

Questions About 1 Timothy 2:11-15

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Preface by Joseph Tkach

For many people, 1 Timothy 2:12 is concise proof that women should not have authority in the church. Paul did not allow women to teach or have authority, they say, and neither should we.

However, it is obvious that we do not insist on the last part of the verse: “she must be silent.” Not even Paul believed that women should be silent *at all times*, even in church. So in this study paper, we examine this verse more carefully in its context to see what Paul is really prohibiting. As we look more carefully, we discover questions about how we should apply these words to the church today.

These verses are important, so we must study them carefully, with prayer, to try to avoid mistakes. As we noted at the beginning of this series of study papers, we want to base our beliefs and practices on Scripture. We do not want to twist the Scriptures.

At the same time, we want to recognize that there are genuine difficulties in understanding this passage. One scholar wrote, “It is sometimes implied that the hierarchicalist’s argument all boils down to 1 Timothy 2. This is patently not the case.... If anything, this passage complicates matters because the exegetical questions are so complex.”¹

Because of the difficulties in this verse, the following paper is quite long, even when some of the important supporting material has been moved into footnotes. I encourage you to read this paper carefully, and at least read the summary at the end.

It is my prayer that we can all examine this passage of Scripture with a sincere desire to hear what God is saying to us through it.

Joseph Tkach

¹ Craig Blomberg, “Neither Hierarchicalist Nor Egalitarian: Gender Roles in Paul,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (ed. James Beck and Craig Blomberg; Zondervan, 2001), 357-58. Craig Keener writes, “It would be surprising if an issue that would exclude at least half the body of Christ from a ministry of teaching would be addressed in only one text” (*Paul, Women, and Wives* [Hendrickson, 1992], 101).

Questions About 1 Timothy 2:11-15

1 Tim. 2:11-12 says: “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.” We will begin with a few observations about these verses, noting areas in which we need further clarification:

- 1) Paul did not believe that “a woman...must be silent” *at all times*. He says that women can pray and prophesy in a worship service (1 Cor. 11). There may be a difference between *prophecy*, which Paul allowed, and *teaching*, which he did not—or a special situation in Ephesus may have called for silence.
- 2) The Bible does not teach that females can *never* have authority over males. Scripture allows women to have civil authority over men,² and to have authority over male children, male teenagers, and possibly others. Again, we must find out what situation Paul was dealing with, and whether it applies to the church today.
- 3) When Paul says, “I do not permit...,” he is stating his policy for churches in his jurisdiction. This may imply that all churches in subsequent centuries should have a similar policy—or it may not.
- 4) 1 Tim. 2:11 says that a woman should learn in “full submission.” However, Scripture does not teach that a woman must be in total submission to *all* men. So we need to find out what kind of submission Paul is talking about.
- 5) 1 Tim. 2:12 does not use the normal Greek word for authority (*exousia*)—it uses the rare Greek verb *authenteō*. We need to find out whether there is a difference in meaning between these two words.
- 6) In verses 13-15, Paul appears to give *reasons* for what he says in v. 12. But the reasons given create additional questions:
 - a) V. 13 says that Adam was formed first, but it is not clear why that should be a reason for women to avoid authority specifically in church, when women can have authority in civil government.
 - b) V. 14 says that Adam was not deceived—thereby suggesting that he sinned deliberately. It is not clear why this is a reason for men to have authority.

² God gave Deborah authority as a prophetess and judge, and Esther as a queen.

- c) V. 15 says that “women will be saved through childbearing,” but this does not make sense for spiritual salvation *or* physical protection.
- 7) 1 Tim. 2 addresses several cultural matters: for people to pray for kings, for men to lift their hands when they pray, and for women to avoid braids, jewelry and expensive clothes. We need to find out whether we can take v. 12 as a permanent guideline when we do not take vv. 8-9 as permanent guidelines.
- 8) Paul’s letter gives pastoral advice on a variety of topics to Timothy as he grapples with a controversy in Ephesus (1:3). Some of the advice seems applicable for any church in any age, but other remarks seem specific to Timothy’s situation.³ We need to find out whether we should take 2:12 as a permanent policy when we essentially ignore Paul’s advice in 1 Tim. 5:9 to maintain a list of widows over age 60.
- 9) In 1 Tim. 6:1-2, Paul counsels slaves to submit to their masters, especially if the masters are Christian. We need to find out whether Paul’s advice for *women* to be submissive is also rooted in a cultural situation that is no longer universally true.

Most of these observations and questions have come from people who disagree with the traditional interpretation. That is not surprising, because on almost any subject, people who are happy with the traditional view have little incentive to ask for more details. However, the requests for clarification are legitimate, and we need reasonable answers. We will start by presenting the traditional or complementarian⁴ view, then egalitarian⁴ objections to that view, and finally a discussion of whether the objections are reasonable.

³ For example, 1:18; 4:12-14; 5:23.

⁴ The “complementarian” view is that men and women are complementary, having different roles in the family and in the church. The “egalitarian” view stresses the equality of men and women, saying that there is no role in the church restricted to one sex or the other. Both terms are less than perfect, since complementarians believe that men and women are equal in worth, and egalitarians believe that men and women have different and complementary strengths.

The traditional view⁵

James Hurley argues that 1 Timothy was designed to give instructions that would apply in all churches, in all ages:

It is universally accepted that 1 Timothy was intended to provide a clear statement concerning certain issues which its author, whom I take to be Paul,⁶ felt needed attention....

Paul wrote...“how it is necessary [*dei*] to conduct oneself” [3:15]. *Dei* is an impersonal verb meaning “one must” or “one ought.”... Paul’s use of *dei* here is presumptive evidence that he considered what he said normative beyond the immediate situation.... Paul’s abstract language indicates that his instructions should have a general rather than closely limited application.... He delivers “trustworthy sayings worthy of full acceptance.”... Only the last section of the fifth chapter is pointedly restricted to Timothy.⁷

Thomas Schreiner, another traditional scholar, is more cautious: “The letters should not necessarily be understood as timeless marching orders for the church but must be interpreted in light of the specific circumstances that occasioned them.”⁸ Although parts of the letters deal with deviant teachings found in specific situations, he says that the letters as a whole “reflect the pattern of governance that he expected to exist in his churches.”⁹ T. David Gordon writes, “The Pastoral Epistles are...written with the purpose of providing instruction of ordering churches

⁵ In some churches, “tradition” is that women *never* speak from the podium. Hurley, Moo, Piper, Grudem, and Schreiner present a moderated version of tradition, in that they argue that women may speak in church in some circumstances.

⁶ Some scholars do not believe that Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles, or that he had someone else formulate the wording. The exact authorship does not affect our study, since we accept these epistles as canonical and therefore authoritative for faith and practice. We will proceed on the basis of Pauline authorship.

⁷ James Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Zondervan, 1981), 196. He ignores 1 Tim. 1:18 and 4:12-14, and says nothing about any modern application of 5:9-14.

⁸ Thomas Schreiner, “An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15,” in *Women in the Church* (2nd ed.; edited by Andreas Köstenberger and Thomas Schreiner; Baker, 2005), 87.

⁹ *Ibid.*

at the close of the apostolic era.”¹⁰

Hurley notes that 1 Tim. 2 deals with prayer and worship. Referring to “the prayer posture of the day,” Paul exhorts the men to pray in a peaceable way. In particular, he wanted them to avoid anger and an argumentative spirit.¹¹ Paul then advises the women to avoid ostentatious hair and clothing styles. “Both sexes are to live holy lives of obedient works. The difference between the commands to the two sexes gives us some indication of besetting sins of the day.”¹² Paul’s instructions “are, to a certain extent, culturally relative,” but they are based on timeless principles: humility and good behavior.

Paul does not forbid *all* braids and jewelry, Hurley says.

He refers instead to the elaborate hair-styles which were then fashionable among the wealthy.... He probably meant “braided hair decorated with gold or with pearls.”... Obedience to this command of Paul’s requires no subtle exegetical skill or knowledge of the customs of Paul’s day; it requires only an assessment of what adornment is excessively costly and not modest or proper. Christians... have no need to set aside Paul’s instructions as somehow “culture bound.”¹³

Paul then addresses another aspect of behavior appropriate for women: They should learn quietly and submissively. Douglas Moo observes, “That Paul wants Christian women to learn is an important point, for such a practice was not

¹⁰ T. David Gordon, “A Certain Kind of Letter,” in Andreas Köstenberger, Thomas Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin, eds, *Women in the Church* (1st ed., Baker, 1995), 59.

