

# Reflections on the “new” Vatican position about homosexuality



I've been noticing a lot of conversation in the last few days about the Vatican's apparent "shift" regarding homosexuality, both in the secular press and among Christians. There is both celebrating (by secularists) and gnashing of teeth (by traditional Christians). Before they conclude either that the Vatican has finally "seen the light," or that "the sky is falling," people should read the document in its entirety: [Relatio post disceptationem](#).

The document clearly affirms the historic Christian position on marriage. The key paragraph is probably the following:

*Jesus Himself, referring to the primordial plan for the human couple, reaffirms the indissoluble union between man and woman, while understanding that "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning" (Mt 19,8). In this way, He shows how divine condescension always accompanies the path of humanity, directing it towards its new beginning, not without passing through the cross.*

What is being addressed seems clearly to be an issue of pastoral response to what are described as "wounded families" and "irregular situations." A number of such "irregular

situations” are referred to: African polygamy, children born outside the context of marriage, civil marriages (a problem for Roman Catholics, since non-church marriages are not recognized), religiously “mixed” marriages, non-remarried divorced, remarried divorced, cohabiting couples, homosexuals.

The document says very little about homosexuality, but clearly distinguishes between homosexual orientation and homosexual practice. The key paragraph is:

*Homosexuals have gifts and qualities to offer to the Christian community: are we capable of welcoming these people, guaranteeing to them a fraternal space in our communities? Often they wish to encounter a Church that offers them a welcoming home. Are our communities capable of providing that, accepting and valuing their sexual orientation, without compromising Catholic doctrine on the family and matrimony? [my emphasis]*

The document affirms the following:

- 1) There is no compromise on the church’s historic stance: “In this light, the value and consistency of natural marriage must first be emphasized.”
- 2) The pastoral goal in cases in which “irregular situations” exist is to regularize the situation wherever possible: “All these situations have to be dealt with in a constructive manner, seeking to transform them into opportunities to walk towards the fullness of marriage and the family in the light of the Gospel.”
- 3) The document asks for a pastoral sensitivity in response to those in such situations, an approach that (to use Reformation language) is driven by the promise of grace, not the condemnation of law:

*Each damaged family first of all should be listened to with*

*respect and love, becoming companions on the journey as Christ did with the disciples of the road to Emmaus. In a particular way the words of Pope Francis apply in these situations: "The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this "art of accompaniment", which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Es 3,5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life» (Evangelii Gaudium, 169).*

4) Even in the presence of "irregular situations," a pastoral approach should recognize that there often are positive aspects included in the relationships: for example, cohabiting couples exhibit many of the positive characteristics of marriage, and many do eventually marry; gay couples do care about and sacrifice for one another, and, if there are children involved, the church has a pastoral responsibility to them:

*Without denying the moral problems connected to homosexual unions it has to be noted that there are cases in which mutual aid to the point of sacrifice constitutes a precious support in the life of the partners. Furthermore, the Church pays special attention to the children who live with couples of the same sex, emphasizing that the needs and rights of the little ones must always be given priority.*

As an aside, this is simply recognizing that even in a sinful situation, there are always elements of grace present. Without approving of the compromised situation, the church is asked to recognize that these elements of grace can be steps toward moving in the right direction:

*All these situations have to be dealt with in a constructive manner, seeking to transform them into opportunities to walk*

*towards the fullness of marriage and the family in the light of the Gospel. They need to be welcomed and accompanied with patience and delicacy. With a view to this, the attractive testimony of authentic Christian families is important, as subjects for the evangelization of the family.*

5) Aside from pastoral sensitivity, the primary concern of the document seems to be evangelism, that is, how might the church most effectively communicate the gospel to those in broken family situations? “The announcement of the Gospel of the family is an urgent issue for the new evangelization. The Church has to carry this out with the tenderness of a mother and the clarity of a teacher (cf. Eph 4,15), in fidelity to the merciful kenosis of Christ. The truth is incarnated in human fragility not to condemn it, but to cure it.”

6) There is a christocentric focus:

*In order to “walk among contemporary challenges, the decisive condition is to maintain a fixed gaze on Jesus Christ, to pause in contemplation and in adoration of His Face. ... Indeed, every time we return to the source of the Christian experience, new paths and undreamed of possibilities open up” (Pope Francis, Address of 4 October 2014). Jesus looked upon the women and the men he met with love and tenderness, accompanying their steps with patience and mercy, in proclaiming the demands of the Kingdom of God.*

As I read it, the point is that, pastorally, the church needs to act more like Jesus, and less like Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50).

If there is a shift, it is not in the church’s historic teaching about sexuality, but rather in the recognition that the church has done a poor job in communicating the gospel to people in such “irregular situations.” If the only message that cohabiting couples, divorced couples, and gay couples

hear is that they are condemned because they are sinners, they will not be able to hear the good news of forgiveness and healing, and they will be reluctant to be reconciled either to Christ or to the church.

Last week, TSM (where I teach) had a conference on “Christian Faith and Same-Sex Attraction: Finding Paths to Ministry.” My own take is that the Vatican is saying something very similar to the issues addressed at that conference.

Without in any way compromising the church’s historic teaching about sexuality, I think it important that those of us who are orthodox Christians recognize that we have often done a poor job of communicating to people of same-sex attraction that the gospel really is good news, even for them. Aside from a suggestion to read the Vatican document for yourself, I would also suggest that folks would profit from reading the book of my colleague, Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*, (Zondervan, 2010).

