. These secondary truth claims represent one of multiple possible readings of Scripture, each submitted to the authority of the Bible. Each local church must determine where it falls on such doctrines and how those conclusions will inform its structure and philosophy.

We believe the conversation on gender roles belongs firmly in the category of second-order doctrines. However, labeling a doctrine as second-order does not mean it is unimportant, or that it would be fruitless for us to arrive at a conclusion as a local church. Quite the contrary, there is a great need for the church to pursue God's creation design as a means of knowing and loving Him. Further, this particular question bears much weight for our church governance, as well as our teachings regarding marriage and parenting, to name a few. So while we do not believe this paper or our corresponding church polity are binding to every church and every Christian, we do hold firmly to our conclusions for the good of our local body and the glory of God.

## Defining Terms

Broadly speaking, views on gender roles can be broken into two categories: *complementarianism* and *egalitarianism*. Both complementarians and egalitarians affirm the equal value and dignity of both genders. This is clear in the creation account (Genesis 1:26-28), and any disparity in gender roles that is based on a perceived disparity in value is incompatible with the biblical witness. The difference between these two views comes in their respective understandings of the roles assigned to each gender. Egalitarianism argues against gender-based role distinctions in the home and local church. The equal value of men and women must lead to equal access to roles of leadership and instruction. Complementarianism, on the other hand, argues that God has assigned specific roles to each gender that are not interchangeable, and that these roles play out in the home and in the local church.<sup>2</sup>

	Ontological Value	Assigned Roles
Complementarianism	Equal	Distinct
Egalitarianism	Equal	Indistinct

The purpose of this paper is to present Creekside Community Church's understanding of biblical complementarianism, particularly as it relates to the organization of the local church. We are convinced that complementarianism is not only the correct reading of Scripture, but that it creates the greatest capacity for the individual flourishing of both men and women within the local church. This paper will defend our doctrinal stance by exegeting several key passages in Scripture that speak to gender roles within the home and the church. These passages include 1 Timothy 2, Genesis 1-3, 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, Romans 16, Galatians 3, 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1-2, along with a few others.

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<sup>2</sup> We believe that complementary gender roles apply the home and the local church. While we believe Scripture clearly speaks to gender roles within these two institutions, we do not believe that they are binding for the corporate or political realms (see, for instance, Lydia in Acts 16:11-15).



## Familial Love

Many things are unique to the gathering of Christians, but high on that list is the practice of brotherly and sisterly love (*philadelphia*; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; Hebrews 13:1; 2 Peter 1:7). This arises from the fact that, in Christ, God has created a new family. This family is related by blood - the blood of Jesus Christ! As we proceed forward into this conversation, we do so not to win an argument or to establish a self-serving power structure. We do so out of love for our brothers *and sisters*, to provide clear and sound doctrine from which the family of God may love one another as Christ has first loved us.

Finally, we intend this paper to be the revitalization of an important conversation in our church, one that centers around our duty to equip our brothers and sisters for the work of the ministry. This does not represent the end of a conversation. We recognize that simply stating our position is not sufficient, nor is it our aim. We want to shepherd the whole body, with special care to those against whom this doctrine has been distorted and weaponized. Biblical complementarianism is concerned with maximum flourishing for both men and women within God's creation order and design.

Before we turn to some of the central passages on complementary gender roles, we begin at the beginning, where Scripture makes its most important claim in regard to men and women.

## IN HIS IMAGE - GENESIS 1:26-28

Creation begins in Genesis 1 with a summary of eternity past, the time when all that existed was the Triune God (1:1-2). Creation dawns when God speaks. The result of God's speech is that, where there once was nothing, something comes into being. Importantly, God does not use raw materials to create something out of something else. God is the origin of all things. He is the Owner of all creation and is just to do with creation as He pleases (Psalm 24:1-2). This also means that all things derive their meaning in relationship to their Creator. For six days, God speaks, and from nothing comes light, sky and water, dry land, the sun, moon, and stars, fish, birds, animals, and in the culminating act of all creation, humanity. While much debate surrounds the exact mechanics and timing of creation - a debate that is outside the scope of this paper - we can see clearly from the Genesis 1 account that God created all things within a divine order. Living within this order is the key to flourishing, to experiencing the "very good-ness" that defined creation at its culmination (1:31), elsewhere referred to as *shalōm*.

In recounting the creation of human beings, Genesis 1 makes one of the most significant claims in all Scripture when it says,

So God created man in His own image,  
in the image of God He created him;  
male and female He created them (1:27).

The *imago Dei* is a unique aspect to humanity among creation. No other creature bears the image of God. No other creature has the surpassing ontological value that comes with the image of God. We must consider two implications of the image-bearing nature of both male and female before we can understand the other passages before us.

First, both men and women have equal value before God because both bear the same image of God.<sup>3</sup> This is essential to understand, not least because centuries of patriarchal societies have considered women to be fundamentally less capable than men, and therefore fundamentally less human. Such understanding completely misses the mark of

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<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this paper, we are assuming a binary gender that is inextricably linked to one's biological sex. We recognize the complexities involved in this assumption, such as those who are born intersex. However, through faith, we trust in God's revealed design for humanity, that they are created male and female in the image of God.



Genesis 1:27. Far from claiming that men are inherently more capable than women, the equality in image-bearing indicates that humanity only fully images God *collectively*. And this leads to the second implication: the collective humanity of the garden is given the same task: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over [all creation]” (1:28). Both men and women are tasked with collectively exercising dominion over all creation, cultivating it so that it will flourish within God’s order and design.

