

TERRAN WILLIAMS



**HOW
GOD
SEES
WOMEN**

**THE END OF
PATRIARCHY**

PRAISE FOR “HOW GOD SEES WOMEN”

Terran Williams provides an honest and robust look at what God, in the Bible, really says about women and the relationship between men and women. This book will make some people uncomfortable, but perhaps it should, because Williams develops a meticulous case that God’s moral compass always points to the unity of men and women, in creation, in the church, and in Christ. A terrific resource for anyone wrestling with this topic.

—*Dr. Michael Bird, Academic Dean and New Testament lecturer at Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia; author of Evangelical Theology*

Instead of simply stating and arguing his position on women and ministry, Terran Williams takes us with him on a journey with a narrative of his theological, exegetical, communal and personal transformation that provides keen observation, insight and caution. His narrative is particularly helpful because it shows the process of his critique and integration of extensive research together with an uncompromising commitment to the authority of Scripture. However, his conversational and engaging approach makes complex research and interpretation accessible.

—*Dr. Cynthia Westfall, research professor at McMaster Divinity College, Ontario, Canada; author of Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle’s Vision for Men and Women in Christ*

With relentless and honest logic and an insider understanding of both positions, Terran Williams offers an engagingly written and well-organised argument for gender mutualism. I gained fresh insights as I read the evidence that he shows compelled him to change his own view.

—*Dr. Craig Keener, professor of Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, Kentucky, USA; editor of The NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible; 2018–2020 president of The Evangelical Theological Society*

In a landmark book of our generation, Terran Williams plumbs the depths of Scripture to reclaim the heights women (and men) are called to.

—*Starla and Daniel Webster, pastors of City Lights Church, Dubai*

This is a timely book and deserves a wide readership. Society has largely lost its capacity to discuss vigorously and debate with civility, particularly when it comes to touchstone issues such as gender, inclusion, equality, and ethnicity. Thus, it is refreshing to read a book written with grace and dignity. Its chapters leave one with the clear impression that not only a really nice person has written them, but a clear thinker, determined to represent the biblical text well. Terran Williams is that person—well read, articulate, careful in crafting a concept and filled with grace. I especially hope that brothers will absorb its message and live the grace filled lives within the community of faith that God has always intended for them.

—*Dr. Paul R Alexander, president of Trinity Bible College and Graduate School, North Dakota, USA; chair of World Alliance for Pentecostal Theological Education*

This book is honest, humble, scholarly, challenging. As I read I could not help but think that what Lee Strobel sought to do to atheism in writing “The Case for Christ”, Terran Williams does here to complementarian theology: making it an increasingly indefensible position for any who seek to be shaped by the evidence. I am deeply grateful for it—it is going to wonderfully shape the landscape of our churches. Read it, experience it, live it and see the Kingdom come through it.

—*Katia Adams, pastor of The Table, Boston, USA; author of Equal*

This comprehensive work on the subject, with a good balance of analysis and critique of prominent scholars, represents a committed follower of Jesus’ diligent effort to arrive at an honest evaluation of an issue which has caused so much division and heart ache for Christians, the church and the community. We would do well to pay attention!

—*Dr. Quinton Howitt, co-founder of South African Theological Seminary and The School of Leadership*

Written with pastoral sensitivity and theological astuteness, this book inspires me to lead an organisation not as a man but as a full partner in the gospel. I originally come from a denomination that excluded women from preaching and leading, so this book gives my husband and I a fresh start as new church planters.

—*Minah Koela, CEO of Beautiful Gates, Cape Town, South Africa*

This book is a must-read for every believer looking to expand their understanding of how men and women are created by God to serve together in his Kingdom. Terran Williams has done what I hope every Christian (and certainly every pastor) will do—study for *oneself* what the Scriptures say about gender and female leadership, including understanding views from all sides. *How God Sees Women* is a compelling narrative of one dedicated theologian’s humble search for truth as well as a full-scale study in complementarian and egalitarian theologies and practices.

