



1 **Male and female in God's world** 1

2 *A summary of what we believe Scripture teaches* 3 *about being male and female*

4 God created human beings as the crown of his perfectly-ordered universe. His perfect ordering
5 included creating human beings as male and female in his image. The image gave male and
6 female the shared blessing of their primary calling (vocation) to be God's dearly loved children.
7 Male and female also shared the responsibility of honoring God by caring for his creation as a
8 reflection of God's wisdom and compassion in all their God-given callings.

9 In loving wisdom our Creator also fashioned male and female to be different from each other in
10 an interdependent and complementary partnership of selfless leading and selfless yielding.² Since
11 God knew that it was not good for the male to be alone, God designed this partnership to be a
12 blessing in all our God-given callings in his world.

13 When the first human beings fell into sin, they lost God's image. Sin separated them from their
14 calling to be God's children. Simultaneously, they lost a full understanding of all their God-given
15 callings, including the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female.

16 In love, God sent his eternal Son that the image lost might become the image restored. In Jesus'
17 perfect submission to his Father's will, we see perfect selfless yielding. In his giving his life for

¹ Please note: this statement addresses the broad issue of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. God lovingly wove this into creation's fabric when he fashioned in his image both male and female. It is beyond this document's scope to offer specific guidance for those struggling in a sin-distorted world with what is called "gender dysphoria." Such gender confusion presents a double challenge: 1) to help those struggling with "gender dysphoria" to apply law and gospel to their own hearts; and 2) to guide those who minister to them to do so with Christ-like pastoral hearts. With respect to this focused issue, this document affirms that gender is not a mere societal construct. Our Creator intended our sex at birth to be formative for our gender identity. We are embodied selves. We are not personalities that float free and independent of our bodies. Such a concept would be the ancient heresy of Gnosticism in new dress. Our gender is instead a loving Creator's design that gives direction to male and female as they seek to delight in loving him and neighbor in common and unique ways.

For a much more thorough discussion of this critical issue, please see Prof. Paul Wendland's [*Statement on Human Sexuality, Personhood, Identity, and the Historic Christian Faith*](#).

² Both tasks are exalting because they enable both the one leading (head) and the one yielding (helper) to carry out work that imitates their Creator. Also, both tasks call for death to self since they are other-centered.

18 the world's sins and in his ruling all things for the benefit of his church, we see perfect selfless
19 leading. When the Holy Spirit wins us to faith in Jesus, we receive as our own the renewed gift
20 of God's image in a perfectly restored relationship with our Creator. As he brings us to faith, the
21 Spirit gives us a new heart recreated to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Daily we
22 die to our self-centered old heart and rise anew in the joy of living as the dearly loved bride (the
23 church) of our heavenly Bridegroom (Christ). In so doing we learn anew what it means for male
24 and female to live in an interdependent and complementary partnership in all our callings in
25 God's world.

26 *A fuller explanation of what this means*

27 To express what God's creating male and female in an interdependent and complementary
28 partnership means in our homes, in the church, and in God's world, we present the following
29 fuller statements of Scripture's teaching.

30 *God established at creation common and unique callings for male and female*

- 31 1. God created both male and female in his image (Genesis 1:26,27). The divine image gave
32 male and female equal status in their primary calling to be their Creator's dearly loved
33 children.
- 34 2. The divine image also brought with it the privilege of serving as a reflection of God's
35 wisdom and compassion in his world. Male and female expressed God's image by
36 carrying out their shared God-given calling of caring for God's world in service to their
37 Creator, to one another, and to all other human beings (Genesis 1:28).³

³ The gift of God's image marks both male and female as having the value of being the crown of God's creation. But point #2 is highlighting the gracious reality that this gift of God's image brings with it still another gift: God designed Adam and Eve to find a glorious sense of purpose in the gracious reality that he entrusted them with the task of caring for his creation and for one another. While God could have preserved this world by one unending series of miracles, God's typical way of providing and caring for his creatures is to use human beings, male and female, to be a glimpse of his love and protection in this world. So God honors those he created as the crown of his creation by calling them to be a reflection of him in all they would do.

This is what is often called the doctrine of vocation (calling). We have the privilege of reflecting God in all our God-given callings. Martin Luther was fond of calling this the privilege of being God's masks. God "hides" behind us as he provides for his world by using us. And while in a turned-in-on-ourselves fallen world, the beauty of this is lost to

- 38 3. God, in his loving wisdom, ordered his creation so that male and female were also unique
39 in their callings. While maintaining their equality of status, God formed male and female
40 to live in an interdependent and complementary partnership in which the male had the
41 calling of selfless leading and in which the female partnered with him in her calling of
42 selfless yielding.⁴
- 43 4. Scripture shows these unique callings existing already in creation's perfection as God
44 began with forming the male and then fashioning the female from him and for him
45 (Genesis 2:4-25; 1 Corinthians 11:8,9; 1 Timothy 2:13). Yet, just as every future male
46 would come from a woman (Genesis 3:20), God also intended this partnership to function
47 in close interdependence, not independence (1 Corinthians 11:11,12).
- 48 5. Since such an interdependent, complementary partnership remains God's created design,
49 male and female are wise to ponder how that partnership expresses itself as they live their
50 unique callings in their homes, in Christ's church, and in God's world.

51 ***The fall into sin destroys a full understanding of our callings***

- 52 6. When the first male and female sinned, all humanity lost God's image (Romans 3:23).
53 With the loss of that image they lost their relationship to God as his children. They also

sinful human beings, God restores our understanding of this gift and our ability to find joy in living it out as he brings us to faith in Jesus.

⁴ It is important to note that male and female are beautiful reflections of God's image not only in what we have in common in our creation but also in our unique ways of serving God and one another in this interdependent and complementary partnership.

As he uses his gifts, the male has the privilege of being a glimpse of God's protecting love as he carries out the calling of selfless leading. As she uses her gifts, the female has the privilege of being a glimpse of God's supporting love as she carries out the calling of selfless yielding. Both are godly tasks.

The beauty of the image of God being lived out even in what is unique about us as male and female is easily lost when our sinful nature causes us to turn what is unique about us from something beautifully woven into our creation into something for dispute, pride, and envy.

As this confession will note later, only as God in his eternal Son, our Lord Jesus, restores to us confidence in our status as his dearly loved children and heirs, can we even begin to learn to see the beauty of what is unique about us in the purpose for which he crafted us as male and female.

54 lost the ability to reflect that relationship with God in their care for his creation and in
55 their service to one another.⁵

56 7. However, even after the fall, God never changed his desire that male and female would
57 live at peace with him (Ezekiel 33:11; 1 Timothy 2:3,4). He also never changed his plan
58 that male and female would reflect his wisdom and compassion as they carried out this
59 interdependent, complementary partnership in all their callings.

60 8. As with all elements of God's will, the interdependent, complementary partnership of
61 male and female remains a good gift of God (1 John 5:3; Psalm 19:8,11) even though
62 sinful human hearts see God's will as oppressive (Romans 8:7). Ignoring any element of
63 God's perfect will harms our relationship with God and with one another (1 Peter 3:7;
64 Ephesians 6:3; Romans 13:2-4).

65 9. Since God's created design is woven into our nature as male and female, even
66 unbelievers can grasp much of what God intended by this partnership. However, because
67 sin is darkness and ignorance compared to God's perfect light and knowledge, no one can
68 have a godly understanding of the interdependent, complementary partnership apart from
69 faith in Jesus (Colossians 2:2,3).

70 *Proper understanding of our callings is restored in Christ*

71 10. God so loved fallen humanity (John 3:16) that he sent his Son to reestablish peace
72 between himself and sinners. Jesus' perfect life and death in human beings' place, and his
73 glorious resurrection, have earned God's declaration that he is again at peace with the
74 crown of his creation (Romans 5:18; 2 Corinthians 5:19).