With this in mind, we will turn in our exegesis with the passage around which complementarianism in the local church centers: 1 Timothy 2:8-15.

## PROPER BEHAVIOR - 1 TIMOTHY 2:8-15

Perhaps more than any other, Paul’s admonition to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:8-15 is the key passage in understanding biblical complementarianism in the local church. To make sure we are not simply proof-texting these verses, we will begin by considering the context of this passage. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, his “true child in the faith” (1:1-2). Timothy was, despite his youth, the presiding elder over the church at Ephesus. False teachers and false doctrine had found their way into the Ephesian church. From the content of Paul’s letter, we can surmise that these false teachers were encouraging Ephesian Christians to adopt an ascetic lifestyle, including “abstinence from certain foods, from marriage, and probably sex generally (1 Timothy 4:1-3).”<sup>4</sup> In response, Paul writes this letter charging Timothy to “wage the good warfare” against false doctrine (1:18) and to teach the Ephesians church “how one ought to behave in the household of God” based on sound doctrine (3:15).

Paul begins his list of such behaviors in chapter 2 by urging the church to pray for those in positions of civic authority (2:1-2). This is “how one ought to behave in the household of God” for two reasons: it pleases God (2:3), and God wants all people to be saved (2:4). Paul is not laying forth a universalist soteriology, nor is He saying there are some who God wills to be saved who will not be saved. Rather, Paul is claiming that the same God who saves the Jew saves the Gentile; the same God who saves men saves women; the same God who saves the free saves the slave. “There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all” (2:5-6a).

The “all peoples” scope of God’s redemptive work is at the foundation of proper behavior in the church. Paul makes this logical connection explicit when he moves into a delineation of gender-specific roles in verse 8: “I desire then (lit, “therefore”)...” In other words, because it is true that God desires to save all people, here is how men and women ought to behave when the church is gathered. This leads to the commands of verses 11 and 12, the core of this passage as it relates to our discussion: a woman must learn quietly and submissively (2:11), and a woman must not teach or exercise authority over a man (2:12). For many in our context, the question that immediately follows this dual prohibition is, why? Why shouldn’t a woman teach or exercise authority over men? The answer to this question is key to understanding whether these commands are specific to Timothy’s context or whether they are binding for all churches in all times and all places. The answer is also provided by Paul in the following verses.

Two reasons are given by Paul for the prohibition of women teaching or exercising authority over men in the church: Adam was formed before Eve (2:13), and Eve was deceived and fell into sin, not Adam (2:14). In order to fully understand Paul’s Spirit-inspired reasoning, we will look at each of these claims, and then come back to 1 Timothy 2:15.

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas Moo, “What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?” in RBMW (eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 2006): loc. 4710.



## Adam Formed First - Genesis 2:4-25

If Genesis 1 gives an overview of all six days of creation, Genesis 2 zooms in on day 6, specifically on the creation of humanity. In this account, God formed Adam out of the dust (2:7) and put Adam in the garden “to work it and keep it” (2:15). Adam was given this task alone, a fact that is almost immediately labeled “not good” by God (2:18). God then addresses Adam’s lonely task by creating a “helper fit for him” (2:18, 20): woman. We must quickly remind ourselves of the order already established in Genesis 1. Eve’s designation of “fit helper” is not a question of relative ontological value. In fact, God Himself is often described as the one who helps His people, using the very same Hebrew word.<sup>5</sup> God establishes equal value first (Genesis 1), then details assigned roles second (Genesis 2). Adam does not have dominion over Eve, who in turn has dominion over the rest of creation. If anything, Adam’s need for a helper is more a statement of his inability to carry out the creation mandate on his own.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, this is not a question of relative value or capability.

However, despite the ontological equality of man and woman in creation, we must not conclude that men and women have no distinction in roles assigned to them. Claire Smith states it well:

Adam’s firstborn-ness is not the only sign of this ordered relationship; there is also the difference in the tasks God assigns to the man and the woman. She is made as “a helper fit for him” (not the other way around). As Paul puts it: “Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man” (1 Cor 11:9).<sup>7</sup>

More than this, it was only to Adam that God explained that he, and Eve after him, must not eat from the forbidden tree (2:17). Though both human beings are accountable before God to exercise their dominion under God’s ultimate authority, it is primarily Adam’s responsibility to make sure both he and Eve know what God demands of them.

So we see the first of Paul’s reasons for prohibiting a woman from teaching or exercising authority over a man: Adam was created first. Adam and Eve are ontologically equal in value before the Lord, but they have been given distinct roles within their collective task of exercising dominion, and those roles are not interchangeable. This role distinction is built into the “very good” order of creation by God.

## Eve Deceived - Genesis 3:1-8

We turn now to the second of Paul’s reasons for complementary gender roles within the church: Eve was deceived, not Adam. Admittedly, this statement may be harder to digest than the first. It may appear that Paul is claiming women are inherently more susceptible to temptation than men, or that the fall itself was primarily Eve’s fault. But when we look closely at Genesis 3, we see that neither is the case. Adam and Eve both sinned (Genesis 3:6-7) and were therefore both equally susceptible to temptation. Paul elsewhere attributes the fall and its effects to Adam, not Eve (Romans 5:12-21). So what is the significance of the fact that Eve was the one who was *deceived*, and how does it strengthen Paul’s argument for complementary gender roles in the church?