—Kadi Cole, CEO of Kadi Cole and Company, Florida, USA; leadership consultant; executive coach; author of *Developing Female Leaders*

You can tell when someone loves Scripture. I first heard Terran speak to a group of young surfers 20 years ago. His eyes lit up and he became more and more animated as he explained with great clarity how the Kingdom of God was bursting into our world and was available to them. Reading this book, the only thing that has changed is that Terran seems even more in love with God’s word. I loved every page, and found myself saying Yes! Yes! Yes! If you are passionate about truth, freedom, and all God has called the church to be, I suspect you may respond in the same way. I recommend this book to everyone, regardless of which side of the fence you now sit on.

—Paul Van Coller, leader of Hope Church, George, South Africa and the Zambia Project

This book is of missional urgency—we have at times silenced and kept the largest portion of the church from walking out their full call to see the world changed. Having grown up in *Apartheid* South Africa, I know firsthand how ideology endorsed by incorrect theology produced a society that gave lip service to equality but still oppressed people of color like me. Likewise I have seen the ‘equal but different roles’ theology produce broken women *and* men. Terran’s book makes a theological and scholarly case that has helped me to go even deeper into how I am to see and love my wife and other women.

—Julian Adams, pastor at The Table, Boston, USA; director of Frequentsee; author of *Terra Nova*

This book is a clear-sounding wake-up call. If you have a high regard for Scripture, a rigorous mind, and are willing to do some deep work, this book will resonate with you. Terran's pursuit of truth is familiar to many Christ-followers, but where these biblical truths lead us may be unfamiliar territory. As tempting as it is to dig in our heels, it may be exactly what is needed to change our mind.

—*Jess and Tom Basson, pastors of Grace Family Church, Durban, South Africa*

As in his former book, Terran writes easily and accessibly, dealing with critical arguments without resorting to technicalities. He is well researched, and explores the full spectrum of complementarian and egalitarian arguments. The story he shares of his journey with his wife, Julie, into a co-equal marriage and ministry, grounds his case in reality. Of the many works I have read that might help complementarians to rethink the matter, this is one of the more persuasive.

—*Dr. Derek Morphey, founder of the international Vineyard Bible Institute; author of The Kingdom Reformation*

I dedicate this book firstly to Julie, my soul mate and battle-tested partner in life, in raising children, and in changing the world.

Also to Ivy, our daughter, who is feminine and fierce, young yet already imbued with a sense of divine call. May you run the race to which you have been called, with joy and confidence, and none of the second-guessing so many women before you have had to endure.

Finally, I devote this book to every person who desires to answer afresh Jesus' soul-searching question in Luke 7:44:

“Do you see this woman?”

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FOREWORD



For most of my life, I have been a Christ-follower.

For all of my life, I have been a woman.

The place where these two descriptors intersect has been a journey of letting go and picking up... letting go of familial, self, societal and indeed even church expectations of who I am. And reclaiming my (at times forgotten) agency, purpose, authority and sense of who God is and who he says I am in turn.

This book, and more specifically, the man who authored it, has played a pivotal role in that journey. We first met when I was just 17—me, a wide-eyed newcomer, and he, a wild-haired leader of the church we would both call home for the next two decades.

Five kids, 4 homes, 18 years of marriage and 1 burnout later, I feel just as wide-eyed and we are both now wild haired! Yet beneath these physical traits, lie two battle-scarred hearts that have learnt and unlearnt how to see one another more how God sees the other.

Interestingly, when my husband first embarked on this journey toward changing his theology on women, I was his fiercest critic. Having both studied theology previously and having personally wrestled with this particular topic many years earlier—I had even testified how God had spoken to me during that turbulent time in my faith, and gently whispered to my weary heart: “Why grapple for position when you’re already seated on my lap?”

At that moment I had seen myself as I really was.

I was not some kind of undervalued servant that needed to demand my rights. I was a beloved daughter of the Most High. I needn’t push and shove my way to be next to my brothers, I was seated with God already, close to his heart, exactly where I most longed to be—regardless of roles and restrictions.