¹¹ Schreiner writes, “When Paul calls on men to pray ‘in every place’... this is probably a reference to house churches” (91). First-century Jews sometimes recited various curses against apostates in their prayers. It is possible that some early Christians used similar curses against government officials or their religious opponents, and Paul tells them to stop.

¹² Hurley, 198.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 199. We agree that women may wear braids, gold, and pearls today, and should avoid flaunting their wealth. Schreiner writes, “The similar text in 1 Peter 3:3 supports this interpretation, for read literally it prohibits all wearing of clothing, which is scarcely Peter’s intention. The words on clothing provide help in understanding the instructions on braids, gold, and pearls. Paul’s purpose is probably not to ban these altogether, but to warn against expensive and extravagant preoccupation with one’s appearance” (95).

generally encouraged by the Jews.”¹⁴ Paul is not just stating a personal preference, Hurley argues—Paul gives v. 11 as a command. The Greek word “does not mean silence but carries with it connotations of peacefulness and restfulness.... Paul is not... calling for ‘buttoned lips’ but for a quiet receptivity and a submission to authority.”¹⁵ “Not absolute silence but rather a gentle and quiet demeanor is intended.”¹⁶

Why did Paul feel it necessary to write this verse? Moo says, “Almost certainly it is necessary because at least some women were *not* learning ‘in quietness.’... The facts that this verse is directed only to women and that verses 12-14...focus on the relationship of men to women incline us to think that the submission in view here is also this submission of women to male leadership.”¹⁷ “It is certainly possible that the prohibition is given because some women were teaching men.”¹⁸

Why silence only the women? Was it because the average woman was not as educated as the average man? No, because Greco-Roman society had some educated women and many illiterate men.¹⁹ If education was the problem, then it would be inconsistent for Paul to silence women but say nothing about uneducated

¹⁴ Douglas Moo, “What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?” in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Crossway, 1991), 183. But he also notes that the stress is on the manner, not the command to learn. “It is not the *fact* that they are to learn, but the *manner* in which they are to learn that concerns Paul” (183; similar comment by Schreiner, 97).

¹⁵ Hurley, 200. The Greek has a third-person imperative: “have a woman learn.” He also claims that the verb in v. 12 is not just a personal preference, “but has overtones of command” (201).

¹⁶ Schreiner, 98.

¹⁷ Moo, 183. “We can also be fairly certain that women were functioning as teachers in the Ephesian community; otherwise, Paul would have no need for a corrective” (Linda Belleville, *Women Leaders and the Church* [Baker, 1999], 169).

¹⁸ Schreiner, 112.

¹⁹ Steven M. Baugh writes, “To say that Ephesian women were uneducated because they did not appear in ‘graduate schools’ of philosophy, rhetoric, and medicine is misleading. *Few* people in antiquity advanced in their formal education beyond today’s elementary school levels, including men like Socrates, Sophocles, and Herodotus.... There were wealthy women in the Ephesian congregation. At least some of these women were educated” (“A Foreign World: Ephesus in the First Century,” chapter 1 in *Women in the Church*, 2nd ed., 34).

men.²⁰ Some inscriptions in Asia Minor show that women functioned as high priests in some temples—therefore there was no *cultural* scandal involved in women being in authority, which leads Wayne Grudem to conclude that Paul’s directive must have been based on God’s law, not cultural sentiments.²¹

However, this does not mean that women should not speak in church. Hurley writes: “Women were certainly free to speak in the Pauline churches (1 Cor. 11). Paul is speaking only of teaching situations here in 1 Timothy 2.”²² In support of this interpretation, he notes that v. 12 is a conceptual repetition of v. 11. Learning corresponds to not teaching, and submission corresponds to not having authority. Just as Paul wants women to learn in a submissive manner, he does not want them to teach *in an authoritative manner*.²³ Hurley concludes that the verse means “that

²⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Multnomah, 2004), 293. This book is available for viewing on the internet at www.efbt100.com.

²¹ Grudem notes that “some women had prominent roles in pagan religions in Ephesus.... The idea that women could not hold church office because it would have been unacceptable in that society does not square with the evidence” (324). Nancy Vymeister notes, “On the western coast of Asia Minor there was a tradition of dominant women” (*Women in Ministry* [Andrews University Press, 1998], 339). Clinton Arnold and Robert Saucy suggest that in Ephesus, “women were converting to Christianity and desiring to attain leadership roles in the church similar to what they held in society. Aware of this situation, Paul addressed this issue because he did not want these churches to cave in to the cultural pressures of the day and violate a deep-set theological conviction about order between men and women” (“The Ephesian Background of Paul’s Teaching on Women’s Ministry,” chapter 12 in *Women and Men in Ministry: A Complementary Perspective*, ed. Robert L. Saucy and Judith K. TenElshof [Moody, 2001], 287).

²² Hurley, 201. Similarly, Piper and Grudem write, “Paul endorses women prophesying in church (1 Corinthians 11:5) and says that men ‘learn’ by such prophesying (1 Corinthians 14:31).... Teaching and learning are such broad terms that it is impossible that women not teach men and men not learn from women *in some sense*.... The teaching inappropriate for a woman is the teaching of men in settings or ways that dishonor the calling of men to bear the primary responsibility for teaching and leadership” (“An Overview of Central Concerns,” in Piper and Grudem, 69-70).

²³ “Both verses have the same situation in mind, one in which women are not to teach authoritatively but are to learn quietly” (Hurley, 201). Blomberg also combines the two as “authoritative teaching” (364). However, Grudem (317) and Moo separate them: “We think 1 Timothy 2:8-15 imposes two restrictions on the ministry of women: they are not to teach Christian doctrine to men *and* they are not to exercise authority directly over men in the church” (Moo, 180). He says that these two prohibitions show us what Paul means by “full submission” (184). “Paul treats the two tasks as distinct elsewhere in 1 Timothy” (187). The fact that Paul

women should not be authoritative teachers in the church,” and he associates that with the office of elder. Paul did not forbid *all* teaching by women, Hurley claims. “What Paul disallowed therefore was simply the exercise of authority over men.”²⁴ Werner Neuer writes, “Paul excludes women from the office of teaching because teaching the assembled congregation would necessarily place them over men.”²⁵

Moo acknowledges that the present-tense form of the verb “permit” *could* allow for a temporary situation,²⁶ but a present-tense verb can also be used for a permanent command (e.g., Rom. 12:1). Whether Paul indicates a temporary prohibition or a permanent rule cannot be decided by the grammar, but only by the context. Moo notes, “Paul’s ‘advice’ to Timothy is the word of an apostle, accredited by God, and included in the inspired Scriptures.”²⁷ Even an indicative verb—a statement—can be used to imply a command, as Paul does in verses 1 and 8.²⁸

What sort of “teaching” is not allowed? The Greek word for “teach” *can* refer to a ministry that any believer might do (Col. 3:16), but it more often refers to a special gift associated with church leadership (Eph. 4:11). “In the pastoral epistles, teaching always has this restricted sense of authoritative doctrinal instruction”²⁹ (e.g., 1 Tim. 2:2). Teaching was an important part of the function of an elder (1 Tim. 3:2).

However, in Protestant churches, authority is based in Scripture, not in the preacher. Does modern preaching involve the same sort of authority? Moo argues

twice calls for female silence (vv. 11-12) suggests that he did not allow *any* form of teaching. Teaching, by its very nature, normally involves some form of authority.

²⁴ Hurley, 202.

²⁵ Werner Neuer, *Man and Woman in Christian Perspective* (Crossway, 1991), 119. “Authorised teaching belongs... to the leadership and direction of the congregation and carries with it an obligation on church members to obey it” (ibid.).

²⁶ “As far as the present tense of the verb goes, this allows us to conclude only that Paul was *at the time of writing* insisting on these prohibitions” (185, italics in original).

²⁷ Moo, 185. However, temporary commands such as “use a little wine” are also apostolic, inspired, and biblical. Moo does not explicitly draw conclusions from his statement, but he insinuates his conclusion.

²⁸ Schreiner, 99-100. He notes that this does not *prove* that the verb in v. 12 is a permanent command, but that the form of the verb does not prove that it is temporary.