75 11. When the Holy Spirit brings sinners to faith in Jesus, they enjoy as their own possession
76 the peace God declared for the world in his Son (2 Corinthians 5:20). Through faith in

⁵ Sin shattered their peaceful relationship with their Creator (Genesis 5:1-3; Isaiah 59:2). Both man and woman lost the beautiful equal status as God's children and gained in its place the horrible equal status of sinners (Romans 3:19,20). Both male and female also lost an understanding of what it meant to be selfless glimpses of God's wisdom and compassion as they lived out their interdependent, complementary partnership in their care of God's world and in their love for others (Genesis 2:16,17; 3:12,16). In every area of life, self-centered leadership and self-focused service would now disfigure the perfect glimpse of God's wisdom and compassion they would have been in the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female.

77 Jesus, both male and female enjoy again being equally loved children and heirs of God
78 (Galatians 3:26-29; 4:4,5).⁶

79 12. Also restored in Christ is the privilege for both male and female to reflect God's wisdom
80 and compassion in his world as they love God by caring for his creation and serving one
81 another. However, while the restoration of the status as God's loved children and heirs is
82 complete in Jesus, living out the restored image as reflections of God's wisdom and
83 compassion is possible only as believers daily return to their baptism. There each day
84 they put to death their old self. There the new self, recreated to be like God, rises with
85 God's power to live.⁷

86 ***Scripture defines selfless leading (head) and selfless yielding (helper)***

87 13. When God calls someone to reflect his protecting love by serving in a calling of selfless
88 leading (head), God entrusts that person with authority to be exercised in humble service.
89 As seen preeminently in Jesus (Philippians 2:5-8), leading in humility means serving for

⁶ When God's image is restored to us as the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in Jesus, along with that gift of the image comes the gift of its purpose toward God. We once again live in perfect peace and fellowship with our God since he sees us with all sins washed away in Jesus' blood and with his Son's perfect life covering us like a beautiful wedding garment (Galatians 3:26-29). This restoration of our status as loved children and heirs of heaven that comes with the image is what we mean when we speak of our justification. This gift is full and complete in Christ and is simply handed to us again for us to cling to by faith. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

⁷ The re-gifting of God's image because of Christ is full and complete in regard to believers' fellowship with God and our status as God's fully loved children. This is the truth of our justification. Justification is a gracious declaration of God about his gift of the forgiveness and holiness earned by Christ in his life, death, and resurrection. This full and complete gift is received through faith. Nothing needs to be added to that which is already perfect in Christ.

However, what is referred to in this paragraph as a work in progress is the re-gifting of God's image in regard to our lives of sanctification. Perfectly forgiven and holy in Jesus, believers daily strive to grow in what it means to live as God's representatives in the world. They seek to grow in loving God above all things by loving their neighbor as themselves as they carry out all their God-given callings.

Living this sanctified life will never be easy since our turned-in-on-itself sinful nature still clings to us until the day we die. However, the strength to live this out is also God's gift. In baptism, the Spirit planted within us a new self that has God's gospel power to live in love for God and neighbor. We daily grow toward maturity in our sanctified life as we daily return to our baptism. There we die with Christ in repentance and rise to live with Christ. The apostle Paul reflects this ongoing restoration of the image in our sanctification in Colossians 3:10 where he states that our new self "is being renewed in the knowledge of the image of its Creator." That "is being renewed" reality reflects the ongoing growth in our sanctification that will not be complete until heaven.

90 the benefit of those under the leader's care and not for self. Leaders distort God's design
91 when they lead with a domineering spirit or to the harm of those under their care
92 (Matthew 20:25-28).⁸

93 14. The authority that leaders exercise is pictured in Scripture as the responsibility for
94 determining direction to be followed (Matthew 8:9) for the benefit of those they lead
95 (Luke 12:42). Exercising authority does not give the leader a higher status before God but
96 rather a greater responsibility. That responsibility includes encouraging those he leads to
97 use their God-given wisdom and gifts.⁹

98 15. Only God has ultimate authority. The authority he entrusts to any leader is limited since it
99 is exercised always under God's own authority. The scope of entrusted authority varies
100 greatly from calling to calling.

101 16. When God calls someone to reflect his supporting love by serving in a calling of selfless
102 yielding (helper), he entrusts that person with the responsibility to submit to the authority
103 of a God-given leader. Helpers are to use all their wisdom and gifts to support their
104 leaders in a way that calls to mind how God is helper to us all (Psalm 121). Since God
105 designed head and helper to function interdependently and not independently

⁸ In a fallen world, leadership has again and again been used for the personal advantage of the one who is leading and to the harm of those being led. It is also true in our fallen world that the one in leadership can easily forget that the talents and abilities of those being led are as important—if not more important—than his own. God did not design leadership to be exercised for personal advantage.

The path God designed for those in the position of selfless leading is that of humble service. Humble service means the one called to leadership is willing to suffer personal disadvantage, loss, or hurt rather than see such disadvantage, loss, or hurt come to those under the leader's care.

Just as Christ does with his Church, a selfless leader is called to make the most of the unique gifts and abilities of those who serve with that leader in an interdependent partnership.

⁹ The benefit God provides through selfless leaders taking this responsibility seriously may not only be for the benefit of those they are leading. In fact, the benefit may not be directly realized either by the leaders or those they are leading. The benefit may be for others whom they together are serving.

An example from earthly life would be a general and his troops partnering to guard the freedom and safety of the people of their country. Many may benefit from their partnership, but that comes with the potential of great personal loss both to the one leading and to those following.

106 (1 Corinthians 11:11), God intends helpers to have a beneficial influence on those leading
107 them.¹⁰

108 17. Selfless yielding to a God-given leader does not indicate a lesser status in God's eyes.
109 Scripture affirms an equality of status before God by proclaiming that all believers are
110 one in Christ (Galatians 3:26-29).

111 18. Just as Jesus is the perfect example of selfless leading as he gave himself for the world's
112 sins (Philippians 2:5-8) and rules over everything not for his own benefit but for the
113 benefit of the church (Ephesians 1:22,23), so also he is the perfect example of selfless
114 yielding as our true brother who submitted to his Father's will (Isaiah 50:5,6; Matthew
115 26:39).¹¹

¹⁰ God does intend selfless leaders to be influenced by those they are leading. This fits the interdependence God designed into this partnership.

Sometimes when people are uneasy with the concept of influence on those being led, they may be thinking of influence in a distorted sinful sense. They picture people selfishly demanding their own way for their own advantage. That, of course, is not godly influence.

Confusion can also arise here because of the different ways Scripture and our culture speak of leadership. In our culture, leadership is often used to speak about someone influencing others without any formal authority. Such influence (in the highest and best sense) is also often at work in the church, but that isn't what Scripture means by leadership.

However, when Scripture uses any of its leadership words, the concept of authority is always in play. As far as the terms it uses, Scripture does not know of leadership without authority. Where God asks someone to lead, he always entrusts them with a bit of his authority.

Also, because our world is so fearful of the many kinds of abuse those in authority have often inflicted upon those they lead, many positions that once were true leadership positions in the biblical sense have been stripped of any true authority. Understanding those distinctions can keep us from talking past one another as we try to discern where true biblical leadership—with authority—is at work.

¹¹ While God will hold all in leadership accountable for any failures of this Christ-like leadership, God still knows how to bring blessing even when leaders fall short of Christ-like leadership through unbelief, ignorance, or disobedience against better knowledge. When believers respect imperfect leaders (without sanctioning what is sinful), they give a powerful testimony of trust in and respect for God as their ultimate leader.

However, wherever a leader would, in defiance of the Creator who is that leader's head also, point in a direction that would compel those following them to sin, their respect for the true Head means obeying God rather than a human being (Acts 5:29).

It is also important to note that God does not entrust all males with specific callings of leadership. Also, all males, almost without exception, will find themselves under the authority of God-given leaders at work, at church, or in government. There are also many times women will also find themselves serving in callings as selfless leaders.