After that encounter, I had happily resigned myself to my supposed God-given role as helper. Frankly, after years of struggling with my place in the church, it was a relief.

And far from feeling oppressed, ministry opportunities came thick and fast.

I preached, I led meetings, I participated in crucial leadership decisions, I partnered with my husband in planting churches, I co-hosted women's events that reached thousands.

And yet here was my husband—all these years later—telling me that he thought we'd got it wrong! That somehow, we were wronging women and the witness of the church with our theology.

I resisted. For a long time.

For one thing, *I* did not feel particularly wronged. And if I were to change my position, would it not ironically show how my husband was still the head of our home, with a wife who simply shadowed her husband's convictions? Terran did not push hard, but over time, and upon more reflection, I slowly began to appreciate how ours' was never a typical complementarian relationship (or church) to begin with.

I was raised in a home with a mother who was just as capable and hard working as my father. I went to an amazing girls' school—where we didn't even need to be told that we could do anything with our lives and potential, we assumed it already! I then enjoyed early success in my tertiary education, career and ministry—never feeling inferior to the men I worked, ministered and lived alongside.

Ironically, my insistence to hold onto my complementarian theology, (stemming from my conviction that I should make up my own mind), and Terran's non-plussed reaction to this, proved that we were in fact far more egalitarian in our partnership than I at first wanted to admit.

Not just the man beside me, but this book, has been one of God's greatest gifts to me. God has used it to reshape how I see myself as a woman, and in so doing, how I see God too.

Whilst I never felt marginalised by others in our previous complementarian church, I recognise now that I had, in subtle ways, marginalised myself. Overly-deferring to others, desisting from dreaming bigger dreams and diminishing my own voice and potential. Perhaps more painfully though, I now see that whilst I was never denied a place at the table, many of my similarly-gifted sisters were, simply by virtue of their singleness, or their being married to men who were not leaders. The thought that I was happy with our theology for so long because it benefited me whilst bruising so many others grieves me now. Still, there is much to be thankful and hopeful for. God is not done with any of us yet!

While so much of my mind and heart still needs renewing, that whisper from God decades ago is as true today as it was back then. I *am* seated on God's lap, and I never need to grasp for position. I am equal in every sense to my brothers in the kingdom. Only now, my theology aligns with my practice and lived experience.

I pray that this book would be a similar grace to you, dear reader. Like the Word we all love, may its words illuminate your mind and allow you to not only see yourself more clearly, but also God—in whose eyes your reflection burns with fierce, liberating love.

—*Julie Williams*

PROLOGUE: HOW GOD SEES WOMEN



For most of the church's history, people have believed that, whatever else women are, they are inferior to men. That there are far less women than men referred to in the Bible (only 200 of its named 3,000 characters) accounts in part for the centuries-long, uncontested assumption that women are less important than men. But the God who selects a woman's womb through which to visit his world has never been about statistics or size. Even in the parts of the Bible where a man plays the leading role, there are women who, despite their smaller roles, convey so much more of God's vision for male-female partnership than we may at first glance realize.

Take Abraham for example. He is the very first Jew—a male, a free man, and a person of social and financial means. God promises him that his children's children will make a mighty impact. Yet he is still a man of his times: his chosen-ness does not negate his terrible treatment of his Egyptian slave Hagar. At the behest of his infertile wife, he uses Hagar to produce a child. Once she is pregnant, he then allows his jealous wife to mistreat her until she flees into the wilderness.

Her story is devastating: unless someone rescues her and her unborn child, they will both die. Enter: God. He intervenes to rescue her, sending her back with the assurance that he will protect both her and her boy. It is a promise that echoes the one he earlier made to Abraham: "I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count."¹

Let's reflect on the significance of this: into a male-dominated world, God begins to reveal his great redemption plan to Abraham, the first of the biblical patriarchs. Yet even as he does so, he comes alongside a woman too. Not any woman either, but one at the very bottom of the social ladder—a slave. Lost in the desert wilderness, with a broken heart, a hopeless spirit and a violated body, God sees Hagar and calls out a future greatness through her that

prevailing social conditions should have made near impossible.