²⁹ Moo, 185, and Schreiner, 101.

that it does, since “the addition of an authoritative, written norm is unlikely to have significantly altered the nature of Christian teaching. . . . Any authority that the teacher has is derived. . . . but the activity of teaching, precisely because it does come to God’s people with the authority of God and His Word, is authoritative.”³⁰

What is the difference between prophecy (which women may do, according to 1 Cor. 11) and teaching (which they may not, according to 1 Tim. 2:12)? Neuer says, “In contrast to prophecy, which is related to specific situations and according to Paul is subject to assessment by the congregation, teaching is binding and of general validity, so that the congregation must submit to it (cf. Rom 6:17; 16:17; 1 Cor 4:17; 15:15ff.; Col 2:6-7; 2 Thess 2:15).”³¹ Grudem says that teaching is based on transmitting apostolic teachings, whereas prophecies may have errors and must be evaluated.³² Schreiner is reluctant to accept Grudem’s definition of prophecy as “mixed with error,” but he argues that it is different from teaching, vertical rather than horizontal, and more spontaneous. “Prophecy applies to specific situations and is less tied to the consciousness of the individual.”³³

³⁰ Moo, 185-86. Moo notes that “evangelistic witnessing, counseling, teaching subjects other than Bible or doctrine—are not, in our opinion, teaching in the sense Paul intends here” (186). Piper and Grudem say, “We do not think it is forbidden for women to tell the gospel story and win men and women to Christ” (77)—although that *is* a form of teaching, and it may involve doctrines about Jesus and salvation. They admit that there is a hazy line between a Priscilla-type role and an official teaching role (76, 85).

Moo says that women can vote in a congregational meeting, presumably even when women are the majority. He reasons that voting “is not the same thing as the exercise of authority ascribed, e.g., to the elders” (187). He thinks that women can perform administrative duties, and notes that the passage is only about the Christian community; it does not address business, government, and education. Neuer is more restrictive: “Women may give instruction, so long as it is not public teaching of the congregation, but takes place among small groups of women” (121).

³¹ Neuer, 119. However, pastoral teaching should also be subject to assessment by the congregation, and if it violates Scripture, the congregation does *not* have to submit to it.

³² As summarized by Schreiner, 102.

³³ Schreiner, 102. This definition seems more speculative and precise than the biblical evidence warrants. Schreiner notes that the prophecies of women are just as authoritative as the prophecies of men, but they may nevertheless be given “without overturning male leadership, whereas 1 Timothy 2:11-15 demonstrates that women cannot regularly teach men” (ibid). One scholarly study of prophecy in the New Testament gives a broader definition: “What all manifestations of this gift have in common is the speaker’s sense that they have a ‘word from the Lord,’ but a

What sort of authority is not allowed? Paul does not use the normal word for authority here (*exousia*), but a rare word (*authenteō*). Traditional scholars argue that the meaning is the same: to have authority over.³⁴ “The two words are used synonymously in at least eight different contexts.”³⁵ Köstenberger analyzes all the “neither...nor” constructions in the New Testament, and finds that in all cases, both words are positive, or both are negative.³⁶ Since Paul views “teaching” as a positive function,³⁷ it suggests that he also viewed *authenteō* as a positive function: to lead, direct, or exercise authority. Although teaching is good, Paul said that women should not teach men; in the same way he said that women should not exercise authority over men even though authority in itself is not bad. Paul is making restrictions not because the activities are bad, but because the people are female. This is simply the counterpart to what Paul said in the earlier verse, that women should be submissive.

What “men” are in view here? Since the Greek words *gynē* and *anēr* can mean either woman and man, or wife and husband, depending on context, some have suggested that Paul did not make restrictions on all women, but only on

preacher who has meditated on a text or theme long enough to have had such an experience may well then qualify as one prophesying when he or she speaks to a Christian gathering or congregation” (David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* [Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979], 213, cited by James Beck and Craig Blomberg, “Reflections on Complementarian Essays,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* [ed. James Beck and Craig Blomberg; Zondervan, 2001], 308).

³⁴ For more on the meaning of *authenteō*, see the appendix at the end of this paper.

³⁵ Schreiner, 103.

³⁶ Andreas Köstenberger, “A Complex Sentence: The Syntax of 1 Timothy 2:12,” chapter 3 of *Women in the Church*, 2nd ed., 71. He notes that this observation has been accepted by egalitarian scholars such as Padgett, Keener, Marshall, and Giles, although some of them, in order to keep *authenteō* as negative, try to see “teaching” as also negative in this verse. Belleville objects to the principle, expressing some reservations about the method of Köstenberger’s study, but not offering any counterexamples of her own.

³⁷ “The verb *didaskō* (I teach) has a positive sense elsewhere in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 4:11; 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:2). The only exception is Titus 1:11, where the context clarifies that false teaching is the object” (Schreiner, 104). Saucy writes, “Further evidence for the positive understanding is seen in the fact that the prohibition of exercising authority is specifically said to be ‘over a man.’ Only a positive meaning makes sense of this addition, as surely the apostle would have prohibited women from ‘domineering’ or ‘flaunting authority’ over all people, not just men” (“Paul’s Teaching on the Ministry of Women,” chapter 13 in Saucy and TenElshof, 294).

women exercising authority over their own husbands. But Moo notes that Paul speaks of men in general in v. 8, and women in general in v. 9, and if he wanted to shift the meaning to wives in particular, he would need to supply a verbal indicator, such as by saying that he did not allow women to exercise authority over *their own* men.³⁸ Lacking such an indicator, and since the surrounding context is about church rather than family relationships, it seems best to conclude that Paul is speaking of men and women in general—or more specifically, the men who had authority in the church. As Schreiner writes, “The context of verse 12... suggests that the submission of all women to *all* men is not in view, for not all men taught and had authority when the church gathered.”³⁹

Paul’s comments were motivated by a particular problem in the church at Ephesus, but that in itself does not mean that his advice does not apply to other situations. He addressed the specific situation in v. 11, Moo says, and then supports it in v. 12 with a general statement about the way he wants all of his churches to function.⁴⁰ He is restricting women not because they are uneducated or deceived (a temporary situation); he is restricting them because they are women (a permanent situation). They are allowed to teach, but not to teach men.⁴¹ They can have authority, but not authority over men.

Reasons for the prohibition

Hurley argues that Paul bases his view on Scripture, not on the cultural situation. By following his instructions with *gar* (usually translated “for”), Paul is expressing reasons for his command.⁴² Paul makes no reference to social customs,

³⁸ Moo, 188; see also Grudem, 296-99; Schreiner, 92-94; Belleville, 121.

³⁹ Schreiner, 99.

⁴⁰ Moo, 189.

⁴¹ Schreiner, 101.

⁴² “When a command or other instruction is given in paraenetic material, it is highly unlikely that the expression *gar* is to be taken in any other way than causal” (Gordon, 61). “When Paul gives a command elsewhere in the Pastoral Epistles, the *gar* that follows almost invariably states the reason for the command.... Even in ordinary speech reasons often follow commands” (Schreiner, 105). Note the qualifying phrase “almost invariably,” which suggests that a different use is *possible*. Egalitarians often argue that vv. 13-15 are illustrations, not reasons. Philip B. Payne writes, “It makes good sense to take *gar* in 1 Tim. 2:13-14 as explanatory since the example of Eve’s deception leading to the fall of mankind is a powerful illustration of how serious the

or to the idea that most women did not yet have enough education to be teachers, or the idea that they were the chief proponents of false doctrine. Rather, he says that Adam was created before Eve, thereby giving him authority over her, just as the firstborn son eventually “became the head of his father’s house and leader of its worship.”⁴³ Moo writes, “For Paul, the man’s priority in the order of creation is indicative of the headship that man is to have over woman.”⁴⁴ He writes:

By rooting these prohibitions in the circumstances of creation rather than in the circumstances of the fall, Paul shows that he does not consider these restrictions to be the product of the curse and presumably, therefore, to be phased out by redemption. And by citing creation rather than a local situation or cultural circumstances as his basis for the prohibitions, Paul makes it clear that, while these local or cultural issues may have provided the *context* of the issue, they do not provide the *reason* for his advice. His reason for the prohibition of verse 12 is the created role relationship of man and woman, and we may justly conclude that these prohibitions are applicable as long as this reason remains true.⁴⁵

Eve rather than Adam was deceived, Paul writes in v. 14—but how does that support a rule that women cannot teach men? Hurley asks, “Would you rather be

consequences can be when a woman deceived by false teaching conveys it to others” (“Libertarian Women in Ephesus: A Response to Douglas J. Moo’s Article,” *Trinity Journal* 2 [1981]: 176, citing Robertson’s *Grammar*).