The significance lies in the fact that Eve did not receive the command concerning the forbidden tree directly from God. That command was given to Adam (Genesis 2:17) before Eve was formed (Genesis 2:21-22). However, when asked by the serpent about God’s command, Eve knows that the tree “in the middle of the garden” is off limits to her, and that eating of it will lead to certain death.<sup>8</sup> Apparently Adam was faithful in his role of headship, having instructed his wife concerning how they both should love God through obeying His commands. The fact

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<sup>5</sup> See Genesis 49:25, Exodus 18:4, Isaiah 41:10; Psalm 30:10, among others.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander, T.D. “Genesis.” ESV Study Bible. Dennis and Grudem, eds. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011): 54.

<sup>7</sup> Claire Smith, *God’s Good Design* (Matthias Media, 2012): loc. 2375.

<sup>8</sup> Much speculation exists over why Eve added the phrase “neither shall you touch it” (3:3). Any explanation is simply that: speculation. The Bible does not tell us directly why Eve added this phrase.





that Eve was the one who was deceived means, at least in part, that the rejection of Adam's headship played a significant role in the introduction of sin into God's very good creation.

This rejection came from both parties. Adam abdicated his headship when he sat passively next to Eve while she wandered into sin - the very sin about which he had already warned her! Eve rejected her role when she usurped Adam's teaching of God's commands and ate of the tree anyway. This has nothing to do with the woman's comparative ability to resist temptation - Adam sinned right alongside Eve. Paul's reasoning is clear: the sin that plunged all of humanity into rebellion against God is in part due to Adam and Eve rejecting their gender-distinct roles assigned to them by God in creation.

Many will look to this passage as the emergence of complementary gender roles. Doesn't this prove that gender-based role distinctions are effects of the fall, and therefore to be undone by God's people? There are at least three reasons why we do not believe this to be the case. First, this is the second of Paul's premises for his gender-based reservation of teaching and exercising authority, the first coming from the order of creation itself (see above). Second, Paul elsewhere anchors complementarianism in the very good creation order (1 Corinthians 11:8-9) as well as the relationships between Jesus and the Father (1 Corinthians 11:3) and Jesus and the church (Ephesians 5:25). Third, Genesis 3 explains why the loving, secure, "naked and unashamed" relationship between husband and wife is now primarily experienced as a power struggle between both parties. The sin-distorted version of complementary gender roles are certainly born out of sin, and many have suffered under it since the first generation of humanity. However, this does not negate God's creation ideal to which Paul so often points.

Therefore, according to Paul, the rejection of complementary gender roles within the home or the local church is not an exercise in Christian freedom, but a return to the conditions that were partly responsible for bringing about humanity's original rebellion against God! This is why the proper behavior of women learning "quietly with all submissiveness" (1 Timothy 2:11) naturally emerges from God's "all people" redemptive work. The behavior of God's gathered people should demonstrate the goodness of a restored relationship with our Creator, through Christ, and being submitted to God's design and order for His creation in pursuit of *shalôm*. Thus, women should not teach or exercise authority over men, which would represent a rejection of the roles assigned to them by God in creation, just as Adam and Eve had done.

### **Saved by Childbearing? - 1 Timothy 2:15**

What then should we make of Paul's statement in verse 15, "Yet she will be saved through childbearing - if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control"? One thing we know for sure is that the act of birthing a child will save no one, because no one will be justified by works (Rom. 3:20). So what is Paul saying here? Two options are held among most scholars. First, some will say the "she" in the first half of the verse refers back to Eve, the most immediate referent. Therefore, Paul is saying that Eve will be saved by bearing the promised Offspring who will crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15), which will in turn save the "they" who have faith.

While the Christological focus of this interpretation is appealing, we are more compelled to read verse 15 as Paul admonishing women to joyfully accept and own the roles that are reserved for them. Paul's focus in this letter is an orderly gathering and leadership structure that demonstrate the goodness of God's divine rule to all. We have already seen Paul's claims that complementarianism proclaims this truth, and that the rejection of gender-distinct roles denies it. Once again, Claire Smith summarizes Paul's argument in verse 15 best:

This helps us to understand what Paul means in reference to women. It helps us to see that he is not talking about childbirth being a means of salvation, but about Christian women being spiritually preserved or saved from the temptations and fate of Eve and the dangers of false teaching, if they continue in faith and love and holiness with self-control. And childbearing is part of that. Childbearing is one of the good works with which godly women are to adorn themselves, even though its goodness and godliness appears to have been under



threat [in the Ephesian church] (cf. 4:3, 5:14-15). It seems to function as a shorthand way of referring to responsibilities that were peculiar to women.<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, this does not mean women who do not bear children are somehow less female than those who do. For starters, this would contradict Paul's desire that Christians would remain single so they can focus on the work of the gospel (1 Corinthians 7:6-9)! The call to singlehood is a noble and godly call for those who receive it, and it would obviously preclude a woman bearing a child. Beyond this, many who desire to have children cannot either because they are not married or because they are not physically able. The pain of this unmet desire runs deep, and the church should be first in line to "weep with those who weep" and "bear one another's burdens" as a demonstration of Christ's love (Romans 12:15; Galatians 6:2). These commands from Paul show that he is not callous to such trials. He is simply saying that, "however their lives unfold, women are to be content with the patterns of relationship between men and women that God has instituted for our own good."<sup>10</sup>

## **Reserved for Women - Titus 2**

What, then, is reserved for women, specifically within the local church? For that question, we turn to Paul's letter to Titus, a young leader of the churches on the island of Crete. Once again, we see Paul's concern for orderly worship come immediately to the fore: "This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town..." (1:5). Paul explains the importance of appointing elders who are "able to give instruction in sound doctrine" (1:9) in light of multiple sources of false teaching in the Cretan churches. Precisely because of this spread of false teaching, Paul urges that mature Christian women would "train the young women" (2:4) in the congregation to walk in accordance with sound doctrine. A similar command is given to the mature men with regard to the younger men in the congregation. All this is to happen under the leadership of Titus and the appointed elders. And once again, this order is grounded in God's "all people" plan of salvation (2:11).