116 ***Living out selfless leading (head) and selfless yielding (helper) in the home***

- 117 19. The interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female finds its fullest
118 expression in marriage. In a Christian home, male and female, as husband and wife, seek
119 to live out what it means to be partners for their family's (Ephesians 5:22-33) and
120 society's good. They do this as co-heirs of God's gracious gift of life (1 Peter 3:1-7).
- 121 20. God uniquely created the male, the husband, for the calling of selfless leading (head).
122 The husband does this by loving and caring for his wife just as Christ loves and cares for
123 the church (Ephesians 5:25-30). Selfless leading includes encouraging his wife to make
124 the most of her God-given gifts (Proverbs 31:10-31) for the good of those influenced by
125 their household.
- 126 21. God uniquely created the female, the wife, for the calling of selfless yielding (helper).
127 She submits to her husband and acknowledges his leadership in the same way that the
128 church submits to Christ and acknowledges his leadership (Ephesians 5:22-24,33). This
129 includes encouraging her husband to make the most of his God-given gifts for the good
130 of those influenced by their household. Such self-yielding service does not include
131 consenting to what is sinful since her Savior always remains her ultimate Head (Acts
132 5:29).
- 133 22. While God designed the day-to-day spiritual nurture of all those in the household to be a
134 shared task, it is the husband and father, as the one called to selfless leading, whom God
135 holds primarily accountable for spiritual nurture (Ephesians 6:4).¹²
- 136 23. God's Word provides few specifics for exactly what the interdependent and
137 complementary partnership will look like in each marriage. Providing a general principle
138 with few specific applications leaves room for Spirit-worked faith to bear fruit in ways
139 that make the most of the unique gifts God gives to everyone in the household. It also

¹² In the realities of a sinful world, there will be households where there is no believing husband and father present. There the wife and/or mother, in obedience to her true loving Head (Christ), will carry out that responsibility as a glimpse of her Savior's saving love.

140 leaves room for applications of the unchanging principle to look quite different from
141 household to household, from culture to culture, and from age to age.¹³

142 ***Living out selfless leading (head) and selfless yielding (helper) in Christ's***
143 ***church***

144 24. Just as within the home, so also within the gatherings of the body of Christ (the church),
145 God designed male and female to use their God-given gifts guided by the interdependent
146 and complementary partnership of selfless leading and selfless yielding so that in all
147 things God's grace in Christ may be honored (1 Peter 4:10,11; 1 Corinthians 12; 1
148 Corinthians 14:12).

149 25. The unique callings of selfless leading and selfless yielding do not hinder but rather guide
150 the use of the gifts of both male and female. The Scriptures provide abundant evidence of
151 how God used the gifts of both without violating the interdependent and complementary
152 partnership he has established (Romans 16:1-16).¹⁴

¹³ Christ-like modeling of the unique callings of selfless leading and selfless yielding in the day-to-day life of the Christian home is critical. It is in the believing home that male and female, both adults and children, learn what it looks like to live in love and respect within the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. This will have countless implications as believing males and females step out of the laboratory of their households to put into practice this same interdependent and complementary partnership in the even more challenging arenas for male and female relationships in Christ's church and in God's world.

¹⁴ In the Old Testament, consider, for example, how God put to use the gifts of Miriam (Moses and Aaron's sister). She was a prophetess who spoke by direct revelation from God when she led the women of Israel in a song of praise after the LORD had rescued his people from Pharaoh's army (Exodus 15:19-21). In Micah 6:4, as the LORD reminds Israel of the blessings of the leaders he gave them, he mentions specifically Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. Clearly God put Miriam's considerable gifts to work in service to his people.

Throughout the Old Testament we see many other godly women whose gifts and talents the LORD used for the blessing of his people. We could consider those such as Deborah (Judges 4-5), Hannah (1 Samuel 1-2), and Huldah (2 Kings 22:8-20).

In the New Testament, the evidence is even more apparent. We think of the women who accompanied Jesus and his disciples in their travels and made sure their earthly needs were met (Mark 15:41). We think of Priscilla, whom the Lord used in multiple places to host believers in her home as new congregations were being formed around the Mediterranean world. Even a casual reading of the reference found here in the doctrinal statement, Romans 16:1-16, will offer detailed evidence of Paul's rejoicing in his partners in gospel ministry who were both men and women.

By God's own design, the body of Christ (the Church) has always operated best when all its uniquely gifted members, both male and female, function as God designed each to play their part within the body (Ephesians 4:16). Here, too, it is not good for the man to be alone (Genesis 2:18).

- 153 26. The encouraging and admonishing with the Word that all Christians are called to carry
154 out as God's royal priests is a shared responsibility of both male and female (Colossians
155 3:15-17). Likewise, making the most of every opportunity in all their God-given callings
156 to witness the truth to the troubled or unbelieving is a privilege of both male and female
157 (1 Peter 3:15).
- 158 27. When God's people gather for Bible study and worship, both male and female rightly
159 participate in the singing of psalms and hymns, in the discussion of God's Word, and in
160 adding their voices to the church's corporate prayers.
- 161 28. When authority is being exercised in the church, God holds males responsible for
162 exercising such selfless leading for the benefit of God's family (1 Timothy 2:12).¹⁵

Yet, in both Old and New Testament, there is nothing in how God put all these women's gifts and talents to work that suggests that the Lord was overruling the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. We see being emphasized again and again both the interdependence and the complementarity.

Even with someone like Deborah, the prophetess and judge, a careful reading of the inspired account of her service to Israel finds her seeking to encourage the men of Israel to live out their calling of selfless leadership.

¹⁵ Scripture offers two specific applications of how the unique interdependent and complementary calling of male and female operates within Christ's Church in matters where God intends the authority of his God-given leaders to be honored. The Scriptures speak of females remaining "silent" in the formal gatherings of the Church whenever such speaking cannot be done without dishonoring those God has called to self-giving leadership (1 Corinthians 14:33-38). Likewise, in the context of more formal gatherings intended for both adult men and women, the instruction in the Word is to be carried out by adult males he has specifically called to provide such formal instruction (1 Timothy 2:11-14).

The interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female also helps guide how congregations operate as they carry out their governance. The Scripture does not give to Christ's New Testament church any specific requirements for how a congregation organizes its governance. While there is a brief glimpse of the casting of lots (an Old Testament practice) used among the believers in Acts 1:46 as a replacement for Judas was selected, that certainly is not a divine mandate—or necessarily even a suggestion—that the casting of lots is a required part of congregational governance. In any form of church governance there will clearly be those called to exercise authority on behalf of the whole body of believers. Therefore, a congregation does well to ponder the implications of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female as it determines, in its freedom, how authority will operate in its midst.

The most common form of government found in our congregations (by custom but not by command of God) tends to vest final decision-making authority with the voters' assembly. While we do not believe that all voting is always an exercise of authority, where a vote is clearly exercising the authority to give direction to others they are to follow for their good or for the good of others, there God's people honor the calling God has given to the adult males of the congregation to exercise that authority on behalf of the family of faith.

However, while that application (remember: voting is not the principle) guards the complementary side of the principle, we often still have much to learn when it comes to honoring the equally important interdependent side of

163 29. Within the Christian church God has supplied us with the unchanging principle of the
164 interdependent and complementary partnership of selfless leading and selfless yielding,
165 but he has given few specific applications. This leaves room for Spirit-worked faith to
166 bear fruit in ways that make the most of the unique gifts given to each believer, in
167 applications that may change from setting to setting, from culture to culture, and from age
168 to age.¹⁶

the principle. Congregations do well to work hard to make sure that the wisdom, insights, and concerns of all in the congregation are considered as decisions are made. That God intended both men and women to exert such godly influence in the process is the intent of—not a violation of—the interdependent and complementary partnership. Once again, Genesis 2:18 needs to resonate in our ears: “It is not good for the man to be alone.”

Christian congregations are certainly free to search for other forms of church governance that may enable them—in their culture and setting—to best carry out the work of the gospel for the edification of the flock and outreach to those not yet in the flock. In fact, throughout the five centuries of Lutheran history, and even currently around the world, Lutheran congregations have been and are structured in many different ways in keeping with the customs and culture in which they were or are found.

However, no matter what form of church governance is chosen, honoring the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female will always play a key role. The God who moved all creation from “formless and empty” to well-ordered still delights today when his people imitate him as they delight in how he has so lovingly and beautifully ordered his world. This may in some cultures mark us as very different from the prevailing culture outside the church. At those times, we remember that embracing the cross as followers of the crucified (not functionaries of our culture) will never hurt us.