⁴³ Hurley, 207. He cites scriptures about inheritance by the firstborn son, but even though he is seeking an application for worship situations, he cites no evidence that the firstborn son necessarily had authority *in worship*. He does not attempt to explain why Adam’s priority would give males authority over females in religious matters but not always in civil government. As evidence that priority is linked with authority, Hurley notes that Col. 1:15-18 connects Christ’s authority with him being firstborn, before all things, and the beginning. Hurley argues that it is reasonable to conclude that Paul connected being first with implying authority.

⁴⁴ Moo, 190. “Paul maintains that the Genesis narrative gives a reason why women should not teach men: Adam was created first and then Eve. In other words, when Paul read Genesis 2, he concluded that the order in which Adam and Eve were created signaled an important difference in the role of men and women” (Schreiner, 105-6).

⁴⁵ Moo, 190-91. If the logic is extended, it would imply that women will be subordinate to men in all eternity, since v. 13 will always be true, but this is probably more than Moo wants to say. It does cast doubt on the validity of his reasoning.

led by an innocent but deceived person, or by a deliberate rebel?”⁴⁶ He dismisses the idea that women are too gullible to be teachers (cf. Titus 2:3, 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15).⁴⁷ However, that interpretation is found in the early church fathers, and it is the simplest reading of the text.⁴⁸ Neuer refers to “the greater susceptibility of women to temptation,” and says that Paul, rather than oppressing women, is simply keeping them out of a situation they could not handle.⁴⁹ Grudem is not clear on this point, but says that Paul refers “to a characteristic of Eve that he sees as relevant for all women in all cultures.”⁵⁰ Grudem writes, “Some complementarians understand this verse to be referring to the fact that Eve wrongfully took leadership in the family and made the decision to eat the forbidden fruit on her own, and other complementarians understand this to refer to a woman’s ‘kinder, gentler nature’ that makes her less likely to draw a hard line when close friends are teaching doctrinal error.”⁵¹ Both of these ideas seem far from what the text actually says—it

⁴⁶ Hurley, 215. Hurley never suggests how we should answer the question. Schreiner notes that this “would seem to argue *against* men teaching women, for at least the woman wanted to obey God, while Adam sinned deliberately” (113-14). But he never answers the question, either.

⁴⁷ Hurley (215) notes that Paul blames Adam for the entry of sin into the world (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:21-22).

⁴⁸ If v. 14 gives a reason for v. 12, these verses say, in short, that women should not teach men because Eve was deceived. The easiest way to get from one concept to another is to assume that the characteristic mentioned for Eve is relevant to the prohibition because it somehow applies to all subsequent women. William J. Webb notes that the traditional teaching of the church is “that women are more easily deceived than men due to an inferior capacity to understand and make sound judgments.... The traditional rendering is the most supportable reading of the text” (*Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* [InterVarsity, 2001], 225). Blomberg notes that the “common Jewish and Christian belief throughout history” is “that women are ontologically inferior to men” (365-66). He further notes, “Attempts, however sophisticated, to defend the view that women are inherently more gullible fly in the face of all contemporary social-scientific analysis and do not fit the context of 1 Timothy” (366).

⁴⁹ Neuer, 120.

⁵⁰ Grudem, 296.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* The fact that these ideas are proposed, despite not being in the text, suggests that people are not comfortable with what the text seems to imply. Blomberg faults Schreiner for suggesting, without any biblical or contemporary evidence, that women are less able to discern doctrinal errors (366). Webb notes, “The revised historical position ‘cleans up’ the traditional view based

specifies deception, and says nothing about leadership or gentleness.⁵²

Does the text imply that women are more easily deceived? Moo thinks that this interpretation is possible, but unlikely. “There is nothing in the Genesis accounts or in Scripture elsewhere to suggest that Eve’s deception is representative of women in general.”⁵³ Moreover, Paul allows women to teach other women—they are capable of teaching correctly. Schreiner also argues against female gullibility: “This interpretation should be rejected since it implies that women are ontologically and intellectually inferior.”⁵⁴

Schreiner notes that “all sin involves deceit,” and Adam was therefore deceived; what v. 14 means is that Eve was deceived *first*—the word “first” is understood from an implied parallel with v. 13.⁵⁵ He writes:

Paul’s purpose is...to focus on the fact that the serpent approached and deceived Eve, not Adam.... The serpent subverted the pattern of male leadership and interacted only with Eve during the temptation. Adam was present throughout and did not intervene. The Genesis temptation, therefore, is indicative of what happens when male leadership is abrogated.⁵⁶

In effect, Schreiner is blaming Adam for sinning first, for he failed to protect his wife from the serpent. Hurley also wants to blame Adam: “Paul seems to be

upon their own social-scientific awareness” (227). He notes that since the text does not say *how* v. 14 is related to v. 12, some speculation is inevitable.

⁵² Webb notes, “The role-reversal interpretation is convoluted; it requires the reader to bring unnecessary and unwarranted information to the text” (114).

⁵³ Moo, 190. In 2 Cor. 11:3, Eve provides an example for both men and women.

⁵⁴ Schreiner, 114.

⁵⁵ Ibid. Blomberg faults this view also: “There are no well-known principles from antiquity...that would make the order in which one was deceived in any way significant” (366).

⁵⁶ Schreiner, 115. If this is Paul’s thought, he picked a roundabout way of expressing it, one that requires the readers to fill in several steps of logic. Schreiner wants to cast blame on Adam, but the text says that Eve is the one who “became a sinner.” Schreiner admits that his interpretation is weak, but says that the egalitarian view is weaker. “The verse is difficult” (112). “I can scarcely claim that I have given the definitive and final interpretation of this passage” (120). “The complementarian view stands on the basis of the clarity of verse 13 so that resolving the interpretation of verse 14 is not crucial for the passage as a whole” (“Women in Ministry,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* [ed. James Beck and Craig Blomberg; Zondervan, 2001], 225).

saying that Eve was not at fault; she was deceived. . . . Could it be that his point in verse 14 is that Adam was the one appointed by God to exercise religious headship?”⁵⁷ Moo makes a slightly different suggestion: Verse 14 “is intended to remind the women at Ephesus that Eve was deceived. . . . precisely in taking the initiative over the man. . . . If the women at the church at Ephesus proclaim their independence. . . they will make the same mistake Eve made and bring similar disaster on themselves and the church.”⁵⁸ In short, there is no widely accepted view among traditional scholars.

Finally, we will consider v. 15, which is not a reason for Paul’s prohibition, but a qualification for v. 14.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, it is part of the paragraph. Hurley says that if the verse “refers to salvation from sin, it is a flat contradiction of Paul’s view of salvation by trust in Christ.” Another option is that the woman will be kept safe in childbearing (implied in the NIV), but “this seems almost totally irrelevant to the context.”⁶⁰ Moreover, as Schreiner says, “the fact that Christian women have often died in childbirth raises serious questions about this interpretation.”⁶¹

The grammar allows another possibility: She (singular, referring to Eve) will be saved through *the* childbearing (the Greek text has the word “the,” possibly referring to the birth of Christ), if they (plural, referring to all later women) remain

⁵⁷ Hurley, 215-16. In this interpretation, too, readers would have to supply several steps of missing logic. “The headship of men in domestic and religious affairs continues from the pre-fall period through the time of Christ’s advent” (220). Note that Hurley again specifies *religious* headship, without any evidence from Genesis for this specificity. Schreiner makes a similar unwarranted qualification: “The creation of Adam before Eve signaled that men are to teach and exercise authority *in the church*” (120, italics added).

⁵⁸ Moo, 190. Note in this view that Eve was not deceived into *eating the fruit*, but into taking initiative. But Genesis has the opposite emphasis: It is clear about the fruit but says little if anything against Eve taking the initiative.

⁵⁹ Schreiner, 115.

⁶⁰ Hurley, 221. Moo notes that this would entail an unusual meaning for *sozō*, normally translated “save” (192). Keener argues, “The most natural way for an ancient reader to have understood ‘salvation’ in the context of childbirth would have been a safe delivery, for women regularly called upon patron deities. . . in childbirth” (*Paul, Women, and Wives*, 118). Payne writes, “Paul’s obvious concern is to highlight the role of woman both in the fall (2:14) and in salvation (2:15)” (178).