She responds to God's affirmation by being the only person in all of Scripture to name her Maker as: "The God who sees me."² Her breakthrough comes from better theology. For the first time, she sees herself, not as Abraham or Sarah or the society of that day does, but as God sees her. She is a seed planted early in the Bible's long story that will one day come to fruition in Christ, who will see to it that not only Jews but Gentiles, not only free people but slaves, not only the rich but the poor, *and not only men but women* will rise to greatness in his kingdom.

WHY (AND TO WHOM) I WRITE

I write for women. Do you desire to honour Scripture and give your all for God and his church? Then let's bust open the doors of limiting, unsound doctrine, smash through the glass ceilings, and unlock the cages of self-doubt too many have lived within for too long. Let's do this by looking to Scripture to rediscover how God truly sees you.

I write for men. Whether you are aware of it or not, you already have a theology of women. It informs how you see half of humanity, and over half of the bride of Christ. As such, it is inseparable from your own humanity and discipleship. Seeing women the way God sees them will not only be a gift to the women you work, minister, and live alongside, it will be an intrinsic part of your own experience of freedom and sanctification too. At least, that has been my experience.

I write for sincere skeptics. Do you have genuine doubts about whether women can and may be fully on par with men, especially when it comes to church leadership? I hope to humbly open up Scripture in a way that helps you to pay attention to your prejudices and inherited beliefs. This requires a detailed, point by point analysis on the many interpretations of Scripture that have been distributed through a seemingly endless array of websites, organisations, books and even a Study Bible.

I write for church leaders. If you're a complementarian church leader, as I was for most of my adult life, you must make certain that what you believe, practice and prohibit pertaining to women in your church is based on a carefully thought-through, whole-Bible theology. After all, your theological position does not only impact you—it affects countless others and in some

instances, alters the trajectory of whole lives.

Whilst I must challenge many long held assumptions, I have no desire to divide the church. Like Paul, writing to the Corinthians, this book was borne of “affliction and anguish of heart, and through many tears—not to grieve you, but because of my deep love for the church.”³ My hope is that, as you read it, you would experience something of what I have experienced—the thrill and undeserved grace of scales falling from weary eyes.

I am hardly a revolutionary, rising to the defence of women. Truth be told, I feel regrettably late to the party—a drummer boy adding his contribution near the end of the battle—when the victory is already in sight. And yet I have felt an almost holy compulsion to raise my voice, to beat my drum, even at this hour. For in recent years, while many churches have made great strides forward, I have witnessed the deeply concerning ramifications and rising (yet unspoken) ‘body count’ wrought by well-meaning churches that hold to a patriarchal theology. In their wake, lie Hagers. They are the countless women who have been forced into the wilderness, with broken spirits, unborn potential, and miscarried dreams. In a sense, this book is my journey into that same wilderness—not as the victim, but as an ex-perpetrator. It has been a pilgrimage from blunt, brash confidence, passed disorientating complexity, then onto humble reverence, as I see what has been in the Scriptures all along: what God sees when he sees a woman.

Though I write mainly with a hope-filled view of a more effective, Christ-honouring church of the future, I also write with a heavy-hearted backward view as I acknowledge the ways I have unwittingly undermined the very churches I helped to lead. This book is therefore my apology to all those women whose worlds I may have unintentionally made smaller, and my attempt to make right what wrongs I have played a part in.