The much needed discipleship of spiritually young women is reserved for spiritually mature women in the local church. Young women and young men, along with the rest of the church, sit under the sound doctrine instructed by the elders. Pastors and elders should be meeting regularly with men and women in the church to attend to various needs. But the life-on-life, apprenticeship-based discipleship modeled by Christ is gender specific. And where there are spiritually young women who are in need of one-on-one discipleship, it is reserved for spiritually mature women to meet this need.

Once again, local church order is anchored in the order of creation. As Paul says over and over again, the orderly worship gathering and orderly leadership of the local church is a testament to the goodness of God's creation order. This is perhaps no more clearly on display than in Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth.

## **ORDERLY WORSHIP - 1 CORINTHIANS 11:3-16**

Paul uses the order of creation for a similar argument in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9, "For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man." The occasion for this letter is not at all dissimilar to that of 1 Timothy. Corinth was home to a church planted by Paul himself (Acts 18:1-17). By the time he wrote this letter, the Corinthian church was in disarray due to false teaching. Corinthian believers had become obsessed with a "spiritual wisdom" that led them to do all sorts of ungodly things in the name

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<sup>9</sup> Smith, *God's Good Design*, loc. 407.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*





of Christ. This manifested itself in several ways, one of which was the weekly worship service, which had become mired in disorder and self-centered attention seeking. Paul spends chapters 11-14 of this letter setting the record straight on how Christians ought to act when they are gathered (i.e., proper behavior for the household of God).

In verse 3 of chapter 11, Paul says, “But I want you to understand that the head<sup>11</sup> of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God” (11:3). Once again, the comparison to the relationship between God the Father and His incarnate Son reminds us that complementary gender roles are not temporary or culturally specific but part of a transcendent design. Nor are gender roles questions of ontological value or worth. God the Son is eternal and co-equally divine with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, the three Persons who are one Being, God. With respect to His humanity, Christ willingly submits Himself to the Father, but He is no less God than the Father, and women are no less human than men.

In the verses that follow, Paul prescribes how men and women are to pray and prophesy in such a way that honors God’s creation order and design (11:4-5). Culturally, wearing long hair with a shawl was typical dress for a woman, and wearing comparably shorter hair and no head covering was typical for man.<sup>12</sup> When we remind ourselves of Paul’s reasoning in 1 Timothy 2:14, that Adam and Eve’s manner of sin represented a rejection of assigned gender roles, we see a similar line of reasoning here. Men, don’t dress like a woman and then pray or prophesy in a worship service, and likewise for women. Doing so creates disorder by balking at God’s creation order and distinction between men and women (hence Paul’s reference to creation in 11:9-10). In fact, such behavior could even serve to deceive angels about the truth of the gospel (11:10)! While this passage does not bind all Christian women in all times and spaces to cover their heads, it does call both men and women to dress appropriately for worship gatherings, especially in such a way that affirms the God-ordained distinction between men and women.

## **Prophecy vs. Teaching - 1 Corinthians 14:28-35**

At this point, we must step aside and observe the fact that these verses affirm a woman praying or prophesying in a worship gathering, provided that she do so in an orderly way (the same applying to men). So we must ask ourselves, what is the difference between the “prophecy” that is open to women in this passage and the “teaching” that is restricted to men in 1 Timothy 2? Some will see the word “prophecy” to refer to the sign gift - a word of insight or knowledge given to a person miraculously by the Spirit. Others will say one prophesies any time they open their mouth to say, “Thus says the Lord,” if what follows is in accordance with Scripture. While there is undoubtedly overlap between prophecy and teaching, they cannot be completely synonymous, since one is open to both men and women, and the other is not.

The distinction between the two seems to arise from the authority that comes with the teaching in 1 Timothy 2. The prophecy of 1 Corinthians 11-14 must be evaluated in the gathering for its fidelity to Scripture (14:29). Elsewhere in the New Testament, prophecy is given to and disobeyed by Paul (Acts 21:4-5, 15)! Therefore, prophecy is not necessarily authoritative in its own right, and certainly not to the whole congregation. Teaching, on the other hand, is authoritative. The purpose of that teaching is to establish sound doctrine for the church. Further, while prophecy might apply to one person, or a small group of people, teaching is always authoritative to the whole church. It is during this teaching that a woman should learn quietly, as should all who might otherwise speak during the service (1 Corinthians 14:28-35).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Some have argued that the Greek word *kephalē*, translated “head,” simply means “source,” and does not speak to an authoritative or submissive relationship. This translation is clearly problematic due to the resulting claim that God is the source of Christ, a stance firmly rejected by the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381, which says Jesus is “True God of True God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father...” (John 1:1, 8:58. Col. 1:19, Matt. 2:11, etc.). Further, all extra-biblical examples of this formula (the head of x is y) clearly refer to an authoritative relationship.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity” in RBMW: loc. 3257.

<sup>13</sup> The command to be silent is applied to three groups of people in this passage: tongue-speakers absent an interpreter (v. 28), prophets after two or three prophecies have been made (v. 30), and women during the evaluation of interpreted tongues and prophecy (v. 34). All of these are encouraged to speak under certain circumstances during the service, and to be silent during others.