⁶¹ Schreiner, 115. He also argues that the verb always has the meaning of spiritual salvation in the Pastoral Epistles.

in the faith. It is not that Eve's salvation is dependent on later women's faithfulness, but the thought is elliptical, requiring readers to supply a verb: Eve will be saved through the birth of Christ, and subsequent women *will be saved*, too, if they remain in the faith. This is a possible interpretation, Hurley says, but "it breaks with the flow of the passage."⁶² Schreiner argues against it: "Those who posit a reference to Jesus' birth have subtly introduced the notion that salvation is secured as a *result* of giving birth to him, whereas the text speaks not of the result of birth but of the actual birthing process."⁶³

Moo suggests that the verse designates "the circumstances in which Christian women will experience their salvation—in maintaining as priorities" the role that Scripture assigns to women.⁶⁴ Paul has simply mentioned one role—bearing children—as a way of designating the female role in general.

Schreiner agrees, saying that childbearing "represents the fulfillment of the woman's domestic role as a mother in distinction from the man."⁶⁵ He notes that the verse mandates more than childbearing: "It is not sufficient for salvation for Christian women merely to bear children [i.e., accept the female role]; they must also persevere in faith, love, holiness, and presumably other virtues.... Women will not be saved if they do not practice good works."⁶⁶ 1 Tim. 4:15-16 provides a

⁶² Hurley, 222. Hurley suggests another possibility: Women will be "kept safe from wrongly seizing men's roles by embracing a woman's role." This seems to read something into the text that is not there, and others have not accepted this meaning of "save." Schreiner notes that "verse 12 is too far from verse 15 for this latter interpretation to be plausible" (116).

⁶³ Schreiner, 116.

⁶⁴ Moo, 192. He speculates that "false teachers were claiming that women could *really* experience what God had for them only if they abandoned the home and became actively involved in teaching and leadership roles in the church."

⁶⁵ Schreiner, 118. "A woman should not violate her role by teaching or exercising authority over a man; instead, she should take her proper role as a mother of children." Paul is not saying that barren women cannot be saved—he is simply citing a common role of a woman that a man cannot possibly have.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* Good works cannot *merit* salvation, but they "are a necessary consequence of salvation (e.g., Rom. 2:6-10, 26-29; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:21).... Since Paul often argues elsewhere that salvation is not gained on the basis of our works (e.g., Rom. 3:19-4:25; Gal. 2:16-3:14; 2 Tim. 1:9-11; Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7), I think it is fair to understand the virtues described here as evidence that the salvation already received is genuine" (*ibid.*, 118-119). In other words,

parallel—Paul says that Timothy will save himself by being a good pastor. An insistence on good behavior does not negate the doctrine of salvation by grace and faith. The point is that women do not need to take on a man’s role in order to be saved. Despite what the false teachers might say against childbearing, women will be saved by staying in their traditional role.

There are some difficulties in this interpretation: First, it ignores the change from singular to plural, requiring that women in general be represented first by a singular and then by a plural. Second, it makes the verse an odd tangential idea nearly irrelevant to the context: I do not permit women to have authority over men, because men were created first and Eve was a sinner, and oh, by the way, women will be saved by being good women.⁶⁷ Third, if Paul wanted to refer to the female role in general, he would have been clearer if he had used a principle he had already mentioned—submission—rather than introducing the specificity of childbearing. Last, it speculates that the false teachings at Ephesus included a criticism of childbearing. This is a plausible suggestion, since the heresy included a rejection of marriage (4:3), but this speculative reconstruction of the setting is precisely the method that traditional scholars have criticized egalitarians for using.⁶⁸ If v. 15 can best be explained by suggesting that it is a response to a particular false teaching in Ephesus, perhaps that approach can be used for the statements in vv. 13-14, too.⁶⁹

Schreiner wishes that Paul had stated things the other way around: women will be saved by faith, if they continue in good works.

⁶⁷ Susan Foh (who supports the traditional view) calls the verse “a sort of non sequitur.” Schreiner criticizes her for that (115), but his interpretation also amounts to a non sequitur, an aside designed to refute something that may have been a false teaching in Ephesus. Paul apparently feels no need to say that men will be saved by staying in their traditional role, rather than abdicating, as Adam supposedly did.

⁶⁸ Schreiner comments: “Egalitarian scholars have been busy remaking the background to the situation in 1 Timothy 2:11-15, but their reconstructions have been highly speculative and sometimes wildly implausible” (223).

⁶⁹ Richard and Catherine Clark Kroeger suggest that Paul was combating some Gnostic heresies taught by women: 1) That Eve was created first, 2) That Eve enlightened Adam with her teaching, and 3) Sex and childbearing is bad. Verses 13-15 can thereby all be explained as refutations of specific erroneous teachings.

Schreiner criticizes the Kroegers for using documents written after the New Testament (88). Admittedly, it cannot be proven that these ideas existed when Paul wrote, but since ideas

Overall, we might find Paul’s logic hard to understand, Gordon admits, but this is not a reason to reject what he says.⁷⁰ Moo concludes that “we are justified in requiring very good reasons *from the text itself* to limit the application of this text in any way. We find no such reasons. Therefore, we must conclude that the restrictions imposed by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:12 are valid for Christians in all places and all times.”⁷¹

Questions remain

In the previous section, we presented the “traditional” view. However, as Proverbs 18:17 says, “The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.” It would be foolish for us to decide the matter before we have heard the other side ask questions about the conclusions. We began this paper with a number of observations, and the traditional interpretation addresses some of them better than others.

- 1) The text twice calls for women in particular to be quiet; it does not allow for *any* form of teaching.⁷² However...
- 2) Women can prophesy in a worship service, saying things that instruct others (1 Cor. 11). Paul believed prophecy and teaching to be different activities, but it is difficult to prove any difference *in the results*. Men might learn

often circulate before they are put into writing, it is *plausible* that such ideas existed in the first century. As Schreiner’s own approach to v. 15 indicates, it is legitimate for scholars to try to understand difficulties in the text by speculating about an unusual need in that specific setting.

Bruce Barron notes that “the internal examination of 1 Timothy points us toward Gnosticism and makes the connection between the two less ‘tenuous’” (“Putting Women in Their Place: 1 Timothy 2 and Evangelical Views of Women in Church Leadership,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 [1990]: 454). This epistle addresses various ideas that were later called Gnostic.

⁷⁰ Gordon, 63.

⁷¹ Moo, 193. By “the text itself,” Moo apparently means the entire Bible, for he allows women to teach some subjects, and to be in authority in some situations, such as civil government, concepts not specifically allowed in 1 Tim. 2.

⁷² Vicente Bejo, Jr. argues that the passage covers behavior not just in church, but “in every place” (v. 8). It would not be appropriate for men to pray with anger anywhere, and it would not be appropriate for women to wear ostentatious clothing anywhere. Paul’s call for submission and quiet demeanor were not intended to apply only to church settings. See “Exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:8-15,” page 6 of 22, posted at <http://churchwomen.tripod.com/a/vbejo.htm>.

something from either form of speech, and both types of speaking need to be evaluated. It is not clear why women should be allowed to speak spontaneously, but not with advance preparation.

3) Females can *sometimes* have authority over males. Paul was dealing with teaching in the church setting; he was not addressing civil government, business, public schools, or evangelism. However, the rationale that complementarians sometimes use to support male authority based on Genesis 2 is not valid when it comes to civil authority, and this inconsistency suggests that the rationale itself may not be valid.

4) Was Paul stating his own policy, or a permanent rule for all churches?

Traditional scholars may claim that everything in the letter is permanently applicable, but this is not true.⁷³ Or they may say that Paul's restriction is permanently valid because Paul supports it from Genesis, but this ignores the fact that Paul used Genesis to argue for a cultural custom in 1 Cor. 11. Paul's policy *might* be appropriate in all churches at all ages, but the fact remains that it was inspired to be written as his *policy*, and his preferences are not always permanently valid (e.g., 1 Cor. 7:7).⁷⁴

5) A woman should learn in "full submission," but women do not have to submit to *all* men. In church, a woman's submission should be to God first,

⁷³ "The pastoral epistles were not written to be manuals of church government. Rather they were written to combat false teaching and heresy. Approximately one-fifth of the 242 verses in the pastorals explicitly treat false teaching. . . . In 1 Timothy 1:3 the concern to prevent false teaching is expressed as the reason Timothy was left in Ephesus" (Evangelical Covenant Church, "Policy on Women in Ministry," 5; posted at www.covchurch.org/cov/ministry/womeninministry.html). "The entire book of 1 Timothy seems to have been written. . . with six key problems in mind, each of which is referred to in the first eight verses and is elaborated throughout the epistle: false teaching, controversies, people leaving the faith, meaningless talk, antinomianism, and Judaizers. . . . Women were involved in each of the first five problems" (Payne, 185). Due to the situation the letter was written for, it should be no surprise that some aspects of the letter do not seem to fit the church today.