¹⁶ However, because the Word neither began with us nor does it end with us (1 Corinthians 14:36), gatherings of God’s people are always wise to consider the heritage of the people of God in applications of the principle made across the centuries of the Christian Church.

In that verse, the apostle Paul lifts our sights beyond the narrow confines of our congregation’s walls by calling us to see the much bigger picture of brothers and sisters in the Holy Christian Church. We especially think of the Christians who “walk together” (the meaning of the word “synod”) with us in our church body and those who are in fellowship with us around the world in the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference.

We owe a debt of love not to seem to be treating lightly the delicate bonds of Christian love and peace that join us with our fellow Christians in other congregations or in church bodies with whom we walk in close fellowship. Such carefulness not to run off abruptly in our own self-chosen direction of application of the principle is in keeping with Paul’s encouragement also in Ephesians 4:3: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Once again, also here, there is a need to say two things. When other congregations adopt applications that are different from our own, we also owe them a debt of love. We dare not jump to the conclusion that they have rejected the principle. We may be the ones who do not understand the unique culture and setting of that family of faith, which may indeed have made a wise application without violating the principle. So we begin by patiently asking questions, and if the answers reveal that a caution or even a rebuke may be needed, we would do that with the gentleness Paul urges in 2 Timothy 2:25. We speak gently because we value the tender bonds of love that bind us

169 ***Living out selfless leading (head) and selfless yielding (helper) in the world***

170 30. God wove into his creation the interdependent and complementary partnership of selfless
171 leading and selfless yielding as a blessing for males and females wherever they would
172 partner in his world. Dearly loved children of God in Christ seek to discover what it
173 means to be unique blessings to each other as male and female while simultaneously
174 seeking to use their God-given gifts and aptitudes to love God and their neighbors in their
175 God-given callings in the world (Genesis 2:18, 1 Corinthians 11:3).¹⁷

together in the truth of Christ. We don't want our harsh words to drive them further into defending what cannot be defended. If they have truly made an unwise application or even clearly violated the principle itself, it is our prayer that they will value such love from their brothers and sisters by hearing and heeding our words.

¹⁷ While many visible Christian churches have long ago given up on teaching anything at all about the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female, some churches that still seek to hold on to the principle refuse to speak at all about how to apply this in the world. In fact, some go a step further: they deny that this principle has any application beyond the home or the home and church.

So, as difficult as this is for both male and female Christians, why do we even attempt to wrestle with such a challenging issue? Why not just focus on home or home and church as if those were the only places for which God fashioned us uniquely for this partnership?

As this doctrinal statement has been confessing all along, God wove deeply into his creation of human beings our being male and female. Such an important part of our created identity is our being male and female that God mentioned it almost immediately as he announced his intentions to form us as the crown of his creation (Genesis 1:27). If God has indeed created us uniquely to function in this interdependent and complementary partnership, to ignore that reality of our creation anywhere we go is to rule out a significant part of how God fashioned us to live. We don't cease being uniquely created for this interdependent and complementary partnership when we step over the threshold of our homes or our churches. The more we understand how God has uniquely formed us as male and female, the more we begin to grasp why it is loving to help one another ponder how this principle impacts how we will live in all our various callings in God's world as we interact as male and female.

Yet some Christians will maintain that since Scripture makes no direct and specific application of the principle to our callings out in the world (government, workplace, etc.), that is evidence that we should not wrestle with such applications.

While that statement may sound reasonable, here is additional evidence that this conclusion does not stand up under careful pondering of Scripture.

1. In 1 Corinthians 11 we see Christians being urged to honor a custom of their pagan culture (head coverings for women). By honoring their culture's custom, they were really honoring the principle that their Creator wove their uniqueness as male and female deeply into their creation.
2. In Isaiah 3:12, as God was tracing evidence that his Old Testament people had forsaken him, the LORD says this through his prophet: "Youths oppress my people, women rule over them." Clearly, the LORD is describing something turned upside down from how he had created life to be. While in the context it is clear that many Israelite women had abandoned humble faith and hope in the LORD (3:16,17), the root

cause also seems to be the brutal lovelessness of the unbelieving men who had lost any concern to offer selfless leading (3:13-15).

3. It is also important to point out a caricature we have noted earlier. Also in our homes and in the church, God gives few applications of the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. Having woven this into our creation, he leaves much to our sanctified Christian wisdom when it comes to making applications. It is not all that different out in the world. The only difference, as we step out into the world, is that those around us will often not be concerned about this principle (or any other principle of love for God and neighbor).
4. Some would like to use Old Testament figures like Deborah (a judge and prophetess in Israel) and Huldah (a prophetess in Israel) as evidence that God does not intend the principle to have such broad application to society as we are suggesting. However, unless we deny or cast doubt on the inspired reliability of Scripture by claiming it shows a patriarchal or misogynistic bias, the reality that Deborah and Huldah are quite rare exceptions in both Old and New Testaments actually gives evidence that God did take seriously how he uniquely designed male and female to function in this interdependent and complementary partnership. Also, even in the cases of Deborah and Huldah, there is strong evidence given by the inspired narrator that Deborah and Huldah went about their callings as those who were aware of this principle.

As we are introduced to Deborah, we do not find her publicly gathering a following in Israel. Unlike the other judges, the people longing for spiritually wise leadership seek her out where they knew they could find her: “She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided” (Judges 4:5). Notice also that she works to convince Barak to lead Israel’s army, and only after he refuses does she accompany him to rally an army to fight against their oppressors. In the case of Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), we do not find her entering the temple to preach like Jeremiah or stepping into the king’s court in Jerusalem like Isaiah. Instead Josiah’s advisors, aware of Huldah’s presence in her home in Jerusalem, seek her out to hear a message from the LORD.

Finally, we would be quite myopic not to notice that Deborah serves during a time of spiritual chaos and apostasy in the book of Judges while Huldah serves only a few years before Judah’s complete spiritual and governmental collapse in the face of the Babylonians.

5. If we claim the principle has application only to believers in the settings of their home (or home and church), that would put us back into the place of God’s minor children (Israel) who had many such laws in the Old Testament both in their worship life and in daily life that did not apply to the rest of the world. These laws marked them as God’s special children from whom he would bring the Messiah into the world for all nations.

However, all such barriers between the Jewish and Gentile worlds were various types of shadows that pointed to the Messiah who was to come from Israel. They were part of the Old Covenant that ceased in its purpose once Jesus had come to live, die, and rise again for the world. Those distinctions of the Old Covenant—often a source of hostility and contention between Jew and Gentile—have been nailed to the cross with Christ (Ephesians 2:14-16 and Colossians 2:16,17).

With all such distinctions of the Old Covenant gone, it would hardly be helpful to tell Christian males and females that they have one way of living their partnership in the home (or home and church) while a completely different way of operating functions out in the world where everyone can do as they see fit in

- 176 31. Just as in the home and church, God provides male and female with an unchanging
177 principle but leaves much to sanctified Christian wisdom when it comes to application.
178 He treats us as free sons and daughters and not as minor children. This leaves room for
179 Spirit-worked faith to bear fruit in ways that make the most of the unique gifts given to
180 each believer, in applications that may change from setting to setting, from culture to
181 culture, and from age to age.
- 182 32. Two elements combine to make it challenging in the unbelieving world to apply the
183 principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. The
184 unbelieving world either ignores this principle or so distorts its applications to make the
185 principle seem repulsive. In addition, Christians living out their callings often wrestle
186 with how to honor multiple good principles of God that may appear to be in conflict.¹⁸
- 187 33. However, God does not want such challenges to paralyze his children. He delights when
188 his children are actively engaged in the world as salt and light. He invites believers to

their own eyes. Is that really any less confusing than the charge that is leveled at our teaching that we confuse consciences by teaching that a broad principle exists with little specific application guidance that can be given?