As a final reflection, one of the key themes of the document is one that I think should be heeded by all orthodox Christians who have been fighting the battle of the cultural wars of the last few decades. A demand for conversion is not one that only needs to be addressed to those in anomalous sexual relationships. If the church is to be heard in its call for conversion, it needs to heed that call itself. It is not enough to just keep telling gay people that they are sinners:

*For this reason, what is required is a missionary conversion: it is necessary not to stop at an announcement that is merely theoretical and has nothing to do with people’s real problems. It must not be forgotten that the crisis of faith has led to a crisis in matrimony and the family and, as a result, the transmission of faith from parents to children has often been interrupted. Confronted by a strong faith, the imposition of certain cultural perspectives that weaken the family is of no importance.*

*Conversion has, above all, to be that of language so that this might prove to be effectively meaningful. The announcement is about letting it be experienced that the Gospel of the family is the response to the deepest expectations of a person: to his or her dignity and its full realization in reciprocity and communion. This is not merely about presenting a set of regulations but about putting forward values, responding to the need of those who find themselves today even in the most secularized countries.*

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## **Concerning Women's Ordination: Speaking and Teaching**



I

In the last few essays in this series on women's ordination, I have focused on the handful of passages in the writings of the apostle Paul to which complementarians regularly appeal to justify their position that women should always be subordinate

to men and should not exercise authority over men in the church. In the previous two essays, I have focused on the two lengthiest passages in Paul's writings discussing questions of the relationship between men and women: Ephesians 5:21-33, in which Paul discusses the relationship between husbands and wives, and 1 Corinthians 11:3-16, in which Paul talks about disorderly practices connected with the ways in which men and women were leading church worship. I have argued that there is nothing in these passages to suggest a subordination of women to men or a hierarchical order defined by a position of permanent authority of men over women. Appeal to Paul's metaphor of "head" (κεφαλή, *kephalē*) to justify the complementarian position of "headship" as authority of men over women represents a misunderstanding of how Paul used that metaphor, and is reading into the text something that is not there.<sup>1</sup>

In this essay, I will address two much shorter passages in Paul's writing which, in the end, provide the strongest biblical warrants to which complementarians appeal, the "last resort" to which appeal is made if all else fails – 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15. (Indeed, these two passages are often the *first* resort in less formal settings.) At first glance, a straightforward reading of English translations of the passages, especially when select verses are read out of context (as they often are), makes it seem as if Paul intended to forbid any public role to women in worship: "As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches." (1 Cor. 14:34b-35); "I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet." (1 Tim. 2:12).

Complementarians themselves recognize that these are the crucial passages for their position in the light of which they then read other passages. George W. Knight III states that these two passages are "clearly the didactic passages on the subject [of 'headship']", while 1 Corinthians 11 only mentions

the subject incidentally. Therefore, our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 ought to govern our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11, not vice versa.”<sup>2</sup>

These are also the passages to which those arguing for a subordination of women to men in the history of church tradition have regularly appealed. Origen wrote, quoting Paul, “‘It is shameful for a woman to speak in church’ [1 Cor. 14:35], whatever she says, even if she says something excellent or holy, because it comes from the mouth of a woman.”<sup>3</sup> The *Apostolic Constitutions* states: “If we did not allow [women] to teach, how can we assent to their being priests, which is contrary to nature?”<sup>4</sup> Thomas Aquinas stated that a woman should not exercise authority over a man<sup>5</sup>; Richard Hooker wrote: “To make women teachers in the house of God were a gross absurdity, seeing the Apostle hath said, ‘I permit not a woman to teach.’”<sup>6</sup> John Knox wrote: “The apostle taketh power frome all woman to speake in the assemblie. Ergo he permitteth no woman to rule aboue man”<sup>7</sup> At the same time, it should be noted that, unlike the repeated complementarian assertions that subordination of women to men does not rest on any inequality, these earlier writers understood the subordination of women to men to rest on an inherent ontological defect. Women were considered to be less rational, more gullible, and more susceptible to temptation, and thus, were restricted not only from church office, but from any position of authority over any men in any sphere whatsoever.<sup>8</sup> And, of course, it is these two passages that are often referenced by feminists as evidence that the apostle Paul was an irremediable sexist.

As with Paul’s teaching about “head coverings” in 1 Corinthians 11, it needs to be acknowledged up front that these are two of the most difficult passages in Paul’s writings to interpret. On a straightforward reading, 1



Corinthians 14:35 would seem to demand absolute silence of all women in church, and would forbid such activities as women singing in choirs or teaching Sunday School classes, activities women engage in even in complementarian churches. Moreover, if the passage demanded absolute silence of women in church, it would be in direct contradiction to 1 Corinthians 11, in which the context of Paul's discussion about whether women should wear head coverings when prophesying, presumes that women are indeed speaking publicly in church, and in the same manner as men. Accordingly, whatever Paul is prohibiting in the passage, the statement that women should "keep silent" is clearly referring to some particular women in some particular context, not to all women at all times and in all places. Correct interpretation of the passage rests on discovering to which women Paul was referring in this passage, in what context, and under what circumstances.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 2:14 that Adam was not deceived, but Eve was, might logically seem to imply that he is forbidding women to teach because women are inherently more susceptible to deception than men – but, whatever previous Christian tradition might have affirmed, complementarians do not want to draw this conclusion!<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, a more careful reading of these two passages is in order.