The results of this comparison are important to elaborate. If it is true that women are to be speaking and praying in a worship service, provided they do so in an orderly fashion (as is the case for men), then worship services that *never* include the voices of women on the grounds of complementarianism are out of step with Scripture. Likely, this is why Paul includes verses 11-12 in the midst of his argument for complementarianism: “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of a man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God” (11:11-12). Lest we misunderstand complementarianism to mean men participate in corporate worship while women simply watch quietly, we need Schreiner’s warning: “First Corinthians 11:3-10 is a sustained argument in favor of male headship and female submission, yet with full participation in worship for women (something Christians today need to remember more often).”<sup>14</sup> Once again, Paul takes great lengths to affirm the fact that women bear the same image of God as men, are given the same Holy Spirit as men, and are expected to use their gifts to edify the church in the roles open to them just as men are. To allow biblical complementarianism to drift into patriarchy is to do a serious disservice to the clear witness of these texts, not to mention to marginalize and silence an entire class of believers.

Thus far, we have seen Paul’s supreme concern for order within worship services as a demonstration of God’s order and design, and so that the gospel would be clearly proclaimed. In the midst of this order, the authoritative teaching of the church is reserved for men, while all other practices seem to be open to women. But does the 1 Timothy 2 prohibition of a woman teaching a man authoritatively extend beyond the worship service? A quick survey of the New Testament makes this stance difficult to defend. Priscilla, along with her husband Aquila, corrects the doctrine of Apollos in Acts 18, with the result that Apollos “powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus” (18:28). One of the first evangelists recorded in Scripture is the Samaritan woman in John 4, whose testimony resulted in the conversion of an entire town (4:29). In all four gospels, women were the first to observe the resurrected Christ, and it was on their testimony that the other disciples (and by extension, all people) knew that Jesus was alive (Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:11-18). Timothy learned the faith from his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5).

It would appear that Paul’s prohibition of a woman “exercising authority” in 1 Timothy 2 does not refer to incidental authority that is inherent to all teaching. However, it is also important to note that “none of these examples are women teaching men in the authoritative instruction that happened when the Christian community assembled.”<sup>15</sup> There is a type of authoritative teaching that takes place in the gathering of a local church and that is authoritative over the whole local church. This authoritative teaching, we have seen clearly from the passages above, is reserved for men.

## ELDERS AND DEACONS - 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13

We return now to 1 Timothy with another question in mind: is every woman required to submit to every man in a local church? This question must have been on Paul’s mind, because the answer immediately follows His commands in 1 Timothy 2. 1 Timothy 3:1-7 paints a picture of the kind of man who is worthy to be appointed to the office of elder/overseer. Intuitively, this signals to us that every woman is *not* required to submit to every man in the church. Instead, every woman (and every man!) is required to submit to the elders of the local church, men who have shown themselves godly and qualified and have been appointed or elected to the office. Elders are responsible to oversee the church, including instructing and defending sound doctrine (i.e., authoritative

<sup>14</sup> Schreiner, “Head Coverings,” loc. 3424.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, *God’s Good Design*, loc. 515.



teaching; Titus 1:5-16) and the ministries of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:4).

Scripture clearly lays out how elders ought to exercise their authority and oversight. In Ezekiel 34, God gives a chilling indictment against the “shepherds” of Israel for using and abusing the “sheep” for their own comfort (34:1-6). In response to this abuse of power, God promises that He Himself will step in and shepherd His people. Unlike the wicked rulers of Israel, God promises to seek out and rescue the lost sheep (34:12), to feed the hungry sheep (34:14), and to bind up the injured sheep (34:16). Since elders serve as undershepherds, representatives of the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), elders must exercise their authority in such a way. Only those who do not truly know God are those who lord their authority over others (Matthew 19:25-28). Those who have been given authority in the office of elder must lead as Jesus did, counting themselves as the servant of all, willing to give their very lives for the flock. To such men, who have been given the office of elder, women (and men) are called to submit.

## **Husbands and Wives - Ephesians 5:22-33**

This flows over into the home, the second institution in which complementary gender roles exist. In Ephesians 5, Paul calls wives to submit themselves to their husbands, once again citing the transcendent category of the church’s relationship to Christ (5:22-24). But far more ink is spent on the husbands, whose role it is to love their wives as Christ loved the church “and gave Himself up for her” (5:25-26). Men who view their God-ordained headship as a position of self-serving autonomous authority are living in sin (Gen. 3:16), not in the creation ideal. A complementarian home is run by a husband and father who is daily dying to himself so that his wife and children might be presented fully mature before Christ. Elders of the local church are called to do the same for the sake of the flock. In so doing, they embody the gospel, the very foundation of complementarianism (1 Timothy 2:4-7).

Some will suggest that Paul is not calling for a complementarian structure within the home in Ephesians 5. Instead, Paul is simply teasing out how husbands and wives can be “submitting to one another” in the immediately preceding verse. While this is a plausible interpretation, we do not think such is the grammatically preferred way to read this passage. Verse 18 contains the two independent commands of this sentence: “And do not get drunk with wine...but be filled with the Holy Spirit...” What follows is a list of dependent participles that describe how those filled with the Holy Spirit will treat one another, including addressing one another, singing, making melody, giving thanks together, and submitting to one another.

Given that “submitting” in verse 21 is grammatically dependent, we find it unlikely that it governs the independent commands that follow in 5:22-33. Further, the repetition of “submit” as the command for wives leaves conspicuous Paul’s use of “love” as the command for husbands. Why not repeat “submit” if Paul is detailing the implications of a common command to both spouses? The dual command of 5:1-2 is far more likely the grammatical head of this whole section: “be imitators of God,” and “walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us...” (cf. 5:25). Once again, the transcendent category of the gospel gives rise to complementary gender roles within the home: husbands love their wives as Christ loved the church, and wives submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ (5:24). So also the women (and men) of the local church should submit to the qualified men who serve as elders and pastors, remembering that elders and pastors exist for the good of those submitted to their oversight!