6. Because a sinful world ridicules or ignores all of God's good principles, it is often difficult in the world for the Christian to know how to make consistent application of those principles. At times, it seems the world takes special delight in making us squirm in situations in which the complexities of living our God-given callings in a fallen world confront us with what appears to be unsolvable conflicts. But it is not just the interdependent and complementary partnership of selfless leading and selfless yielding that is hard to apply in that world. So is every good principle of God. All of this is part of bearing the cross as we seek to honor our Creator and Savior's will for our lives. To get rid of any principle of God that is difficult to apply in the world would soon leave us with no principles at work to guide us. Instead, we should expect that seeking to honor what the world is ignoring would make us stand out as different. That's why the apostle Peter speaks at length in his first letter about the reality that we live as "God's elect strangers in the world" (1 Peter 1:1).

¹⁸ The other principles of God that may come into play depend greatly on the specific calling in which men and women find themselves. Each calling brings with it a unique set of responsibilities from God in addition to considering the implications of the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female.

For example, in the calling to be godly citizens serving under or in government, Christians have much to consider about what it means to love their neighbor as themselves. Understanding that God rules all things for the good of his church does not remove the responsibility of Christian citizens or governmental officials to act to promote as much justice and outward peace as is possible in a fallen world. In the workplace, Christians again look beyond themselves as they recognize that the earthly welfare of many others may depend upon them carrying out a particular calling of employee or employer in that workplace.

189 pray for sanctified wisdom so that they might know how to honor the heart of what is
190 behind all the principles of God's law: to love God and neighbor selflessly. They trust
191 that the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and
192 female is a good principle from God. They understand that other godly principles may
193 also need to be considered as they decide how to serve. They weigh the unique
194 responsibilities God has given them in each of their callings. Finally, they act in faith and
195 not fear, trusting that God knows how to bless them as they wrestle with decisions.¹⁹

¹⁹ Part of what may help us walk through many challenging situations in life is to grasp the biblical doctrine of the two kingdoms or two realms, both of which are under the rule of our Triune God. Sadly, this doctrine is rarely taught clearly (or at all) outside of Lutheran circles, and all too frequently it is not even taught or understood well by Lutherans. Failing to grasp what is meant by these two kingdoms can cause us confusion as we live our callings out in the world and can, in fact, unintentionally do harm to the cause of the gospel we long to further.

What is meant by these two kingdoms? We speak of God's ruling in his world by his almighty power as he keeps his universe and its natural laws operating as he created them. In particular, just as he worked from formlessness and emptiness to a well-ordered creation during the six days of creation, so even in a now-fallen world God still is at work to preserve outward peace and order and to provide for the outward earthly needs of all who live on the earth, both believer and unbeliever (Matthew 5:44,45).

Sometimes this work of God to maintain the outward order and provision for his world and his creatures is referred to as God's kingdom of power. Ever since creation, God partners in this realm through human beings as he gives us an important part in promoting outward peace and providing for the outward needs of those in this world. We see God's kingdom of power at work through human beings most evidently as God works through his representatives in government. In addition to government, we would also see God at work in his kingdom of power in other focused-on-this-life institutions such as the workplace. Martin Luther was fond of calling God's kingdom of power "the kingdom of God's left hand." The goal of the kingdom of God's left hand is to maintain as much outward peace as possible in a sinful world and to provide for the necessities that preserve the life (the time of grace) of the residents of this world.

And that leads us directly to God's other kingdom or realm. God's other kingdom is his kingdom of grace. This is what is meant when we read in Scripture about the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. It is God's gracious activity in his world through his gospel (and his law as he calls sinners to recognize their need for the grace of his gospel). In the kingdom of grace, God isn't focused primarily on the outward, but God's Holy Spirit is at work to win hearts to repentance and faith. Then, once God has accomplished by his gospel that change of heart from unbelief to faith, he then also works to renew that heart day by day so that the believer lives and reflects his saving grace in the midst of an unbelieving world. Luther was fond of calling this "the kingdom of God's right hand."

As Christians, while our true citizenship is in this kingdom of God's right hand, in the kingdom of heaven (Philippians 3:20), as long as we live in this world, we will always hold a dual citizenship. In God's earthly kingdom, the kingdom of his left hand, we live under the God-established authorities in a particular country, and within that country we participate in other institutions of this world such as the workplace. As we live out our callings in the kingdom of this world, we work for the outward peace and bodily welfare of our neighbors. In the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of his right hand, we live under Christ as our head and seek to advance the cause of his saving kingdom.

And God has given us unique tools fashioned in his wisdom for the work of each of his realms. In the kingdom of grace, the kingdom of his right hand, the tools we use to operate are God's law and gospel, his revealed Word and sacraments. Our focus—like God's—is primarily on people's hearts and how God changes such hearts by the power of his gospel. Then, once God has won a heart to faith through the gospel, we also seek to direct believers with God's law and empower them with his gospel to walk worthy of our high calling to faith as sons and daughters of God (Ephesians 4:1).

But we have different tools from God to carry out his different purpose in our callings that are part of the kingdom of his left hand (government, workplace, etc.). When we are operating in our callings within God's kingdom of power—where God is at work to promote outward peace and provide for people's earthly needs—we operate according to conscience and reason. Reason and conscience are the tools God has given us when we are serving in a calling where he is seeking to bless people with earthly peace, order, and provision.

It is very important that we do not confuse the tools God has given us by failing to ask ourselves in which kingdom we are serving as we carry out a particular calling in life. While it is true that the Christian's conscience and reason have a huge advantage because they are instructed by God's revealed Word and empowered by his gospel, yet, when we are carrying out the duties of our callings in the kingdom of his world, the kingdom of his left hand, we operate by reason and conscience, not by quoting chapter and verse of the Bible.

Why is that? When we are operating in the kingdom of God's left hand, if we use the Word of God as a tool of outward coercion, we unintentionally end up distorting the chief purpose for which God gave his Word. God did not give his Word primarily to get us to do the right outward things (that is Pharisaism). Rather, he gave his Word to lead hearts to repentance and faith in his Son. If Christians in their assigned tasks in their kingdom of power callings (for example in government or in positions of leadership in the workplace) try to use the Word to compel an unbelieving world to outward obedience to God's will, we are in grave danger of teaching unbelievers that what God is most concerned about is their outward compliance with earthly laws. We would be operating in God's kingdom of power (where outward peace and earthly blessings are the goal) with the tool God designed to be used in his kingdom of grace (where the emphasis is on imparting to our hearts his eternal blessings).

Yes, it's true, we do hope that as we model Christ-like selfless love for neighbor in our kingdom-of-this-world callings, the unbelievers around us will take note and ask us about "the reason for the hope that [we] have" (1 Peter 3:15). But as we speak of that hope, it's important to note that we are then carrying out our calling as royal priests of God—a task of his kingdom of grace. But that doesn't mean that suddenly the revealed Word of God has become the tool we wield in our assigned tasks in the kingdom-of-power callings God has permitted us to have. Since God is at work through our kingdom-of-power callings to provide outward peace and earthly provision, we use the tools God designed for our duties in our for-this-life callings: we use reason and appeal to conscience.

That's also why, as we carry out our callings in the kingdom of God's left hand, we will often need to swallow hard as we serve in the midst of institutions that have turned much of God's will upside down. It is a confused sinful world. As Christians, we know in our hearts that things are vastly different in many ways from what God designed this world to be. And we know that the structures of this world that deal only with the outward things of this life never will get to the heart of what truly troubles us. Yet, that doesn't mean we retreat from taking part in government or the other structures of this world just because they are messy. God has called us to be salt and light in the midst of the darkness and decay of the world. When we involve ourselves in callings from God in the kingdom of his left hand, we are doing godly work as his representatives by preserving as best as possible in a sinful world a semblance of order and seeing to it that greed and corruption don't rob people of having their earthly needs met. And through it all, Christians know something else: we know we are preserving peoples' time of grace and enabling a climate in which we can carry out the even more important work of the kingdom of God's right hand (see the relationship of the two kingdoms at work right next to each other in 1 Timothy 2:1-4).