### **1 Corinthians 14:33b-36**

As with Paul's discussion about "head coverings" in 1 Corinthians 11:3-16, 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 is difficult to interpret because Paul assumes that he and his readers in Corinth have a common knowledge of things that we ourselves cannot possibly know. The contemporary reader is in the position of listening in on and trying to understand the gist of someone else's conversation when he or she has not heard the beginning. As with the earlier passage, any contemporary reader has no choice but to engage in a certain amount of speculation as to the actual problem that Paul is addressing, the context of the situation in Corinth that led to Paul

writing these three verses, the reasons for Paul's prohibitions, and, assuming that Paul is not deliberately contradicting what he had written in 1 Corinthians 11, the specific kind of silence that Paul is enjoining. Accordingly, any attempt to understand the passage is necessarily tentative, and that is as true for complementarian interpretations as for egalitarians. A certain humility is required. As Alan F. Johnson writes, "Frankly, it is much easier to cite views and dismiss them for various reasons than to offer a completely satisfying alternative."<sup>11</sup> The following is a summary of the various alternative interpretations offered by scholars.

### **Did Paul Write It?**

A number of contemporary biblical scholars argue that the text is an interpolation, and was not written by Paul at all.<sup>12</sup> Scholars give several reasons to doubt the passage's authenticity.

(1) Gordon Fee points out that the Western manuscript tradition places 1 Cor. 14:34-35 after verse 40, while no non-Western manuscript does so. There are two possible explanations for this difference. First, the verses were in Paul's original text, but very early in its transmission, a copyist, for unknown reasons, moved the verses to a different place. Alternatively, the verses were not originally in Paul's text, but a copyist wrote them in the margin. At a later date, two later copyists moved the gloss into the text, one after verse 33, one after verse 40. Fee argues on principles of "transcriptional probability" that the latter is more likely the case. It is easier to explain the differences in the textual tradition by the assumption of a common origin in a gloss than to account for why a later scribe would have moved the verses from where Paul had originally put them.

(2) The verses read as an interruption to Paul's argument, and

the passage not only makes perfect sense without them, but better sense if they are omitted.

(3) The linguistic ties between the passage (“speaking,” “silence,” “submission”) are used in different ways from the way that Paul uses them in the rest of the letter.<sup>13</sup>

(4) The verses are in “obvious contradiction” to 11:2-16, which assume that women are praying and prophesying in public worship. To the contrary, the prohibition against speaking is absolute in these verses, and scholars must engage in numerous arguments to “get around” their literal meaning.

(5) The verses contain language that is contrary to Paul’s usual manner, specifically, the phrase “even as the Law says.” When Paul appeals to the law, he always cites the text, and Paul never appeals to the law in an absolute sense to justify behavior. Quite the contrary! Also, there is no such text in the Old Testament law to which Paul could be appealing.<sup>14</sup> Finally, the expression the “churches of the saints” is contrary to Paul’s language and the flow of the argument. Why would Paul suddenly switch to language about “the churches” when his immediate concern is the church at Corinth?

If the verses were not actually written by Paul, then there is no problem of interpretation to be addressed, at least for those who take seriously issues of apostolic authority. The “interpolation” argument is not accepted universally, however. Other New Testament scholars argue in favor of Pauline authenticity on the following grounds:

(1) The verses appear in all New Testament manuscripts we possess. Given that there are no manuscripts that lack the verses, it would have to have been inserted at an extremely early date.

(2) Verses 34-35 take up a significant amount of vocabulary from the preceding verses (“speaking,” “silence,” “order”).

The concern about Paul's use of "the law" is surprising, but not inexplicable.

(3) The assumption that 1 Corinthians 14:33b contradicts 1 Cor. 11 depends on whether one understands the passage as an absolute restriction on speech. If the contradiction were that obvious, then why did the supposed interpolator not notice it?<sup>15</sup>

A strong argument can be made that the text is an interpolation, but considerable disagreement indicates that the jury is still out on that question. Given that numerous scholars presume that the text was indeed written by Paul, what are the possible explanations for how it might best be understood? In particular, how do scholars address the tension between Paul's permission of women to speak in chapter 11 with the apparent prohibition in chapter 14?<sup>16</sup>

A first possible suggestion is not very different from the interpolation option. Some scholars have argued that the words are not Paul's at all, but that Paul is quoting a position of the Corinthians, which he is actually rejecting. Against this suggestion is that, in previous examples of such quotations, Paul not only states the view to which he is opposed, but also provides a refutation. Again, the words in the passage that echo earlier words in the immediate context count against this suggestion.<sup>17</sup>

Assuming that the words actually are Paul's, and that he did not contradict what he had written previously, scholars argue that Paul's admonition is not about an absolute silencing of women, but about silencing some kind of disruptive speech in the context of ordered worship. The entire context of the passage in 1 Corinthians is about proper order in worship. In 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Paul discusses issues of both men and women who are leading worship, and the appropriate attire when doing so. In 11:17-34, he discusses issues of disorder

concerning the Eucharist. In 12:1-30, 14:11-33, he discusses the proper order of worship and disorder in the use of charismatic gifts. Paul's hymn to love in 12:31-14:1 provides a centering device in the middle of this discussion, focusing on love as the proper context in which worship should be conducted. Finally, in 14:3b-40, he discusses disorder among men and women in the congregation responding to those who are leading worship.<sup>18</sup> The issue that Paul is addressing is not then whether women should speak at all, but the issue of disorder in the midst of worship.<sup>19</sup> Paul's introductory statement to the passage makes this clear: "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." (1 Corinthians 14:33, KJV).<sup>20</sup>

Paul's exhortation to silence is consistent with what he has written in the previous paragraph. He tells three specific groups who were speaking in the church to be silent. In each case, he identifies the group; they are told to be silent, and a reason is given for the silence. In 14:28, he writes that if there is no interpreter present, that the person speaking in tongues should "be silent in the church." In 30-31, he writes that if someone receives a prophetic word, the first person should "be silent" to let the other person speak. In both cases, the concern is about order and edification: "For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged . . ." (1 Corinthians 14:32). Finally, Paul addresses a third group, women, and asks them also to "keep silence." The overall context makes clear that Paul is not asking all women to be silent all the time any more than he was asking all tongue-speakers or all prophets to be silent at all times. Rather, Paul is clearly asking certain women to be quiet under certain circumstances because something about their manner of speaking must have been disruptive to the order of the service.<sup>21</sup>