## **Deacons - 1 Timothy 3:8-13**

What of deacons? Is this role also reserved for men? This question is the source of much debate, mostly centering around the fact that rarely is the word “husband” or “wife” employed in the Greek New Testament.<sup>16</sup> Often, the word “man” or “woman” is used, and context dictates whether it is referring to spouses specifically or

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<sup>16</sup> A similar challenge exists in interpreting 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, discussed above.



genders broadly. That makes 1 Timothy 3:8-13 particularly difficult to interpret. In the ESV, verse 11 is rendered, “Their (deacons’) wives also must be dignified...” However, a straight rendering of the Greek would be, “Women likewise (should be) dignified...” Some translations, like the ESV, supply “their” and render the word “women” as “wives” given the following verse, which says deacons should be husbands of one wife.

However, there are three reasons why we think this is not the correct interpretation of this verse. First, the qualifications for elders (3:1-7) contain no reference to their wives, making this an unlikely qualification for a deacon. Second, “husband of one wife” is probably a colloquial way of referring to one being submitted to God’s design for marriage and sexuality. Paul himself was single (1 Corinthians 9:4) and therefore would not be qualified to be an elder if this phrase in 3:2 is taken literally. Finally, Phoebe is listed in Romans 16:1 as a “servant (*diakonon*, lit. “deacon”; same word used in 1 Timothy 3:8, 12, 13) of the church at Cenchreae.” In Acts 6, we see that the role of deacon was created to allow the disciples to devote themselves “to prayer and the ministry of the word,” which alone is reserved for qualified men by 1 Corinthians 14, 1 Timothy 2, and Titus 1. For all these reasons, we believe that the role of deacon is biblically reserved for qualified women and men, while the role of elder is biblically reserved for qualified men.

## **NO MALE AND FEMALE - GALATIANS 3:28**

What of Galatians 3:28? How can Paul’s claim that “there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” square with His writings elsewhere that affirm gender-distinct roles within the local church? Some will charge complementarians with subordinating Galatians 3:28 to other passages (such as 1 Timothy 2:11-14 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-35), while others will charge egalitarians with the reverse. The truth is that these passages are not incompatible, nor is subordinating one to another necessary to make sense of both. The context of Galatians 3:28 deals with the question of who will stand righteous before God. Paul states clearly that justification (being declared “righteous”) comes by faith alone; one’s demographics play no role in their justification.

Primarily, this argument is being applied to the Jew/Gentile divide, with Paul’s response being that Gentiles receive the same Holy Spirit as Jews (Acts 10, 15), and therefore do not need to become Jewish or adopt Jewish worship practices in order to be justified. In the same way, God is not the God of the free or of men only. Galatians 3:28 clearly states that anyone who responds to the gospel in faith is equally justified before God because all are in Christ. God’s redemptive work is for all people. Ironically, this is the very foundation upon which Paul calls for distinct gender roles within the church in 1 Timothy 2, as we discussed above. So Galatians 3:28 does not undermine complementarianism, but in fact reinforces the foundation upon which biblical complementarianism is built.

## **Laboring Together - Romans 16:1-16**

Given the fact that men and women are one in Christ, we should expect what we find in Romans 16 - a list of both men and women who have labored alongside Paul on behalf of the gospel. The fact that this passage is filled with women should therefore be no surprise to us. On the contrary, it should encourage women (and men) to be noteworthy in their commitment to the gospel, to the labor that defines one who uses his or her gifts to edify the church. However, there is one verse in this passage that warrants closer attention.

The inclusion of Junia (16:7), coupled with Paul’s description of her, is the source of much debate. The ESV translates, “They (Junia and Andronicus) are well known to the apostles” (see also CSB, NET). The NIV translates the same passage, “They are outstanding among the apostles (see also NLT, NASB, KJB). So what does Paul have in mind here? Are Junia and Andronicus both well known among the apostles, meaning the apostles know these two well for their service to Christ? Or are Junia and Andronicus both apostles, and famous ones to boot? Many egalitarians prefer this second interpretation, as it bolsters their position that women should have equal access to ministry roles within the local church. However, the meaning captured



by the ESV is to be preferred.<sup>17</sup> The same Greek construction found elsewhere clearly means “well known to [someone].”<sup>18</sup> Further, it is unlikely that the technical meaning of the term “apostle” was applied wider than to the twelve and Paul.<sup>19</sup>

Paul’s list of co-laborers in Romans 16 is further proof that he valued the multi-faceted ministry of women, including their teaching, prayer, support, and fellowship. He also applied the good order of God’s creation to the order of a godly home and a godly worship service. These two truths are not incompatible. They come about from the same author under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit. As we read Romans 16, we are encouraged to labor together on behalf of the gospel, calling each other to use the gifts given to us to edify the church in whatever roles or opportunities are available to us.

## SUMMARY OF EXEGESIS

Now that the above passages have been weighed, we will summarize Creekside’s understanding of biblical complementarianism. Men and women bear the same image of God (Genesis 1:27) and are given the same Holy Spirit (Galatians 3:28). Therefore, they are equally valuable and equally capable to carry out the creation mandate of exercising dominion over all creation. Men and women were created in a specific order and with distinct roles (Genesis 2:4-25; 1 Corinthians 11:9; 1 Timothy 2:13), and Adam and Eve’s rejection of those roles were part of humanity’s overall rejection of God’s very good order and design for creation (Genesis 3:1-7, 16; 1 Timothy 2:14).