196 34. Christians wrestling with such difficult decisions are wise to seek the counsel of other
197 spiritually mature Christians to guard against being deceived by the motives of their own
198 hearts. Christians are also wise not to rush to judgment on applications made by other
199 Christians as they also wrestle with how best to love God and neighbor in their callings.²⁰

So, if we love God and our neighbor, we do not hide from the messiness of taking part in the callings of this world in the kingdom of God's left hand. We take part, even though we know it will often be very difficult to know how to do that wisely and well. It will not always be easily or immediately clear to us in those difficult situations what the most loving course of action would be. (In a perfect world, there would be no such challenges brought on by sin.) In fact, part of the messiness may mean that, in our responsibilities in our callings in the kingdom of God's left hand, we may seem for a time for our neighbors' good to be acting in a way that is in violation of a particular principle of God's will. We do that even though in our hearts our Spirit-created new self still delights in that principle.

In regard to the topic of this doctrinal statement, that means when living out the responsibilities of our callings in the kingdom of God's left hand, we may find ourselves wondering precisely how we can best honor the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. In fact, we may at times act in a way that seems to work counter to that principle. When we are in the Christian home and our Christian churches, where the Word of God has already won other hearts to faith, we know even there it can be difficult to know precisely how to honor the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. But at least there we have brothers and sisters in Christ who are partnering with us and whose hearts have been won to treasure the saving Word of God. But in the world, we may often find that few around us care about this aspect (or any aspect) of God's will for their lives or ours.

When it comes to wrestling with every part of what it means to love God and neighbor, not just the principle that is the focus of this doctrinal statement, we will often find ourselves praying for sanctified wisdom, seeking wise counsel from others, and then acting in faith in the way that best seems both to honor God and, in that situation, love the specific neighbors he himself has put around us in the responsibilities of that calling. We do this knowing that God delights for us to be salt and light in this messy world. As mentioned above, the goal is never merely to look outwardly pristine and pious (the Pharisees were good at that), but to actually discern in every setting and situation what it truly means to love as ourselves the neighbors whom our callings impact.

²⁰ Since God has not laid out for us clear application to all such situations as we live amid an unbelieving world, not all believers will make the exact same decision as other believers in how to honor all of God's principles in the clearest way possible. As male and female make such difficult decisions, and as other Christians assist them, love and wisdom would encourage male and female to hold the following two truths in tension:

- Male and female will make decisions about their life in the world informed by the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. Believing hearts trust that God's love to them in Jesus is already abundant proof that all of God's will is revealed to be a blessing to us in every setting of life.
- Male and female will also understand that the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female is often only one of many principles of God that impact their decisions in the various callings of life in which they live.

It is also a reality of a sinful world that the tension believing males or females feel as they make these difficult decisions does not go away once the decision is made. Living with this tension may be part of the cross they continue to bear as a result of the decision they made as they seek in a sinful world to love God above all things and to love their neighbor as themselves.

Apart from faith in Jesus, the unbelieving world will never fully grasp the beauty of any principle of God's will. This is especially evident in the unbelieving world's rejection of much of what believers confess about the

200 35. Christians will also want to remember that it is a confusion of law and gospel to seek to
201 compel unbelievers and an unbelieving world's institutions into outward conformity with
202 God's will (1 Corinthians 5:9,10). Proclaiming the truth of God's law and gospel is the
203 task God has given his church. If Christians use the Word to compel outward obedience,
204 they have lost sight of the Word's God-given purpose to win hearts to repentance and
205 faith and to empower believers to be salt and light in a dying world.²¹

206 ***We reject the following as denials or caricatures of selfless leading and selfless***
207 ***yielding:***

208 1. While we give thanks for the many ways Scripture testifies to how God used the gifts of
209 both male and female in this interdependent and complementary partnership, we reject
210 the attempt to set such narrative passages of Scripture (descriptive passages) in
211 opposition to passages that establish God's unchanging will for male and female
212 (prescriptive passages).²²

interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. Christians, both male and female, will often find themselves in settings in the world in which the world's ignorance or rejection of this interdependent, complementary partnership is very evident. Our calling from Jesus to be in the world and not of it, and the courage of knowing that this same Savior never leaves or forsakes us, gives believers courage to embrace living out their godly callings as salt and light in a dark and decaying world.

²¹ It is precisely in such confusing settings that the believing male or female can witness to the new heart that the Spirit has given them even in situations that are at best confused. Our ultimate purpose is to live to the honor of God's good and gracious name as those who have borne that name since baptism. The believing male or female's ultimate goal is to witness to the reality of human sin and Jesus' grace. If that witness impacts not only individual hearts but the very structure of an institution of this world, for that we give thanks. Where that leads to bearing the cross of ridicule or rejection from the unbelieving world, for that too Christian male or female learns to thank God for where they are counted worthy to suffer for Christ's name. Even then, God may yet use such situations to testify to the hope that is found alone in Jesus.

²² Paragraph #1 is urging us to make the wise distinction between descriptive and prescriptive passages. When we speak of prescriptive passages, we think of portions of Scripture, such as the epistles of the New Testament or some of the sermons and discourses of Jesus in the Gospels, where the inspired speaker/author is applying God's truth directly to the hearts and lives of God's people. What we are to believe in our hearts and how that is intended to impact our lives is explicitly laid out for us.

When we speak of descriptive passages, we are often thinking in particular of the narrative sections of the Old and New Testament. These portions of Scripture speak God's truth with no less authority than any other portion of Scripture. They also have the advantage of taking God's truth and bringing its application into the concrete realities of the lives of God's people.

However, it is also true that there is an extra element of care needed lest we read into the narrative sections our own ideas and then draw conclusions that are actually at variance with the rest of Scripture. That is the case because

213 2. While we give thanks for the equal status as children of God created in his image that
214 Jesus restored to us (Galatians 3:26-28), we reject the attempt to use our equal status to
215 cancel God’s interdependent and complementary design for male and female.²³

those narratives often describe the thoughts, emotions, and actions of sinful human beings. What is being described in regard to those thoughts, feelings, and actions of those sinful human beings may not be something for imitation. In fact, the inspired author may be holding it before us as something for us to flee from rather than for us to copy. The truths for our hearts to believe and the impact God intends this to have on our hearts is often more implied than explicitly stated.

A key part of interpreting such descriptive portions of Scripture wisely is to slow down and to ponder that narrative carefully within the broader context into which the Spirit has placed that narrative. While the truths for us to grasp in narrative sections are often only implied rather than being directly stated, we still trust the Spirit is at work through his inspired narrator in multiple ways to guide readers in regard to what they are to imitate and what they are to avoid.

In addition, since Scripture interprets Scripture, it is often clearer prescriptive passages that help us to understand some of the more challenging descriptive passages. We trust that authors inspired by the Holy Spirit do not contradict themselves, so we wisely seek to allow those more explicit passages to help us understand what is being implied for our learning in the more descriptive passages.

For example, God’s clear prescriptive statement in Genesis 2:24 that marriage is a union between one male and one female is not cancelled or modified by the confusion often seen in multiple descriptive passages where in a fallen world we see some Old Testament believing males who were influenced more than they realized by the prevailing culture when they took multiple wives.

What this first paragraph in the section of denials and caricatures is warning us about is the careless and superficial reading of Old Testament or New Testament narratives in ways that seek to undermine what Scripture has clearly taught elsewhere in regard to the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female.

²³ Here the objection to the principle we are seeking to answer is a very typical confusion at work between status/value before God and the uniqueness of our different callings in life.

In Galatians 3:26-28 Paul is very clearly teaching us that our status or value—our identity—before God is absolutely equal for everyone who has been brought to faith in Jesus. In our baptism we are all washed in the very same cleansing flood of the blood of Christ who died in our place, and there in our baptism we are all clothed in the very same perfection of Christ’s life lived in our place. Our value and status before God are absolutely equal. The Holy Spirit wins us to know the wonder that our identity is that of sons and daughters of our heavenly Father and co-heirs with Christ.