What was the nature of the disruption that Paul was

addressing? As with the question of “head coverings” in 1 Corinthians 11, there can be no absolute certainty because we do not share information to which both Paul and his readers were privy. The following scenarios have been suggested:

*Scenario 1: Chatting in church:* Kenneth Bailey makes the case that what Paul was addressing was the disruptive practice of “chatting in church.” Drawing on both history and his own experience living in the Middle East, Bailey suggests the following scenario: Corinth was Greece’s largest ancient city, populated by people of numerous cultures and languages who communicated in the common language of Greek. The ability of non-native Greek speakers to understand Greek would have varied. The ancient Mediterranean was also predominantly an oral culture, in which perhaps ten percent of the population could read. In oral cultures, the attention span of non-literate people for extended discourse is limited, and it is not uncommon for side conversations to take place in which chatting and discussion begins as listeners ask one another, “What did he say? What does he mean?” In addition, in an era before the invention of microphones and amplified sound, the speaker could not only be difficult to hear, but the conversation of listeners could itself contribute to distraction. Bailey notes that in ancient cultures, women would have been even less likely to be literate than men, and thus would be prime offenders in the disruptive conversations. (Thus Paul’s reference to saving the questions to ask husbands later.)<sup>[22](#)</sup>

Paul was not then restricting women’s speech in *leading* worship. Paul had been clear in what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 11 that this was allowed. He was, however, restricting the speech of those in the congregation who were supposed to be listening. His advice to these women, as to the tongue-speakers and prophets, is to be quiet so that others may be heard. They are to “submit” to those who are leading the worship. Paul is asking for quietness on the part of those who

are listening so that they can hear and learn.<sup>23</sup>

A contemporary parallel from my own experience teaching in a seminary sheds light on a similar situation. In recent years, numerous articles have been appearing in academic journals and popular magazines suggesting that students should not bring laptops to class but should take notes by hand.<sup>24</sup> Studies indicate that laptops distract other students, but also affect the user's comprehension; taking notes by hand seems to promote better comprehension. And, of course, laptops provide the temptation to "web surf" rather than pay attention to the lecture. If a professor tells students that they cannot bring laptops to class, he or she is not providing an absolute restriction on the use of laptops. (Students are free to use them in other settings.) Nor would the professor be restricting the student's ability to use a laptop in class to give a presentation. The professor would be restricting laptop use that distracts while the student is supposed to be listening. The apostle Paul's concerns were not, then, totally foreign to our own.

*Scenario 2: Asking Questions:* The second scenario is a variation on the first scenario. Picking up on Paul's reference in verse 35 – "If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home" – some scholars suggest that the disruptive speech in which women were engaged is asking questions that disrupt the worship service. Craig Keener suggests that Paul is not addressing the question of women *teaching* in church – we will discuss this below – but *learning* in church: "put more accurately, he opposes them *learning* too loudly in public." Keener notes that "the only kind of speaking *specifically* addressed in 14:34-35 is that the wife should ask her husband questions at home, rather than continuing what she is doing."<sup>25</sup> Keener refers to Plutarch's essay *On Lectures* for social background.<sup>26</sup> It was common practice in ancient Mediterranean culture, both non-Jewish and

Jewish, for hearers to interrupt lectures with questions. There was an etiquette to these questions; the questioner was not to be rude or ask irrelevant questions. At the same time, cultural “shame” was associated in Mediterranean culture with women addressing unrelated men: “social convention particularly respected women who were socially retiring and did not talk much with men outside their household.”<sup>27</sup> In addition, there would have been a contrast between the level of education among men and women in ancient culture. While some women would have been educated, their numbers, in relation to men, would have been small. (And, as noted above, the level of literacy would have been low in general. If ten percent of the population were literate, the numbers would have been lower for women.) Few women would have studied philosophy, for instance, and, among Jews (with some exceptions), women were discouraged to study the Torah.<sup>28</sup>

Paul’s concern in the passage is then two-fold. On the one hand, he was trying to deal with a question of social disorder within worship by asking the lesser educated women who were disrupting worship with irrelevant questions to save these questions for later. Presumably, their husbands, being more educated, could answer these questions for them later. Second, in the semi-public setting of early Christian worship, Paul is concerned to avoid public “shaming” in the eyes of outsiders, in a culture in which women were expected to be decorous in public:

*The point is . . . that preserving church order (14:40) means preserving the common good by not scandalizing the culture. It was “shameful” or “disgraceful” for a woman to interrupt the service with her questions (14:34) the same way that it was “shameful” or “disgraceful” for a woman to have her head uncovered or hair cropped short (11:6); it offended the cultural sensitivities of those whom the church wanted to reach with the gospel.*<sup>29</sup>



While such a proposal might seem sexist by contemporary cultural standards, in Paul's own setting it would have not only preserved the order of worship by challenging disruptive behavior, but also respected women by assuming that they were indeed capable of learning, and encouraging them to do so (something not characteristic of ancient Mediterranean culture as a whole) – just at the appropriate time in the appropriate setting.<sup>[30](#)</sup>