Therefore, those who have been redeemed by God through Christ should organize their homes and their local churches according to God’s creation design, affirming the equal dignity and value of women and men while preserving the gender-based distinction in roles. In the local church, this means men and women are called to exercise their gifts to build up the church (Galatians 3:29; Romans 16:1-16; Corinthians 12:1-13:13). The act of authoritative teaching and the office of elder/pastor are reserved for qualified men. Among the responsibilities of the elders is the task of raising up men and women in their local church to be qualified for the roles that are available to them.

## COMPLEMENTARY GENDER ROLES AT CREEKSIDE

How does this play out at Creekside? First, it is important to note that we do not see the conclusions of this paper as binding for all churches that are submitted to the authority of Scripture. While we are convinced the form and practice of complementarianism at Creekside is best for our church, many gospel-centered churches arrive at different conclusions, and everything else being equal, we are unwilling to be divided from them as a result. However, we are convinced of the goodness of these conclusions for Creekside and will hold to them as such. Based on our prayerful reading of Scripture and our governance and practice, we believe that all roles and practices within our church are available to both women and men with two exceptions: the role of elder/pastor and the practice of preaching (authoritative teaching). These are reserved for qualified men.

### Elders and Pastors

We have already discussed the qualifications for elders. The elders are responsible for the ministry of the Word, instruction of sound doctrine, and the ministry of prayer. Where these ministries are the exercise of oversight for the whole local church, they are reserved for qualified men. As we read Scripture, we do not see a

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<sup>17</sup> This is the meaning intended by the NIV. See Douglas Moo, “Romans” in NIVSB.

<sup>18</sup> Schreiner, “Romans” in ESVSB. See Psalms of Solomon 2:6; Euripides, Hippolytus 103; Lucianus, Harmonides 1:17.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Moo, “Romans.”





distinction between the role of pastor and the role of elder. Some will refer to Ephesians 4:11 and Paul's reference to "shepherd-teachers" (*poimenas kai didaskalous*) as a pastoral role that is distinct from that of elder/overseer (*episkopon*, see 1 Timothy 3:1, Titus 1:7; *presbuterous*, see Titus 1:5, 1 Peter 5:1). However, though different words are used in these instances, it appears that the substance of the role remains the same.

We say this for three reasons. First, in 1 Peter 5, Peter exhorts "the elders (*presbuterous*) among you, as a fellow elder...: shepherd (*poimanate*) the flock of God that is among you, (by) exercising oversight (*episkopountes*)..." (5:1-2). Clearly, the ideas of shepherding, teaching, and exercising oversight converge in the role of elder (see also Titus 1:5-16). Second, Peter likens the godly manner of shepherding to that of Christ, the "Chief Shepherd" (5:4), who oversees the universal Church. The relationship between Christ and the Church, as we have already seen, is one of the transcendent categories that gives rise to complementary gender roles (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:25). Third, given that instruction in sound doctrine and refuting false doctrine is key to exercising oversight (Titus 1:5-16), it would seem odd to separate the instruction of sound doctrine to a separate role of shepherd-teacher (pastor) that is not a function of elder oversight.

For these reasons, we see pastors as elders who are given material support from the church in exchange for their full-time vocational focus on the matters of the church. Given that this is the case, the qualifications and reservations that apply to the role of elder also apply to the role of pastor. Pastors, as elders, are qualified men called and affirmed by the congregation to shepherd and oversee the church.

## Authoritative Teaching

We have also discussed the fact that the authoritative teaching for the gathered local church is reserved for qualified men. At Creekside, we view this teaching as the Sunday morning sermon. The sermon is given in the one venue where the entire local body is gathered to worship God corporately. Each week, the opening and unpacking of God's Word functions as oversight through the instruction of sound doctrine. Sermons are delivered by men who are currently elders or aspire to the office and have been vetted by those currently serving as elders. As noted above, all teaching has some authority incidental to it. However, not all teaching is reserved for men (Acts 18:26; Colossians 3:16). It is when the authority of the teaching extends to the whole church, given as a means of exercising oversight, that it becomes the "authoritative teaching" of 1 Timothy 2. This specific type of teaching is a core function of the elders/pastors, and as such, comes "pre-packaged" with elder authority and is binding for the whole church.

This is not to say that congregation members should uncritically consume the sermon. Far from it! The Jewish Christians in Berea are praised for examining the Scriptures "to see if these things (the gospel) were so" (Acts 17:10-11). The result was a faith not just received by these new converts, but owned and multiplied in their community (17:12). We encourage all Creeksiders to search the Scriptures daily to see if the content of the Sunday morning sermon is aligned with God's Word.<sup>20</sup> We encourage the reader of this paper to do the same! However, this does not diminish the fact that the authoritative teaching of the local church serves a unique function among all the teaching venues of that church.

## Sunday School and Small Groups

For instance, we do not see the teachings in our Sunday School or small group (One Another Groups, or OAGs) settings as equal in authority to the Sunday morning sermon. Our reasoning for this designation begins with the fact that Scripture has no category for Sunday School as a function of a local church. Sunday School

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<sup>20</sup> To this end, we have produced The Daily Read, a daily Bible reading plan that offers multiple passages each week. These passages demonstrate and expand on the claims of Sunday's sermon.





originated in 18th century America as a literacy program for children who could not go to school, with the Bible serving as the primary text.<sup>21</sup> Over the years, as public education became widely available, Sunday School morphed into a space for classroom-style instruction on the Bible and doctrine. This tends to be the model employed by churches who still offer Sunday School or some similar form of Christian education.