⁷⁴ Keener observes, "What is most significant about the wording of the passage, however, is that Paul does not assume that Timothy already knows this rule. Had this rule been established and universal, is it possible that Timothy, who had worked many years with Paul, would not have known it already?" (*Paul, Women, and Wives*, 112). Had the situation never arisen before that women wanted to teach? The situation in Corinth suggests that this is unlikely. As noted earlier, the reason that Paul felt it necessary to write this passage may have been because women were already speaking and seeking leadership.

Scripture second, and the sermon third.⁷⁵ If the pastor says something that contradicts Scripture, a woman should not submit. It is doubtful that this type of submission can be described as “full.” Since modern preaching may contain erroneous ideas and must be evaluated, it is *not* more authoritative than prophecy was. Perhaps the role of the pastor and the preacher’s authority in the church is different today, significantly altered by the existence of the New Testament as *the* authoritative record of church teaching.⁷⁶ People in the pews now have an objective standard by which to judge what is taught, whereas before they did not.

- 6) 1 Tim. 2:12 uses the rare Greek verb *authentēō*. Although it is tempting to see a difference in meaning for a different word, there would be little point in Paul saying that he had a policy against allowing one group of people to exercise a wrong kind of authority against another group;⁷⁷ the verse more naturally says that Paul did not allow women to do something that was permissible for men. It is not clear whether he prohibited teaching *and* authority, or teaching *with* authority, and it does not seem necessary to choose between these two—either way, the verse seems to contradict Paul’s policy of allowing women to prophesy in the Corinthian church.⁷⁸
- 7) In verses 13-15, Paul gives unusual *reasons* for what he says in v. 12.

⁷⁵ In the Septuagint, the Greek word for “permit” always “refers to permission for a specific situation, never for a universally applicable permission.... The vast majority of the NT occurrences...clearly refer to a specific time or to a short or limited time duration only” (Payne, 172). “The women are to ‘submit,’ but the text does not say to whom.... The text itself seems to be discussing attitudes in worship rather than the marriage relationship. The Bible does not elsewhere teach that all women are subject to all males. Submission to the teaching elder in 1 Tim. 3:2 does not fit the text. A natural understanding of the verse would be that the women are to submit to the gospel, to the teaching of Jesus, not to an unnamed person. Theirs is to be a receptive attitude” (Vymeister, 342).

⁷⁶ 2 Tim. 2:2 suggests that “teaching” is the accurate transmission of apostolic sayings. However, most preaching today is not an attempt to *transmit* the apostolic teachings (members already have a copy), but is an attempt to explain them and persuade people to apply them in modern situations.

⁷⁷ However, a negative meaning is possible: Paul did say that *males* should not pray with anger (2:8). The doctrinal team does not have the technical expertise to resolve the meaning of the word, and we cannot build our conclusions on what would surely be a debatable point.

⁷⁸ “It is...safe to say that Paul does not want women to teach at this time” (Vymeister, 346).

- a) Adam was formed first, and that might give him authority—but there is nothing in Genesis to say why it would give him (and by implication all males) exclusive authority in doctrine but not in civil government. Traditional interpreters do not explain why one applies but the other does not; they base their belief on 1 Tim. 2:12 rather than Genesis 2, and it is erroneous to say that Genesis 2 gives males authority specifically in matters of worship.⁷⁹
- b) Adam was a rebel. Traditional interpreters do not explain why this has any relevance to church authority, and it suggests that there was something going on behind the scenes in Ephesus that we do not know about.⁸⁰ The readers knew why this was relevant to Paul’s prohibition because they had information that we do not. Otherwise, the structure of the verse implies that Eve’s gullibility is relevant to contemporary women, but some complementarian scholars distance themselves from this traditional interpretation.
- c) V. 15 says that “women will be saved through childbearing.” Interpreters agree that this is a difficult verse, and it again suggests that we are missing some crucial information. This increases the possibility

⁷⁹ “If there had been no doubt about whose creation came first, the assertion of v. 13 would not have been necessary” (ibid., 347). Vymeister reports Gnostic teachings that gave Eve priority: Adam addresses Eve: ‘You are the one who has given me life.’ Eve is said to have ‘sent her breath into Adam, who had no soul.’ Eve...declares herself the ‘mother of my father and the sister of my husband,...to whom I gave birth’” (340, citing *Hypostasis of the Archons* 2.4.89.14-17, *On the Origin of the World* 115, and *Thunder, Perfect Mind* 6.2.13.30-32).

Douglas Moo, a complementarian, offers support: “Some later gnostic texts interpret Eve’s eating the fruit in the garden as a *positive* step—for by doing so, she gains access to knowledge (*gnosis*), the central feature of the gnostic system and the means of salvation.... Could it be that some of the Ephesian false teachers were arguing in a similar manner, stimulating Paul’s categorical assertion: ‘Eve was *deceived* and became a *sinner*?’... It may be that this tradition was partially responsible for the statement” (“The Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11-15: A Rejoinder,” *Trinity Journal* 2 (1981): 204).

⁸⁰ Ann Bowman summarizes: “Historical reconstructions generally fall into three categories. First, women may have been seeking to improperly assert authority over men in the worship assembly. Second, women may have been teaching heretical doctrine. Third, women generally were doctrinally untaught and thus in greater danger of falling into heresy” (“Women in Ministry,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* [ed. James Beck and Craig Blomberg; Zondervan, 2001], 288).

that Paul is addressing a situation that is unusual.⁸¹

- 8) 1 Tim. 2 addresses several cultural matters. Traditional scholars say a) we can see a universal principle behind vv. 8-9, but v. 12 is a universal principle, and b) Paul supports v. 12 with evidence from Scripture, thereby indicating that it is a universal rule.⁸² However, 1 Cor. 11 shows that Paul *can* use Scripture even when arguing for a cultural custom, and he could have cited a scripture to support vv. 8-9, too, without making them universal. The principle behind v. 12 may be a general one, just as it is for 5:9 or 6:1.
- 9) Some of Paul's advice seems specific to Timothy's situation, without any specific "application" required today, so we cannot assume that every passage must be applied today—for example, 1 Tim. 5:9.⁸³ Traditional scholars do not address the inconsistency very well.
- 10) In 1 Tim. 6:1-2, Paul counsels slaves to submit to their masters for the sake of the gospel.⁸⁴ Paul's advice is not a permanent approval of slavery, and in

⁸¹ "While the sparseness of the information and the complex construction of the passage make it difficult for modern readers to know precisely what Paul had in mind, it is clear that he was addressing some current concern that Timothy and the Christians in Ephesus would have readily understood" (Vymeister, 350).

⁸² Schreiner writes, "The prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12 is grounded by an appeal to creation, indicating that the command has universal validity" (109).

⁸³ Schreiner acknowledges the problem of inconsistency when he writes, "Perhaps we have not been serious enough about applying 1 Timothy 5:3-16 to our culture" (109). He offers a tentative application, but it still allows numerous exceptions. The Evangelical Covenant Church paper notes, "Those who are quick to argue against women in ministry on the basis of texts like 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 and 1 Timothy 2:11,12 need to ask why they do not imitate the kind of church service described in 1 Corinthians 14:26-36 or why they do not institute widows' roles and care for widows according to the instructions of 1 Timothy 5. Using proof-texts out of context and using only the parts of the text that we like are not suitable practices for a church claiming to believe the Bible" (6).

⁸⁴ The evangelistic purpose of slave submission is explicit in 1 Tim. 6, but Eph. 6:5-9 shows that Paul can issue similar commands without any acknowledgement that they are given for expedience in a temporary cultural situation. Indeed, in this passage he seems to deal with slavery as if it were a legitimate social structure, like marriage and family. In Eph. 6:8, Paul gives a timeless reason for slave submission: because God will reward everyone for the good they do. The fact that the supporting reason is timeless does not change the fact that the initial command had a temporary application.

the same way, his policy for women may be a temporary need, not a permanent approval of authority restricted to males. Paul did not directly command slavery, but his policy was that slaves should submit to their masters. By doing this, Paul “taught something less than God’s ideal in order to advance the gospel”⁸⁵—which means that he *might* have done something similar for women.

Hermeneutics

The question in this passage is not just one of exegesis (what *did* it mean?), but also one of hermeneutics (what does it mean *for us?*). We want to understand what Paul wrote, but we also want to understand whether and how we should *apply* it in churches today. That is a question of hermeneutics, the art of interpreting the text for modern application. Paul said that younger widows should get married (5:14), but does this advice apply to all younger widows today? Do cultural expectations make the situation of widows significantly different today? (In many cultures, they probably do, and in some, perhaps not.)