CHANGING MY MIND

“To change our mind does not mean we have abandoned our principles. It may mean we have learnt something.” Adam Grant

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines patriarchy as “any form of social organisation in which men have predominant power”. By this definition, I used to be the primary articulator of a patriarchal doctrine in my church.⁴ As a lead teaching pastor, several times a year, I would stand up before hundreds of new members and explain why, by God’s will, it was biblical for men to hold more responsibility in church and marriage. I’d explain:

According to the Bible, God made Adam and Eve to complement each other in equal but distinctive roles. More than that, God has brought that complementarity into the church, so that, although most roles are open to women, God has ordained men alone to be elders and pastors. Although there is enormous cultural pressure to revise this, we’re committed to taking our cues from the Bible not culture.

And just like that, most people would accept our position. When some didn’t and chose to leave, I consoled myself that faithfulness to Jesus was most important.

Then a few years ago, after the issue resurfaced yet again and we realised our past substantiations were a bit thin, our core leadership team decided to revisit the doctrine and draw up a thorough articulation and defense for it. Though we spoke open-mindedly about the issue, none of us had any real doubts that we might be wrong about our prior interpretation of Scripture. After all, we had respected Christian leaders like John Piper and Timothy Keller who had championed our way of reading the Bible on all manner of things—including gender and leadership. And God had blessed our church

numerically while this doctrine was in place.

As one of the most theologically qualified leaders, I had recently come alive to the field of biblical interpretation. I was commissioned with others to write a paper on the subject. I delved into the topic with enthusiasm and abandon, ready to provide an articulate and considered defense for our position. Despite my theological education, this was the first time I had deeply explored the arguments against *and for* women leading in the church. Never afraid of the facts, I read everything I could on the subject.

As I did so—and I never imagined this might happen—my confidence turned to dust. The more I understood what I believed, and how many of the most well-known and vocal proponents of this belief have defended their position, the more it dawned upon me how wrong I had been to assume my convictions were built on rock-solid biblical exegesis. How could this be? How could so many of the authors and scholars I respected and who I had thought were immune to the snares of culture have themselves been captured by an antiquated yet equally unbiblical culture? My journey to uncover the answer to this question is unpacked in this book.

I did not change my mind carelessly. I especially applied the counsel of Proverbs: “The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and cross-examines him.”⁵ Making doubly and triply sure, I turned every stone—every text and every argument—looking at it from all sides, over and over and over. Upon reflection, it has proven to be one of the most liberating of journeys.

DEFINITIONS & DEFINING MOMENTS

Allow me to define some of the terms I use in this book. By *patriarchy* or *gender hierarchy* I mean the assumption that in whatever sphere is being referred to—be it home, church, or society—men are mandated to have the highest authority. Contrary to our secular culture’s overtones that portray men as bullies, predators, abdicators, and power-mongers, when I use the terms, I do not mean that men are always oppressors, or that their masculinity is inevitably toxic. Encouragingly, more and more patriarchal churches are discovering the wisdom of listening to the voices of women. Yet whilst these churches give women *a say*, it is still understood that men have *the final say*.

In this book, I will mainly refer to a particular form of patriarchy labeled

complementarianism. This is a recent and highly influential brand of revised patriarchy invented in the American church in the last quarter of the last century. It excludes women from preaching and pastoral leadership in churches; upholds a wife's submission in marriage; and to a lesser degree, casts doubt on female leadership in society. It also tends to primarily esteem the domestic role of women as husband-supporters, homemakers and child-rearers.

Making the young history of complementarianism a little more complicated, a small percentage of churches have more recently attempted to *soften* its harsher implications—allowing women to preach (but not with authority). Women can also lead men in the church (but only in lower levels of leadership). They can be top-tier leaders in society (but not senior leaders in the church). They can make decisions with their husbands (but where there is disagreement, the husband is the tie-breaker). This is called *soft complementarianism*.

For two decades, I would have described myself as a soft complementarian. Like many other leaders who find themselves in similar church circles, I valued and worked alongside many gifted women—grateful to be part of a healthy church that did not appear to limit, silence or suppress their call or contribution.