Against this interpretation, complementarian Wayne Grudem complains that Keener's references to Graeco-Roman and Jewish settings do not address the situation at Corinth: "Not one of them mentions women in the Corinthian church, or in any first-century church for that matter. Proving that Greeks and Romans and Jews had concerns for order in public assemblies does not prove that women in the church at Corinth were being disruptive or disorderly!"<sup>[31](#)</sup> Grudem is correct, but, at the same time, we should not expect to find material outside the New Testament directly addressing the questions Paul was addressing in the church at Corinth. No such material exists. This does not mean that scholars should not examine contemporary Jewish and Greco-Roman culture to provide clues for issues that Paul was addressing. Similarly, there are no extra-biblical materials that discuss the problem of "head coverings" in the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 11), but scholars do not hesitate to look outside the New Testament to find clues as to the issue that Paul was addressing, for example, ancient practices concerning women's head coverings or hair arrangements. Grudem himself does not hesitate to appeal to Jewish and pagan sources to help him decide the meaning of *kephalē* ("head") in 1 Corinthians 11, although none of these sources specifically mentions the wearing of head coverings in the church at Corinth.<sup>[32](#)</sup>

Grudem also complains that there is no "hard evidence" for Keener's assumption that verse 35 provides the clue to the

issue that Paul was addressing: “[T]hat does not prove that they were already asking disruptive questions, or any questions at all, during the worship service.”<sup>33</sup> Again, Grudem’s assertion is beside the point. Grudem’s own suggestion is that Paul was requiring women to be silent with respect to judging prophecies<sup>34</sup> (as we will see below), but there is even less evidence for this position than there is for Keener’s suggestion.<sup>35</sup> Paul writes nothing whatsoever in these verses about “judging prophecy,” but he actually does mention asking questions. Any suggestion for the disruptive behavior that Paul is addressing in this passage is necessarily inferential because Paul is not specific. The “asking questions” scenario has the advantage that it depends on something that Paul does mention in the text itself.

*Scenario 3: Judging Prophecy:* The last scenario suggests that the silence to which Paul is referring is that of “judging prophecy.” There are both egalitarian and non-egalitarian versions of this scenario. The egalitarian scenario builds on the notion that Paul is concerned with disruptive questions by suggesting that the specific kinds of questions being asked have to do with standing in judgment over prophets (v. 29).<sup>36</sup> The scenario would be the following: (1) certain women believed that they were prophetesses who had the gift of weighing prophecy; (2) the prophecies that they were weighing were either those of their husbands or other men in the congregation; (3) the wives were asking leading questions in such a manner as to interrogate or cross-examine their husbands; (4) this embarrassing humiliation by a close relative or wife brought disgrace rather than honor on the husband or other male relative. In the shame-honor culture of the first-century Mediterranean world, this behavior was particularly troubling. The result was chaos in the worship service. Paul’s solution is to forbid such questioning during the worship service, and to suggest that the women should save these kinds of questions for when they are home: “Worship was

not to be turned into a question-and-answer session.”<sup>37</sup> Why were the women in particular being singled out? Because they were the ones who were causing this particular problem. Of special importance, however, is the connection between verses 33 (“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches.”) and verse 36 (“Or was it from you that that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached?”). By focusing on order in the church, Paul’s goal is to get the Corinthian church to follow the practice of all the other churches rather than “doing their own thing.” The problems he addresses are not simply those of women, but of disorderly worship in the congregation as a whole.<sup>38</sup>

It is significant that the “judging prophecy” scenario has also been embraced by complementarians. In so doing, they recognize that Paul is not simply restricting the speech of women in worship, but a particular kind of worship. At the same time, they reject the reading that Paul was addressing problems of disruption or disorderly worship. Against the notion that Paul was addressing a local problem at Corinth is his assertion that women are to be silent “in all the churches.”<sup>39</sup> Rather, a distinction is made between prophecy and teaching. Prophecy in the New Testament period was a spontaneous revelation of God to the prophet. Teaching, however, was the explaining of and applying of Scripture or the teaching of the apostles. In Corinthians 11, Paul does indeed allow that women can prophecy; however, in 1 Corinthians 14:34, Paul is asking women to be silent in reference to the judging of prophecy because the judging of prophecy involves the same kind of authority as teaching, and Paul forbids women to teach or exercise authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12).<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, Paul states, “[Women] are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the law says.” (1 Cor. 14:34). The “submission” referred to is submission to the authority of male leadership in the church. Paul’s reference to “the law” without a specified passage

probably refers to the creation order in Genesis 2, with its understanding of the principle of male-leadership. Paul's statement about women asking questions of their husbands at home is meant to prevent any attempt by women to evade his teaching by asking questions that were really just a circuitous attempt to judge prophecy.<sup>41</sup>

What to make of these two variations on the scenario that Paul was addressing the issue of women judging prophecies in the church? If *Scenario 2* builds on *Scenario 1* by suggesting that the specific kind of disruptive speech that Paul was addressing was interrupting worship by the asking of questions, *Scenario 3* builds on *Scenario 2* by suggesting the nature of the kinds of questions being raised arose during the evaluation of prophecy. While *Scenario 3* raises a genuine possibility for interpretation of the passage, it is subject to the criticism noted above by Keener that "there is little reason to associate 'asking questions' here with challenging prophecies."<sup>42</sup> While Paul specifically mentions "asking questions" with reference to women, and also specifically mentions the weighing of prophetic speech (v. 29), he does not specifically connect the two in any way. Moreover, as Keener also points out, judging prophecy is probably equivalent to the gift of "discernment of spirits" (12:10), and nothing in the discussion of spiritual gifts in chapter 12 suggests that only men exercised this gift. 14:29 suggests to the contrary that weighing of prophecy was something expected of all who exercised the gift of prophecy, both men and women. Nonetheless, all interpretations of the issue that Paul is addressing are necessarily speculative, and this suggestion, while perhaps more so, is a plausible explanation.