Such is how we view *Sundays at 9* (Sunday School) at Creekside. Our *Sundays at 9* classes have much more in common with a college/seminary classroom than with the corporate worship service for our local body. These venues are not the gathering of the whole local body that 1 Corinthians 11-14 and 1 Timothy 2 have in mind. Though we hope our members will attend Sunday School classes, it is not an expectation of membership. We do expect our members to prioritize attending Sunday morning worship services. Further, we often offer multiple Sunday School classes concurrently, meaning the whole congregation *cannot* gather under the teaching of an individual class. The same applies to OAGs, which are not intended to function primarily as a teaching venue, but one of community and prayer.

At the end of the day, the fact that Sunday School is not a category found in the New Testament leads us to believe that the elders of each local church have discretion concerning what level of authority they will confer on the teaching that takes place in that setting. There are some churches that choose Sunday School and/or small group teachings to carry equal authority to the Sunday morning sermon, and we respect the fact that they reserve those teaching roles for qualified men. However, the elders at Creekside have chosen to treat our *Sundays at 9* classes more like a college or seminary classroom, two venues we believe women can and should teach. Therefore, we do not treat *Sundays at 9* or OAGs as the authoritative teaching that is binding on the conscience of our whole church, and we do not reserve teaching in these settings for qualified men. Instead, these are two of the spaces where men and women can and should fulfill Paul's gender-indiscriminate command to "teach and admonish one another" (Colossians 3:16).

Just because Sunday School and OAGs do not function as the authoritative teaching for Creekside does not mean we are unconcerned with the content of the teaching in those spaces. Quite the contrary, the elders at Creekside take steps to oversee these and all the ministries of our church. Where non-elders are teaching in Sunday School, elders are almost always in attendance, and at times have exercised their oversight by correcting a minor point that was shared by the teacher. The elders review and approve all classes and see the material being taught beforehand. Most OAGs have current or former elders either in attendance or in leadership. We are chiefly concerned that the teaching in these spaces is faithful to God's Word and orthodox doctrine.

## Summary of Creekside Practices

At Creekside, we practice complementarian church structure by reserving the role of elder/pastor and the practice of authoritative teaching (preaching the Sunday morning sermon) for qualified men. All other roles can and should be filled by both men and women. The elders are responsible to equip the congregation for these roles, raising up both the character and competence of Creekside's members so that they will be qualified for the roles available to them.

By way of summary, the next page offers a list of questions and answers surrounding this topic.

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<sup>20</sup> Jen Wilkin. "Not Your Grandma's Sunday School Class." The Gospel Coalition National Conference, Apr. 2019.



**What offices are available to whom?**

The office of elder/pastor is reserved for qualified men. The offices of deacon and non-pastoral staff are reserved for qualified men and women.

**Does every man hold authority over the women at Creekside?**

No, because not every man can be an elder. Qualified men can serve as elders and do so provided they are appointed by the current elder board and affirmed by the congregation. Under the ultimate headship of Christ, the elders hold oversight authority over men and women in the church.

**Can women serve in leadership at Creekside?**

Yes. Women serve as deacons, OAG leaders, non-pastoral staff, and lead various ministries under the oversight of the elders.

**What counts as “authoritative teaching” at Creekside?**

We view the sermon during the corporate worship service as the “authoritative teaching” for our church.

**Who can preach a sermon on a Sunday morning at Creekside?**

Qualified men who hold the office of elder/pastor or who aspire to that office and have been vetted and authorized by the elders to function in that role.

**What about other speaking roles during a Sunday worship service?**

We believe Scripture expects both men and women to speak in the worship service in an orderly manner for the edification of the body (1 Corinthians 11:2-16). Therefore, any speaking role that does not function as the authoritative teaching at Creekside (i.e., the sermon) is open to men and women who are invited to speak by the pastors and elders.

**What about the ordinances (baptism and communion)?**

The ordinances are officiated by qualified men at Creekside. In other words, the congregation is invited to the Table by an elder/pastor or one who aspires to that office and has been vetted by the elders. The same applies to the baptism liturgy. Members in good standing may help distribute the elements of communion and participate in baptizing new converts.

**Who can teach a mixed-gender adult Sundays at 9 (Sunday School) class?**

Sundays at 9 classes exist under the oversight of Creekside’s elders. Since Sundays at 9 does not function as the authoritative teaching of the church at Creekside, qualified men and women who are invited by the elders may teach in this setting.

**Why doesn’t Sundays at 9 (Sunday School) count as “authoritative teaching?”**

Scripture does not have a category for Sunday School, so we acknowledge the need for prayerful discretion in regard to this question. At Creekside, the elders have not given Sundays at 9 classes the same authority as the Sunday morning sermon. We see it in the category of Priscilla correcting Apollos (Acts 18:26), women (and men) prophesying in a mixed-gender setting (1 Corinthians 11:2-16), and fulfilling Paul’s gender indiscriminate commands to “teach and admonish one another” (Colossians 3:16).

**Who can lead, teach, or facilitate discussion in a One Another Group (small group)?**

OAGs exist under the oversight of Creekside’s elders. Since OAGs do not function primarily as a teaching space at Creekside, qualified men and women who are invited by the elders may lead in this setting.



*Thank you to the men and women who took the time to review and offer edits to this paper.*

## Resources

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## Abbreviations

RBMW - Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood.

ESV - English Standard Version

CSB - Christian Standard Bible

NET - New English Translation

NIV - New International Version

NLT - New Living Translation

NASB - New American Standard Bible

KJB - King James Bible

OAG - One Another Group (small groups at Creekside)