Yet as I studied Scripture afresh, I had to admit that, if the original complementarian methods of interpreting Scripture are correct, then soft complementarianism is much less defensible than I had hoped. It simply no longer has a sound biblical argument for its more inclusive practices. I concluded that either we should practice what we believe—and not let women preach, lead or even co-lead with men—or we should look closer at what we believe, and why. (After all, if complementarianism is wrong, then even a soft form of it is no more acceptable than merely a soft form of racialism would be.)

Having done just that, leaning in closer to every one of the primary and secondary sources, what I discovered deeply unsettled me. Upon closer investigation, I was astonished to discover that respected theologians (like Wayne Grudem, Tom Schreiner and Andreas Köstenberger), as well as beloved pastors (like John Piper and Timothy Keller) all have offered critically unsound biblical analyses and imbalanced arguments in order to reach their conclusions about excluding women from many high-impact roles. In fact, *I couldn't find a single watertight biblical argument for excluding females from senior leadership*.

However many arguments can be made, each is significantly flawed. And merely assembling them together makes them no more solid than does stacking many flimsy cards to form a house of cards.

Conversely, I was just as astounded to find substantial, indeed persuasive, biblical arguments for why women *should* be included. My commitment to a whole-Bible approach to the subject is why I have ultimately settled upon a theology of *gender mutualism*. I appreciate the synonymous term *egalitarianism*, and lock arms with most of the biblical scholars who nailed their colours to this mast—they are correct to say that Scripture supports the notion that men and women are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities. However, I prefer not to use the term in this book for three reasons: first, complementarians also believe in gender equality; second, the term when applied to gender is sometimes associated with the negation of all distinctions between men and women; and third, equality is not the only crucial idea—reciprocal partnership is as important. With this in mind, here is my working definition and the position I will expound upon further in this book:

Gender mutualism takes the theological position, informed by Scripture, that men and women are distinct and yet equal, created to serve and partner alongside each other in all spheres of life. Each person's God-given authority, gifting and expertise can and should be recognised and celebrated, regardless of their gender.

By using the terms *male* and *female*, I echo Lucy Peppiatt who, in the introduction to her excellent book, says,

I am aware that by constantly referring to male and female as made in God's image ... this language excludes those who see themselves as neither male nor female. ... [T]his book is dealing with a very specific situation in which expectations of differences in forms of ministry and roles in heterosexual marriage for men and women are rooted in assumptions about differences in sex and gender between male and female. Thus, I will continue to use this language, despite its limitations, to address this particular situation.⁶

And finally, a note on the word “*theology*”. In its simplest and purest state, our theology should be informed by an ongoing endeavour to get as close as possible to God's view on any and every matter. *How God Sees Women* is thus, a *theology of women*—*what the Bible, taken as a whole and properly pieced*

together, teaches about women.

ALWAYS REFORMING

The Protestant Reformation of the 1500s ushered in a much-needed review of the church's teachings. Yet this Reformation itself advocated the principle of "church always reforming" (from the Latin phrase *ecclesia semper reformanda*). Calvin and Luther, for example, did not imagine that they had the last words on any matter of biblical import, but rather, passed to succeeding generations the ongoing task of diligently reflecting on our doctrines and their alignment to the Scriptures. They knew all too well that, in a church that is centuries old, it is easy to pick up peculiar items—old, irrelevant relics from bygone eras—that need to be abandoned, not embraced, if the church is to freely move from one degree of glory to the next.

I believe that this is one of our generation's crucial reformations. Reading church history, I have marvelled at how the Spirit continues to lead the church into ever-greater clarity about its teachings and practices on a wide variety of matters. If the first reformation sought to give *the Word of God* back to ordinary people long since divested of its life-changing power, subsequent reformations have slowly yet steadily been restoring *the work of God* back to all God's people—regardless of their age, race, class or gender.