Less plausible, however, is the complementarian interpretation. Grudem and other complementarians agree with egalitarian advocates of *Scenario 3* that the issue concerns judging of prophetic speech (a connection not specifically made by Paul), yet reject the suggestion that women were

engaged in disruptive speech or that women were raising questions – something Paul specifically mentions! While recognizing a distinction between prophecy and teaching is not unique to complementarians,<sup>43</sup> complementarians make a leap considerably beyond the evidence in suggesting not only that the issue of concern was judging prophecy, but, more specifically, that women were not allowed to judge prophecy because this would be a form of teaching which would imply that women were exercising illegitimate authority over men. Grudem and others appeal to 1 Timothy 2:12, yet 1 Timothy had not yet been written, so the Corinthians could not have been familiar with it, and nothing in the text whatsoever mentions either teaching or male authority.<sup>44</sup> Grudem's appeal to Paul's reference to "submission" and to "the law" are problematic simply because Paul provides no specific content for either. Paul does not say that the women are to submit to some person. Rather, *submission* (ὑποτάσσω, *hypotassō*, v. 34) is without a personal object. To assume that it means that wives should submit to their husbands is reading something into the text that is not there. A more plausible reading is that it refers to submitting to the "principle of order in the worship service." Again, Paul does not cite a specific text for "the law." Some (including complementarians) have suggested that Paul is thinking of the order of creation (cf. 11:8-9), but this provides no basis whatsoever to draw a connection to 1 Timothy 2:13. A more plausible suggestion in the context is that Paul is thinking of the Old Testament's repeated emphasis on order and purpose.<sup>45</sup> Thiselton suggests that *hypotassō* and "law" come together to form a common context of order. He suggests a plausible translation: "they should keep their ordered place." The order to which the women are being asked to "submit" is that of the order of the service. As the God of Genesis brought order out of chaos in creation, so the Holy Spirit brings order within the context of Christian worship.<sup>46</sup>

The above three scenarios all offer plausible suggestions as

to the concern that Paul was addressing in his exhortation to women's silence in the Corinthians church. The three scenarios are not in complete agreement because all three must engage in a certain amount of speculation since, in a manner similar to his discussing of head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul does not provide details in his discussion of which both he and his readers were aware, but we are not. Nonetheless, a sufficiently common interpretation emerges. Assuming that Paul did indeed write the words of 1 Corinthians 11:14:33b-36, he was neither demanding absolute silence of women in church, nor affirming a principle of male hierarchy and female subordination. Rather, the entire context of 1 Corinthians 11-14 is dealing with questions of disorder in worship. In this passage in particular, Paul is not dealing with questions of "creation order" but "church order." He corrects an abuse of disruptive speaking caused by some women within the congregation not by forbidding them to speak at all, but by restricting the particular form of abuse, and redirecting their questions to the appropriate time and place.<sup>47</sup>

### **1 Timothy 2:11-15**

The single passage in the New Testament that is most critical to the complementarian argument is 1 Timothy 2:11-15. It is the only passage in the entire Bible that on a literal reading might seem to exclude women from teaching or having authority over men. Moreover, as those who advocate a hierarchical understanding of male/female relationships are quick to point out, the passage appears to be transcultural in that it grounds its argument in the order of creation itself. Because Adam was created first, women are not allowed to teach or have authority over men.<sup>48</sup> If the passage is crucial for advocates of women's subordination to men, it is equally troubling for those who affirm the full participation of women in the church:

*Few if any texts are more painful to modern sensibilities.*

*The portrayal of women as effectively gagged in church, forbidden to exercise authority over men, and restricted to the role of childbearers, modest dressers, and doers of good deeds is about as remote from most twenty-first century evaluations of women's roles in Western society, as one could imagine. What does one do with a text like this?*<sup>49</sup>

As with the other Pauline passages I have examined so far in this series, this passage is also difficult to interpret, and raises a number of problematic issues. The meaning of almost every word in the passage is subject to debate and disagreement.

The first issue is that of authorship. Although 1 Timothy begins "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus . . . To Timothy" (1:1), most biblical scholars believe that the pastoral epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are pseudepigraphal. That is, they were not written by Paul, but by a successor or disciple of Paul from a later period, writing in his name. Differences from the authentically recognized Pauline epistles include (1) a distinctive vocabulary and style; (2) a different understanding of "faith" as a body of content (what is believed) rather than an act of trust. (In Romans, justification by faith is about trust in the work of Jesus Christ. In the pastorals, the "faith" is a body of truths to be preserved); (3) different threats to the gospel: the Judaizers of Galatians and Romans have taken a back seat to new heresies; (4) Church structures are more formalized. There are distinct offices of bishop and deacon, and references to presbyters; (5) There is far more concern to conform to the culture. A focus on good order and the household is concerned largely about how the church will come across to the outside world. (There is a similar concern in the Petrine epistles.)<sup>50</sup>

In terms of the current issue of debate in this series of essays – relationships between men and women – there is a

curious lack of mutuality. In discussing the relationships between husbands and wives in Ephesians 5, Paul addresses both men and women, calling for mutual submission. In the exhortations to subordinates in Titus 2:1-10, this mutuality is missing. Those in subordinate positions (women, children and slaves) are addressed, but the householder is not.<sup>51</sup> In 1 Corinthians 11, when Paul discusses the order of creation, he balances what he says about the first woman being made from man, by saying that now all men come from women in childbirth. This reciprocity is missing in 1 Timothy 2:13. In Romans 5:12, Paul is clear that sin came into the world through Adam, but in 1 Timothy 2:14, he seems to place the blame entirely on Eve: "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." The cumulative weight of all of these differences has led most biblical scholars to question whether the same author could have written the recognized Pauline epistles and the Pastorals.