When Paul told slaves to submit to their masters, was he endorsing slavery? Christian slave-owners often said he was, but when other Christians perceived the injustice involved in owning a human being, they began to ask more questions of the texts. It is generally only when people see problems in the way that a text is applied, that they begin to ask more probing questions of it. People who are happy with the status quo don’t see the need for questions, but when questions arise, we all need to look at the text more carefully. Sometimes the objections are valid; sometimes they are not.

Scholars on both sides of this controversy agree that 1 Tim. 2:12 puts certain

Some scholars argue that Paul taught female social conformity for the sake of the gospel. “Paul’s missionary strategy provides the rationale for this approach. This is most succinctly described in 1 Cor 9:19-23, where Paul states that he conforms his behavior to those around him so that he can win as many as possible” (James G. Sigountos and Myron Shank, “Public Roles for Women in the Pauline Church: A Reappraisal of the Evidence,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26 [1983]: 293). Sigountos and Shank show that Greek culture accepted women in priestly roles—prophesying and praying—but not teaching roles.

⁸⁵ Contra Grudem, 323. Paul made some comments that could be interpreted as criticisms of slavery, but none are clear denunciations. 1 Cor. 7:21 merely makes an allowance for specific situations; it could be claimed that Gal. 3:28 addresses salvation but not social roles, and Philemon 16 may apply only to Onesimus.

restrictions on women: Paul did not allow women to teach or to have authority over men in the functioning of the church—he told them to be quiet.⁸⁶ The question is whether these restrictions were based on the situation in Ephesus, the culture in the Greco-Roman-Jewish world, or a principle rooted in the way that God wants men and women to interact with one another in worship.

Craig Keener presents an egalitarian view, but begins with this admission: “I believe that Paul probably prohibits not simply ‘teaching authoritatively,’ but both teaching Scripture at all and having (or usurping) authority at all.” But he then asks, “Is this a universal rule? If so, it is a rule with some exceptions. . . . But it is also possible that this text is the exceptional one, which can be argued if it can be shown to address a particular situation.”⁸⁷ After all, if it were to be a universal rule, one might have expected. . . Timothy. . . to be aware of this rule already.”⁸⁸ He then gives evidence that there are exceptions, and he notes, “The one passage in the Bible that specifically prohibits women from teaching is addressed to the one church where we know that false teachers were effectively targeting women.”⁸⁹

Many egalitarians do not argue about what 1 Tim 2:11-15 says—they disagree about its significance for the church today. Although there are a few disagreements about specific words in the text, much of the egalitarian case

⁸⁶ James Beck and Craig Blomberg note that some primarily American egalitarians have proposed “hermeneutical oddities” in an effort to show that these verses are not restrictive. Egalitarians in the British Commonwealth tend however “to argue that these texts did imply rather widespread prohibitions on women’s leadership in the first-century world, but they were due to specific circumstances within that world that largely no longer obtain today” (“Reflections on Egalitarian Essays,” 164).

⁸⁷ The choice is more complicated than Keener suggests, because a command can be local and temporary even if we cannot demonstrate the situation that prompted the command, and a command can be universal even if it was prompted by a local situation. For example, Paul says that men should pray without anger or disputing (1 Tim. 2:8). This admonition seems universally appropriate, yet prompted by some situation that we have no specifics on.

⁸⁸ Craig Keener, “Women in Ministry,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (ed. James Beck and Craig Blomberg; Zondervan, 2001), 53.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 53-54. He writes, “False teachers targeted women in the households (2 Tim. 3:6), who were proving incapable of learning correctly (2 Tim. 3:7; cf. 1 Tim. 4:7).” Nancy Vymeister writes, “Not only are women carried away by the false teachers, some of them ‘learn to be idlers, gadding about from house to house, and not only idlers but gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not’ (1 Tim 5:13), evidently spreading false teaching” (*Women in Ministry*, 337).

focuses instead on evidence that the text was not written “for all churches in all subsequent centuries.” Much of this effort has been an attempt to show that Paul was addressing an unusual situation—they have tried to sketch a situation that motivated Paul to write these verses.⁹⁰ These reconstructions are speculative, sometimes implausible, and sometimes contradictory. Since the original situation cannot be proven, we will not spend much effort along these lines. However, we will address some evidence that may suggest that Paul’s policy is *not* intended for all time.

First, there is evidence that some commands in Scripture do not apply today. For example, as we saw in a previous paper, women do not need to cover their heads when they pray in church today, nor do believers have to greet one another with a kiss. We do not have to pray for Paul to be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, nor encourage virgins to avoid marriage. Some commands in Scripture are based in culture; the question here is whether Paul’s policy on the conduct of women is one of them.⁹¹

There is evidence within the Pastoral Epistles, too, that even though these letters give guidance on church matters, some commands are situation specific—even though the original readers might have assumed the commands to be universally true. When Paul says that older widows should be put on a list and younger widows should remarry, Timothy may well have thought the rule applicable for all time. When Paul commands Christian slaves to serve their Christian masters well, there is nothing in the text to indicate that Paul expects this situation to be a temporary one. Therefore, although we base our beliefs and practices on the Bible, this does not mean that we have to follow every instruction

⁹⁰ Some suggest that the situation involved a culture that rejected female leadership, but this seems contradicted by archaeological evidence and by the role that Paul permitted women in 1 Cor. 11. Others suggest that Paul was concerned that women were generally poorly educated, and he told them to learn in silence—implying that they would not have to be silent after they had been taught. “If he prohibits women from teaching because they are unlearned, his demand that they learn constitutes a long-range solution to the problem” (Keener, *Paul*, 112).

⁹¹ Grudem argues that governance is an essential aspect of the church, not a cultural matter (323). But this misses the point—egalitarians are not arguing against all governance, but saying that governance *restricted to males* is a cultural matter that is not essential to the church, just as greeting one another *with a kiss* is a cultural matter. We can have the core function without insisting on the specific form found in the New Testament.

that the Bible contains; we have to see whether it applies to us. This does not prove that 1 Tim. 2:12 is a temporary admonition—it simply shows that it *may* be.

Summary

To put the matter in simple terms, we see in 1 Cor. 11 that Paul permitted women to speak in worship meetings, but in 1 Tim. 2:12 he said they should be silent—they cannot teach or have authority. There are two basic ways to address this difference:

- 1) Complementarian scholars try to resolve this contradiction by saying that 1 Cor. 11 permits a form of speaking that is not authoritative. Although they cannot prove that modern preaching is more authoritative than ancient prophecy, they believe that this distinction best resolves the problem, and Paul’s prohibition is still valid. In brief, “We know that women cannot have authority, so the speaking that Paul permitted in Corinth must not be authoritative.”
- 2) Egalitarian scholars try to resolve the problem by saying that 1 Tim. 2:12 was a temporary restriction based on circumstances in Paul’s churches at the time he wrote, a situation that apparently did not exist when he wrote to Corinth. Although they cannot prove what that situation was, it is not necessary to reconstruct it. The fact that Paul allowed women to prophesy in Corinth shows that the restriction was not a rule for all time. In brief, “We know that Paul permitted women to speak, so the prohibition in 1 Tim. 2:12 (which includes speaking) must be temporary.”

We believe that the second approach has more merit, for these reasons:

- Prophecy, by its very nature, seems to involve authority, for it means to speak words inspired by God. Prophecies must be “weighed” (1 Cor. 14:29),⁹² but this is done not to disagree with God, but to ascertain *whether* the words are from God. If they are words of God, they should be heeded. Modern preaching does not have more authority than first-century prophecy,⁹³ and it is inconsistent to argue that women may be

⁹² Complementarian scholars have suggested that churches had a designated time for evaluating prophecies. As discussed in the previous paper, this is unlikely.