Reformations require effort. For much of church history, Christians have left it to a select few learned individuals to figure out what we all believed. In fact, before the Protestant Reformation, and the advent of the printing press in 1436, most thought of theology and much of the Bible as lofty gibberish—to be understood only by priests who read and spoke Latin, and who had access to a rare copy of the Bible. Whilst so much has changed since, many believers (and indeed many church leaders) still "outsource" their evaluation of this critical topic by relying on others to do the hard exegetical work for them. When I told a fellow-pastor about my change in position he lamented, "As a busy pastor I don't know when I'm meant to find time to reflect on my theology." He is correct: time and effort is needed! Yet surely it is an endeavour worthy of such an investment.

Reformations needn't dishonour. Beyond divisive camps and disparaging caricatures of one another—there is a better way. I am referencing not only the two obvious 'sides' in this debate, but also our genders—which are all-too-

often pitted against one another as if either men are all trash, or women are all Jezebels. In this vein, I am so proud of the many men and women I know (on both sides of this conversation) who do all they can to build up the body and honour one another. One female pastor tells me, “I walk in the way of Jesus who lifted women up without disparaging men.” In this same spirit, I also desire to honour those leaders and theologians (again, in both camps) that have dedicated their lives to honestly pursuing truth and justice. Whilst I may not agree with the likes of Tim Keller and John Piper on this particular issue, I do not see them as 2-dimensional posterboys of the patriarchy. Much of who I am today has been shaped by them, and I continue to learn from them in many ways.

Churches evaluating their theologies need to say no to the “culture wars” of the last decades as well as the methods of personal shaming to induce value change. While listening empathetically to voices of society, and the pain experienced by women, our primary driver in this conversation must be a proper understanding and redemptive application of Scriptural theology.

Reformations require humility. It’s possible to do the right thing but to do it in such a way that actually does more harm than good. Wherever you land, be sure to add to your convictions kindness, gentleness and patience.

I take no pleasure in controversy and neither should you. Even though I now believe differently, I still hold many complementarian leaders and their churches in the highest regard as my brothers and sisters in Christ—whatever our differences of understanding may be, what we have in common is so much greater. Having been a complementarian most of my tenure in Christian leadership, it would be remiss of me to suggest that those who still hold to it are spiritually or intellectually defective in some way.

As I will later disclose in greater detail, perhaps the church’s engagement with the relatively new cultural phenomenon of female equality is the greatest case study we have ever had to properly interrogate how the historical church imbibed cultural assumptions in its reading of its own texts. Tim Keller states this masterfully:

[Our] understanding of the Bible may definitely be wrong—indeed, is always partly so—and therefore must always be open to being corrected. ... Because of our cultural blinders, we must not only speak to [a new culture]; we must listen to [it’s people] as well. We need to listen to what they are saying and take seriously their questions, their objections to what we are saying, and their hopes

and aspirations. More often than not, this interaction with a new culture shows us many things taught in the Bible—things we either missed altogether or thought unimportant, possibly even ways in which we misread the Bible through the lens of our own cultural assumptions.⁷

According to Paul the apostle, in Ephesians 5, Jesus is always at work beautifying his church through “the washing of his word” and making her ever more radiant and without blemish. It is in light of his grace that I offer this book, though no doubt flawed in all kinds of places I am presently unaware of, I pray it may still play a small part in the renewing work of the Spirit to beautify the church of Jesus.

Prologue: How God Sees Women

¹ Genesis 16:10

² Genesis 16:13

³ 2 Corinthians 2:4

Ch. 1. Changing My Mind

⁴ Though I never used the word patriarchy to define my earlier position, I cannot find another word in the English language that comes closer to what it is that I taught.

⁵ Proverbs 18:17

⁶ Lucy Peppiatt, *Rediscovering Scripture's Vision for Women*, ch. 1, fn. 15. In the last decade or so, a new view, mainly driven by the question of transgenderism, rejects distinction of sexed gender as a theological category altogether. Although a thorough and thoughtful book on the subject is needed, as far as I can see in the Scriptures, God in his original creation intended the human race to be divided into two equal, complementary and distinct biological sexes, (see chapter 4) even if gender norms and identity is more culturally fluid an idea (see chapter 14).

⁷ Timothy Keller, *Center Church*, ch. 8.