On the other hand, there are numerous characteristics of the pastorals that argue for Pauline authorship, especially the numerous personal references, which are difficult to account for apart from some form of genuine Pauline tradition. (Why would someone other than Paul go to the trouble of creating so many historical details?)<sup>52</sup> Those who argue for Pauline authorship suggest that the differences can be explained by changes in historical circumstances, and that there are enough continuities and similarities to support Paul as author. Essentially three solutions have been proposed. First, Paul himself wrote the pastorals, although changes of circumstance and other concerns can account for the differences with Paul's other letters. Second, Paul did not write the pastorals; they were written at a later period by someone who was familiar with Paul's writings, and perhaps incorporated some authentically Pauline material in the letters. Third, Paul wrote the letters using an amanuensis to whom he gave considerable liberty in composition. This would explain both



the personal references, but also the differences from Paul's usual manner of writing.<sup>53</sup>

Although many of those who deny Pauline authorship tend to devalue the pastoral letters or treat them as of having less authority than those recognized as authentic, theologically, the important point to recognize is that they are canonical Scripture, and have been recognized as such by the Christian church throughout its history. The authority of the pastorals as Scripture does not depend on their authorship but on their bearing witness to the subject matter of Christian faith either as reflections of Paul himself under changed circumstances, or of churches who were influenced by Paul and saw themselves as continuing his heritage.<sup>54</sup> In what follows, I will not attempt to resolve the issue of Pauline authorship, but will throughout refer to the author as "Paul." If Paul himself wrote the pastorals, then "Paul" refers to the apostle. If Paul did not, then "Paul" refers to either his amanuensis or a later writer who wrote in his name, perhaps incorporating significant material from Paul's own hand.

### **Exegetical background**

A major theme of the pastorals is a concern with both conflict in the church and false teaching. 1 Timothy 2:8 refers to "anger and quarreling" among men; 1 Timothy 5:14-15 mentions women who are "busy bodies," and some who have "strayed after Satan"; 2 Timothy 3:6-7 refers to women who are being led astray by false teachers, while Titus 1:10-11 refers to "empty talkers and deceivers" who "must be silenced." It is this conflict with false teaching that provides the context for the pastorals, even more so than the concern for order which interpreters often emphasize.<sup>55</sup>

The immediate context of the passage suggests that Paul is addressing an issue of disorderly public worship that concerns both men and women. (There is a parallel here to 1 Corinthians

11: 2-16.) That men are requested to pray “without anger and quarreling” (1 Timothy 2:8) suggests that there were some men who were engaging in angry and quarrelsome behavior. The reference to women adorning themselves modestly and with self-control rather than with “braided hair and gold or pearls or costly apparel” (v. 9) indicates that there were wealthy women in the church who were attending worship dressed ostentatiously in a manner that was intended to draw attention to themselves.<sup>56</sup> The word “similarly” (ὡσαύτως, *hōsautōs*, v. 9), along with the lack of a verb, which indicates that the verb must be supplied from verse 8, makes clear that Paul is addressing a problem caused by both men and women.<sup>57</sup> While the immediate context suggests issues of disorderly worship that concerned both men and women, the immediately following verses that speak only of women are the crucial verses for the complementarian argument that women cannot exercise church office because they cannot exercise authority over or teach men in the church.

Paul’s instruction in verse 11 (“Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness.”) has been used as a warrant by complementarians to argue that women should be in submission to male authority.<sup>58</sup> There is nothing in the context that indicates that this would be the case, however. Women are being asked to learn quietly with submissiveness. This is neither a demand for silence, nor of submission to male authority. Rather, this is the kind of standard advice that would have been given to students in the ancient world. (That Paul assumes that women should be learning is itself of significance, since this contrasts with both Gentile and Rabbinic discouragement of women students at the time.) The situation is, again, similar to 1 Corinthians 14:34. Paul is suggesting that women should listen to what is going on in the worship service rather than interrupting it with disruptive speech. There is also a possible parallel here to 1 Timothy 5:13, in which Paul refers to women who are “saying things

they ought not.” (Note the parallel to the false teachers of 1 Titus 1:11, who “teach things they ought not.”) In its immediate context, the “submission” being asked for is not submission to a person (such as a husband or male authority), but to what is being learned.<sup>59</sup>

### **“I do not permit . . .”**

The crucial verse for the entire discussion of the permissible roles of women in church for complementarians is 1 Timothy 2:12, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather she is to remain quiet.” In a previous essay, I had referred to the lengthy debate about the significance of the word *kephalē* as the “battle of the lexicons.”<sup>60</sup> The discussion about the meaning of a few key words in verse 12 has become equally contentious, and could reasonably be called the “battle of the Greek grammars and databases.” The first key question has to do with whether the word ἐπιτρέπω (*epitrepō*) should be translated “I do not permit” or “I am not permitting.” Complementarian Douglas Moo states that the meaning is indefinite: “The fact is, however, that nothing definite can be concluded from the word. . . . 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. . . . It certainly is *not* correct to say that the present tense in and of itself shows that the command is temporary; it does not.”<sup>61</sup> Wayne Grudem goes further than Moo, and insists, to the contrary, that Paul’s command must be understood to have permanent effect or it will undermine the authority of Scripture itself: “Appealing to the present tense or to Paul’s use of first person, ‘I do not permit,’ cannot be used to argue that this is a temporary command. Such a claim misunderstands the force of the Greek present in Paul’s commands. . . . Christians who believe Scripture to be the Word of God have rightly understood these to be *commands that are applicable for all Christians for all times.*”<sup>62</sup>