However, that does not change the reality that God fashioned male and female uniquely in regard to how they would carry out their callings in this life. These unique callings do not raise or lower our value before him, but they do give us unique ways we serve our God and one another. These unique callings do not establish our identity or value before God—that is settled as those who are one in Christ—but the callings are simply unique ways that God designed for us to live out our purpose as his children for this life.

The challenge comes from an unbelieving world that has not come to believe in the unchanging objective reality of the status that is ours in Christ. They have not found their true sense of identity in being the loved children of God and heirs of eternal life in Jesus. Lacking that objective ground of identity to stand on, the world (and our own sinful nature thinks this way too) attempts to find its identity in the various things they do in life or what they possess. To those who do not rely on the objective love of God in Christ to give them their rooted sense of identity, unique

- 216 3. While we give thanks that God claimed us in Christ as his holy and free children, we
217 reject the idea that we are free to ignore God's created design for male and female. The
218 New Testament directs its applications to converted believers who alone can grasp the
219 full beauty of this interdependent and complementary partnership (1 Corinthians 11;
220 Ephesians 5).
- 221 4. While God announces after the fall that the interdependent and complementary
222 partnership of male and female would groan under sin's weight (Genesis 3), we reject the
223 suggestion that the principle was established only after the fall. Scripture repeatedly
224 returns to Eden's perfection when applying the principle (1 Corinthians 11; Ephesians 5;
225 1 Timothy 2).²⁴

callings almost inevitably end up seeming to rank people in status or value. In regard to the subject of this confession, they easily look with great suspicion on the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female as if God is making a distinction in value or status between male and female because their callings are not identical.

This is simply another place where this teaching cannot truly be understood until God's grace in Jesus wins our hearts to grasp the boundless width, length, height, and depth of the love of Christ that we all share equally. Faith trusts that God's unique crafting of us as male and female, and our unique callings that flow from that, are good things from a gracious God.

²⁴ This paragraph is responding to those who would suggest that there were no unique callings for male and female in the perfection of God's created world. They would suggest that God is announcing for the first time any such distinctions as he addresses Adam and Eve after the fall in Genesis 3:14-19. Many who make such claims also would claim that when male and female are brought to faith in Christ, these distinctions of a fallen world become null and void as male and female enter back into the way life would have been lived in perfection (without any created distinctions in our callings).

However, as this paragraph states, when the apostle Paul seeks to ground the applications he is making of the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female, he does not quote Genesis 3, but instead he goes back to the perfection of God's creation in Genesis 2. Paul thereby clearly and powerfully indicates to us that the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female was not a result of the fall into sin. This principle too was a part of God's wise and loving original design for his world.

The whole context of God's words to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 after the fall speak of the loving discipline of God as he announces to Adam and Eve the troubles and heartache that their disobedience will bring into their lives and into the lives of all their descendants (all of us). God is not describing how things would have worked by his gracious design, but rather he announces the distortions caused by sin. Included in those distortions will be dysfunction between male and female in a partnership that will often function in ways that are sinful and bring harm.

Only the promised offspring of the woman (Genesis 3:15), our Lord Jesus, can bring us back again to being at peace with our God and with one another. It is to that hope that the LORD pointed fallen humanity. And in that hope, we learn again what it means to delight in the uniqueness God created for us as male and female in the perfection of Eden.

- 226 5. While we recognize that the home is the prototypical place for the interdependent and
227 complementary partnership of male and female, we reject the attempt to limit the
228 principle as if it only applies in the home, or only in the home and the church.
- 229 6. While it is always important to know not just what Scripture speaks but also to whom it is
230 speaking, we reject the opinion that the interdependent and complementary partnership of
231 male and female is intended only for some people, or only for some periods of history, or
232 only to limited areas of the believer's life. Scripture grounds the principle's application in
233 God's created design for male and female (1 Corinthians 11; Ephesians 5; 1 Timothy 2).
- 234 7. While applications are often culturally conditioned and may change, we reject as an
235 abuse of Scripture any failure to distinguish between the unchanging principle revealed at
236 creation for male and female and the potentially changing applications flowing from it (1
237 Corinthians 11).²⁵
- 238 8. While God's primary concern in establishing this principle may be to guard who is
239 responsible for the authoritative teaching of his Word in the Christian home and church,
240 we reject the opinion that the authority in selfless leading is limited only to matters
241 pertaining to instruction in the Word. No such limitation is expressed or implied in
242 Scripture.²⁶

²⁵ Even when in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul dealt with the cultural application of the day of head coverings for females (an application that fit the custom of that day), he grounds his encouragement for believing women to honor that custom in the unchanging principle that God had woven into his creation of male and female. In this paragraph, we are addressing the danger of confusing principle (which does not change) and application (which may and often does change). At times, those most zealous for the goodness of God's principles (thus seeking to say everything God has said) can begin to treat applications as that which must not change and thus end up saying much more than God has said.

²⁶ Once again in this paragraph we are addressing a failure to differentiate between principle and application. While the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 2 clearly makes application of the principle to the authoritative teaching of the Word, that does not mean that this is the only place we find at work the authority God designed for selfless leaders to exercise.

This has often been the path some Christians or church bodies have followed when they have lost the ability or willingness to make almost any other applications of the principle other than the authoritative teaching of the Word. Whether by intention, or by fear of speaking against their prevailing culture, they refuse to recognize that the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female has a much broader application than this one specific application that Paul makes here.

Following this path of severely limiting the principle's application puts one in grave danger of treating the principle as something unfortunate or harmful that needs to be limited to the smallest sphere possible. That is a complete

- 243 9. While we honor the principle as a good gift of God by making applications in situations
244 where authority is clearly at work, we must refrain from caricaturing the biblical concept
245 of authority by claiming to see authority, as Scripture defines it, when there is no clear
246 evidence of such authority being exercised.²⁷
- 247 10. While we grant that God has called all believers, both male and female, to a mutual
248 service that is willing to treat the needs of others as more important than their own, it is

distortion of the beauty that God intended as selfless leading and selfless yielding would partner in his creation. It allows the abuse of the principle seen in a fallen world to cloud an understanding of the use God intended.

²⁷ This paragraph is cautioning against those who claim to find in every isolated and passing interaction between male and females the kind of callings in God's world where a more formal relationship between male and female would lead us to make a wise application of the principle. We must be careful not to read into every such isolated and passing encounter of male and female the kind of God-established authority which the biblical principle has in mind. Such an over-application of the principle contributes to making the principle look foolish in the eyes of the world (and in the eyes of Christians who struggle to understand this principle).

It is also worth adding what has happened in our world because of the growing fear of the abuse of authority. This fear has been fueled by the reality of how many in our fallen world throughout its history have indeed abused positions of authority for their own personal advantage and the harm of others.

Because of that fear of such all too common abuses of authority, there are many places in society and the work world where positions that once carried significant authority have now had true authority written out of the job description. Often, very little if anything remains of what would be recognized as biblical authority (the responsibility to give direction to others that they are to follow for their good).

If we are not careful in such situations to notice what has happened, we will read true authority into a setting in which it may no longer be at work.

It is also true that we need to be careful to recognize how differently Scripture uses its many synonyms for leadership and how the world speaks of leadership. In Scripture, all the different words used for the concept of leadership carry with them the concept of biblical authority (again, giving direction to others that they are to follow for their good). However, in the world, leadership terms are often used only to describe what we might call influence without authority. (As already mentioned, sometimes any idea of authority is gone from a situation where leadership once existed with authority.)

If we do not keep this distinction in the use of leadership terms in Scripture and in the world, we can easily end up in either over-application or under-application of the principle. If we apply the principle to situations in which there is influence (which God intends to flow back and forth freely between male and female) at work but no true biblical authority is in play, we have then over-applied the principle.

However, the challenge can also be in the reverse. It can also happen that a position that very evidently still has authority at work is described as "merely" exercising influence without authority. If we fail to see that authority as Scripture knows it is still truly at work, we may fail to apply the principle where it needs to be applied. That would be under-application.