⁹³ Some scholars seem to focus on the question of authority, but leadership in the church depends more on personal example, and the truth of Scripture, than on bare assertion. “One is hard-

inspired by God to speak in church about everything *except* the Word of God. In Corinth, Paul allowed women to speak with authority in church,⁹⁴ which indicates that the prohibition in 1 Tim. 2:12 should not be taken as a universal or permanent rule. The inconsistent attempts by complementarians to draw lines between what women can do and what they cannot suggests that the task is impossible.⁹⁵

- Paul was inspired to write this prohibition as his own policy, not as a command. True, his policies might sometimes be taken as a command, but we have also learned to discount the policies he describes in 1 Cor. 7, for example. When Paul wrote to Timothy, he had a policy against women in authority—but God does not seem to have that policy.⁹⁶ He gave Deborah authority as a prophetess and judge—and there is no logical reason why the creation priority of man gives males exclusive authority in the religious sphere but not in civil government. The Bible clearly shows that although women rarely had civil authority, God does allow it, and the primary passage that would seem to limit female authority in the church is introduced as a policy rather than a command.
- Considering the nature of 1 Timothy, it is not surprising that Paul is describing a policy that was of temporary validity. It was written to help Timothy combat some heresies that were causing problems in Ephesus; its directives include cultural matters such as the posture of prayer and the way in which women might adorn themselves. Paul’s advice

pressed to find a biblical link between local church leadership and ‘authority’ (*exousia*). The New Testament writers simply do not make this connection.... It is the church that possesses authority and not particular individuals” (Linda Belleville, “Women in Ministry,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry* [ed. James Beck and Craig Blomberg; Zondervan, 2001], 104-6).

⁹⁴ Paul commended women as fellow workers in the gospel. Although he does not give them specific titles, the implication is that they had significant influence in his churches—and that probably involved *some* speaking, although we do not have enough details to be more precise.

⁹⁵ Beck and Blomberg note that conservative churches often allow female missionaries to have considerable authority in the mission field but not at home—this “often remains an embarrassing double standard that undermines some of the credibility of the hierarchicalist position” (310).

⁹⁶ Assuming that Paul was in agreement with God’s policies, we conclude that his restrictive policy was necessitated by the situation his churches were in. As we saw in the previous paper, that is the most likely explanation for the restriction that Paul gave in 1 Cor. 14:34.

concerning widows, despite being issued with commands, is not applicable to the church today. Although the letter is about church administration, it was written for a specific situation, and we should not assume in advance that its instructions are timeless truths.⁹⁷

Complementarians argue that Paul's policy must be universal, because he supports it from Scripture. However, we see in 1 Cor. 11 that Paul uses Scripture to support his command for women to wear head coverings, too. He can use Scripture to argue for a temporary policy. His use of Scripture is not an attempt to explain what Genesis means⁹⁸—it is simply a use of one part of Scripture to add support to one part of his argument. Moreover, the obscurity of 1 Tim. 2:13-15 suggests that Paul was dealing with an unusual situation, and that we do not understand the relevance of his arguments because we do not know the details of the situation. It is not clear why Adam being formed first would give all subsequent men authority in the church but not in civil government; it is even more obscure why men should have authority if Adam sinned deliberately.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart write, "That 1 Timothy 2:11-12 might be culturally relative can be supported first of all by exegesis of all three of the Pastoral Epistles. Certain women were troublesome in the church at Ephesus (1 Tim. 5:11-15; 2 Tim. 3:6-9) and they appear to have been a major part of the cause of the false teachers' making headway there. Since women are found teaching (Acts 18:26) and prophesying (Acts 21:8; 1 Cor. 11:5) elsewhere in the New Testament, it is altogether likely that 1 Timothy 2:11-12 speaks to a local problem" (*How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* [Zondervan, 1982], 69).

⁹⁸ Paul uses Scripture selectively (saying that men are in the image of God, not saying that women are, too). Paul's use of Scripture in support of this policy is no proof of permanence, just as his use of a timeless truth in Eph. 6:8 does not mean that his policy for slaves was permanent. Keener writes, "In the polemical context of Galatians 3:16, where Paul may be responding to his opponents by using their own methods, he employs a standard interpretive technique of his contemporaries: Apply the text the way you need to in order to make your point. While some of us may not want to accept that Paul uses Scripture in an ad hoc way at times (it makes it more difficult for us to teach sound hermeneutics to our students), respect for Scripture requires us to revise our preconceptions in light of what we find in the text, rather than forcing the text to fit philosophical assumptions about what we think it *should* say" (61).

⁹⁹ Paul's policy would be appropriate under the following scenario: False teaching was sweeping the congregation, targeting women in particular, with the ideas that Eve was created first, that Adam was deceived, and that women should avoid marriage and giving birth. There is evidence for the first and fourth points in 1 Timothy itself; points two and three are speculative, but this scenario becomes more plausible when we see that these doctrines were later taught in this very area.

In short, it is difficult to take this passage as a permanent command restricting all women from all leadership positions in all churches. It indicates that women should not speak in church, and yet Paul himself permitted women to speak authoritative words in church. His prohibition should therefore be seen as based on the situation at the time, not a rule that applies in all circumstances. It is not even written as a command, so it is preferable to take it as a policy of temporary validity, given because of a temporary need.

The early church had a different view.¹⁰⁰ We respect church history, but in this case we believe that Scripture, our standard for faith and practice, has been misunderstood—just as it was often misunderstood in the matter of slavery, and of salvation by grace. The culture of previous interpreters had blinded them to questions they should have asked but did not. Scholars of *all* persuasions today recognize errors in the historical interpretation of passages about women.

In our next paper, we will conclude this series of studies with some policy recommendations for the diverse situations found within our fellowship.

“It is now known that Ephesus was a major center for Mother Goddess worship...., major tenets being that a female goddess gave birth to the world, that Eve was created before Adam, and that to achieve highest exaltation woman must achieve independence from all males and from child-bearing” (JoAnn Davidson, “Women in Scripture,” in *Women in Ministry* [ed. Nancy Vymeister; Andrews University Press, 1998], 178). Although the evidence comes from the second century, the teachings may have circulated before Paul wrote. “1 Tim 2:13-14 makes very good sense as a coherent counter-argument to a specific problem—namely, a false interpretation of Genesis by heretical women. Paul refutes the Gnostic arguments by reasserting that Adam was created first and that he was created perfect, not ignorant.... It is not simply that some women are teaching error. Rather, the placing of any woman, whether qualified or not, in authority, may be undesirably reinforcing pagan cultural baggage” (Barron, 455-56).

¹⁰⁰ Dissenting voices may be found as early as the 17th century, but they became much more prominent in the 20th century. It was certainly not the modern feminist movement that caused Margaret Fell to write her book *Women’s Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures* (London, 1666). Beck and Blomberg note that “secular cultural forces have in part contributed to the ascendancy of hierarchicalism” as well as egalitarianism (168). All interpreters are influenced by their culture, sometimes in ways they do not realize.

Appendix 1: *Authenteō*

“A precise consensus as to the meaning of the word has not been achieved among well-known lexicographers.”¹⁰¹ The word sometimes had a negative meaning, sometimes a neutral meaning of exercising authority. The lexical question is what it meant when Paul wrote the Pastorals. Did it have a negative meaning—to use violence, to domineer, to usurp authority—or a neutral meaning, to exercise authority in general, in a way that might be either bad or good?

Baldwin analyzed 85 occurrences of *authenteō* and found only three uses before Paul. Philodemus used it in the sense of “to rule”; a private letter used it in the sense of “to compel,” and Aristonicus used it to mean “instigate.”¹⁰² Some of the most negative meanings suggested have been based on the fact that the noun *authentēs* can mean murderer, but there is no evidence that the verb was used to mean “murder,” and the noun may not necessarily be derived from this verb.

Two examples from Chrysostom (A.D. 390) are particularly interesting: “Eve exercised authority once wrongly.” Baldwin comments: “The implication... is that Chrysostom could not make the negative force felt without the addition of *kakōs* [“wrongly”], and he therefore did not regard the verb *authenteō* as negative in itself.”¹⁰³ However, in the second example Chrysostom uses *authenteō* with a negative meaning *without* adding any word: Do not try *to have your own way* with unbelievers, but redeem the time (he is commenting on Col. 4:5). Baldwin concludes that in this instance, the word means something like “domineer.”¹⁰⁴

Baldwin concludes that the word *most often* has a neutral meaning, but as with any word, the final determination of meaning must be based on the context in which it is used.

¹⁰¹ H. Scott Baldwin, “An Important Word: *Ἀυθεντέω* in 1 Timothy 2:12,” in *Women in the Church*, 2nd ed., 40.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 49-50.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 47, and see the first edition of Köstenberger et al., p. 286. Wayne Grudem is not as certain that the word has a negative meaning. “The sense could be, ‘Don’t just give orders all the time because your wife is subject to you.’... On the other hand, the parallel with telling the wife not to be puffed up (proud) argues for a more negative sense for the verb in this instance. In any case, it is still over three hundred years after the time of the New Testament” (308).