249 taking Ephesians 5:21 out of its context to insist that Paul teaches there a mutual
250 submission that denies the unique callings of male and female.²⁸
251 11. While we recognize that authority is to be exercised in love and that males sin whenever
252 they act as if authority is to be used for their own advantage, it distorts Scripture’s clear
253 teaching to respond to such sin by removing authority from the biblical definition of
254 leading or by rejecting the authority of those who lead imperfectly.^{29 30}

²⁸ In and around the time of Paul’s writing, the Greek verb that is translated “submit” in this context (*ὑποτάσσω*) was never used anywhere inside or outside the New Testament for anything other than asking people to yield (submit) to another whom they recognize as having been given authority over them.

Despite that clear meaning, some have suggested that the “one another” in verse 21 is suggesting some kind of mutual submission (without authority) between husbands and wives in marriage. However, such a translation not only badly distorts the meaning of the Greek verb Paul uses, but it also misses the flow of thought of Paul’s inspired words. Paul is in the midst of speaking of five ways that Christians give evidence that they have been filled through the gospel with the Spirit’s power. In verse 21 Paul moves to the fifth and final way that Christians can show themselves filled with the Spirit: by showing proper respect for those God has given them who have authority over them.

That begins a whole section (Ephesians 5:21–6:9) in which Paul is urging Christians to consider the multiple directions in which they may have such God-given authorities. Paul begins by speaking of wives honoring their husbands (while also talking about the Christ-like love husbands are to show to their wives) and then moves to children honoring both parents. He concludes this large section by speaking of the most common employer/employee relationship in the Roman Empire as he urges Christian slaves to show respect to their earthly masters out of reverence for Christ.

It would also be fitting to add that while Scripture knows nothing of mutual (reciprocal) submission, it certainly does urge all Christians to see themselves as servants of all those in their lives. That does not cancel the concept of authority, but it does inform the attitude of the heart with which selfless leaders and selfless yielders carry out their unique callings from God.

Such mutual service is certainly scriptural as we can see from places such as Philippians 2:3,4. Some try to insert the biblical truth of mutual service into Ephesians 5:21. However, the wording Paul uses and the context around that verse combine to make it clear that mutual service is not the point he is emphasizing here.

²⁹ It may be wise here to state the obvious: both males and females are born with sinful natures. When Adam and Eve fell, all their offspring became sinners. Throughout the history of a fallen world the calling to selfless leading in the interdependent and complementary partnership which God has given to males has all too regularly been turned into a selfish opportunity to abuse those under their care or been ignored where no personal advantage was observed. Similarly, down through the ages of a fallen world the calling of selfless yielding that God has given to females has all too regularly been distorted into a reason for envy or been rejected altogether. If it were not for the power of the redeeming love of Jesus, we would be doomed to biting and devouring each other in endless rounds of he-said, she-said finger pointing. We thank God that in the forgiving and empowering love of Jesus the Holy Spirit teaches us to see one another again as gracious gifts of God fashioned as male and female to be a blessing to each other.

³⁰ All we need to do to see this point made very clearly is to ponder what Paul said to the Christians in Rome about their government. In Romans 13 we find Paul calling those in the Roman government “God’s servants” even though almost everyone in the Roman government would have been unbelieving pagans. Christ-like love was hardly the

255 12. While we teach that this selfless leading and selfless yielding is woven by God's creation
256 into our very being and so impacts all our vocational relationships with one another as
257 male and female, we reject as a caricature any understanding of this in terms of authority
258 alone, as if automatically every male must always be recognized as an authoritative head
259 over every female in every setting (e.g. Proverbs 31:16; Ephesians 6:1; Titus 2:5).³¹ That

trademark of their ruling. Yet Paul urged the Roman Christians to receive their government—flaws and all—as a gift of God.

Respect for authority is not dependent on the ones in authority exercising their authority in perfect harmony with God. Otherwise, in this sinful world we would easily be able to find reason to refuse to honor every authority. Instead, we honor even those who are leading poorly because as Christians the one we are really honoring is the Lord who is at work to bless us even through imperfect leaders.

As an example of God's work through such imperfect (and in fact unbelieving) leaders, just consider how the taxation decreed by Caesar Augustus was the earthly tool God used to move Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem (Luke 2:1) where the Scriptures had long ago prophesied that the Messiah would be born (Micah 5:2). Our God always remains the ultimate ruler who knows in his wisdom and love and power how to accomplish his saving purpose for us even through flawed authorities. The confident boast in God's loving oversight of his world spoken by God's Old Testament people remains our boast as well: "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him" (Psalm 115:3).

Of course, we hasten to add again that Christians cannot follow any direction from those in authority when they command us to sin against God. There we always honor the will of our true Head, not the sinful earthly head (Acts 5:29).

³¹ How do these passages help illustrate the point being made?

In Proverbs 31:16 (in fact in that whole chapter in multiple places), we see a believing woman carry out her family's business in the world. She would easily have been paralyzed in carrying out that work if she needed to treat each man she met in her transactions as if God had put that man into a position of authority over her.

In Ephesians 6:1, we are reminded that age is also a factor in when we would apply the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female. Minor male children are clearly under the authority of both father and mother.

This can also serve to remind us that even in settings such as our churches and schools, we need to be careful not to claim to know at which point a male has clearly become an adult (and so, at what point we would then make application of the principle). Scripture does not give us a definitive age at which we would consider a male to be an adult man. Every culture is free in its customs to deal with that question differently.

Even in the culture in which most WELS Christians live (the United States), we are conflicted on the answer. While we allow 18-year-olds to vote, we reserve the right to purchase alcohol until age 21, and most rental car companies don't honor the maturity of someone wishing to rent a car until age 24 (which they show by charging higher rates to those whose maturity they do not trust to care for their cars quite as responsibly). Health insurance companies essentially allow children to be considered minors in regard to being covered under their parents' health insurance until age 26.

While we need to be careful that we don't use this reality as a dodge to avoid making application of the principle where it may be wisely called for, we must simultaneously be careful that we do not label someone else's application to be wrong as if we could know precisely who are adult males and who are not.

260 takes a general principle and turns it into an exaggeration that fails to consider the many
261 different settings and callings of living in the world. We maintain that God’s creative
262 design means that a male is always a male and a female is always a female wherever they
263 are in God’s world. It is always wise to consider in all our callings how the
264 interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female informs our decisions
265 and our actions, just as we honor all God’s good principles in our callings.

266 13. While we recognize that the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and
267 female was meant to be applied in all the relationships in which we partner in God’s
268 world, we reject broad, rigid, and arbitrary applications that do not take into account that
269 customs and practices that reflect how this principle expresses itself may change across
270 settings, cultures, and centuries.

271 14. While we take seriously Paul’s encouragement in 1 Corinthians 14 that “women should
272 remain silent in the churches,” we do not teach that Paul is forbidding all speaking by
273 women in any gathering of Christ’s church. That would be an overstatement that turns an
274 application into a principle and also overrides other clear Scripture (1 Corinthians 11:5;
275 Colossians 3:16).³²

276 *In conclusion*

277 In this confession of what we believe from Scripture about the interdependent and
278 complementary partnership of male and female, we seek to honor the Word of our heavenly
279 Father who knows only how to give good and perfect gifts (James 1:17). Even though we often

³² Such an overstatement would easily make it seem that silence is the principle. Silence is an application appropriate only to a situation where having a female speak would dishonor the principle. God has entrusted to males the responsibility of selfless leading of both males and females in the family of God.

Such categorical silence would also completely miss that in this interdependent partnership God intends the spiritual wisdom and gifts of both male and female to have influence for the good of the whole family of faith. Such categorical silence would prevent the partnership of male and female from functioning as God intends. Both of the passages listed here, 1 Corinthians 11:5 and Colossians 3:16, expect that we will hear women’s voices as well as men’s as the congregation carries out its gospel ministry. Also here it is “not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18).

280 struggle to make wise applications of the principle, we make these applications with this
281 confidence: the One “who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood” (Revelation
282 1:5b) is always at work to bless us and to make us a blessing to many. Therefore, we do not
283 regard the principle of the interdependent and complementary partnership of male and female as
284 a burden to be avoided or ignored but as a gracious gift.