While rhetorically effective, Grudem's claim is overblown. Numerous scholars point out that the verb *epitrepō* should be translated "I am not permitting." Paul does not use a possible rabbinic formula "it is not permitted" (1 Cor. 14:34) nor the future "I will not permit."<sup>63</sup> Payne points out that when Paul uses the first person present active indicative he indicates his personal advice for a situation that is not universal.<sup>64</sup> Paul tends to use imperatives when he is making universal exhortations. Moreover, all examples of *epitrepō* in the Greek LXX translation of the Old Testament refer to specific situations, as do the majority of New Testament occurrences. Jesus' reply to his opponents on the question of divorce (Mark 10:4, Matt. 19:8) makes it clear that he did not understand the Mosaic permission (ἐπέτρεψεν, *epetreupen*) to divorce to be permanent. The evidence suggests that Paul's use of *epitrepō* is temporally limited, and thus, the prohibition is neither universal nor for all time.<sup>65</sup>

The second issue of debate has to do with the meaning of ἀυθεντεῖν (*authentēin*), translated "to exercise authority over" in translations such as the ESV. Does it mean the neutral "have authority over" (as complementarians insist) or does it rather mean the more negative "to domineer" or "to dominate" or "to assume or usurp authority" as suggested by a number of earlier translations?<sup>66</sup> Egalitarian scholars note that the pre-New Testament use of the word is rare, and that, if Paul had simply meant "to exercise authority," he had numerous Greek words from which to choose, which he regularly used elsewhere, for example, some variation of ἔχει ἐξουσίαν (*exēi exousian*).<sup>67</sup> As with *kephalē*, this has been discussed at length. H. Scott Baldwin has produced an examination of 82 examples of ancient uses of ἀυθεντέω (*authentēō*) to make the case that the word was understood neutrally as "to exercise authority," which Grudem has reproduced as an Appendix in his *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*.<sup>68</sup> The problem with

Baldwin's list (as with Grudem's word studies on *kephalē*) is that the vast majority of his references occur centuries after the New Testament period, and thus are of no use in assessing the meaning of the word when 1 Timothy was written.<sup>69</sup> The scholarly debate is tedious, and I refer readers to the discussion. What seems to be established is that the use of the word is rare in the period before the New Testament, that "there are no established instances with this meaning ['to exercise authority'] until centuries after Paul," and that, in earlier periods, it was understood to have primarily negative connotations of domineering or usurping authority. Ben Witherington writes, "I conclude that the author means that women are not permitted to 'rule over,' master,' or 'play the despot' over men." Payne suggests "to assume authority" as the "best-supported meaning."<sup>70</sup>

Another debated issue in the discussion is whether the conjunction οὐδὲ (*oude*) separates two different prohibitions – women should not teach *or* assume/exercise authority – or rather whether this should be understood as a single prohibition – to teach *so as* to assume authority. Grudem argues that those who argue for a single prohibition have "misunderstood Greek grammar."<sup>71</sup> Payne argues at length for a single prohibition.<sup>72</sup> Belleville argues that the infinitives ("to teach," *authentein*) function as direct object nouns restricting the direct object "woman." The two infinitives are not synonyms or closely related ideas but rather combine to form a single purpose or goal: "I do not permit a woman to teach so as to gain mastery over a man" or "I do not permit a woman to teach with a view to dominating a man."<sup>73</sup> Those with the patience for detailed discussions of Greek grammar can pursue this discussion for themselves. However, assuming that Paul's prohibition is a temporary one, this discussion, while interesting, is not of deciding significance.

**Gentlemen First . . .**

Whether these issues of Greek vocabulary and grammar can be resolved, the crucial issue for Paul's prohibition is found in verse 21 where he provides the warrant for the prohibition: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." The complementarian interpretation of this passage focuses on Paul's appeal to creation order (Adam was formed first, then Eve) to argue that Paul is arguing for a hierarchical relationship between men and women based in the original pre-fall creation as the reason why women may not teach or have authority over men: "Paul emphasizes that the man was created 'first, then' Eve . . . Both the logic of this passage and the parallel in 1 Corinthians 11:3-10 make this clear: for Paul, the man's priority in the order of creation is indicative of the headship that man is to have over woman."<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Grudem states: "Paul gives the reason for his command, and it is the creation order . . . not any false teaching by women. . . . Paul's reason is the Creation order: 'For Adam was formed first, then Eve.'"<sup>75</sup>

There are two key problems with the complementarian approach. First, it assumes that Paul uses "because" ( $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ , *gar*) as a warrant in the sense of cause rather than a warrant in the sense of example. Grudem insists that this is the only meaning the text can have:

*The main problem is that it [the interpretation that says creation order does not have to do with authority] says that Paul is wrong. . . . But Paul's "for" (Greek gar) shows that that is exactly what he did. He used "Adam was formed first, then Eve" as a reason why he does not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man in the assembled church . . .*<sup>76</sup>

The Greek word *gar* can be used as a statement of causation ("because"); it can also be a simple connecting conjunction. However, it can also be used in the sense of an example.

Witherington states: "What follows, then, is intended to be an historical example or precedent that explains the consequences of a woman being deceived and attempting to assume or assert an authority not given to her. The point of the example is to teach women not to emulate Eve . . ." <sup>77</sup>

The use of Adam and Eve as examples would be consistent with Paul's usage elsewhere where he regularly uses Old Testament imagery typologically.<sup>78</sup> In 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, Paul uses the imagery of the Old Testament Exodus, including crossing through the Red Sea, manna, the cloud that followed the Israelites, and the rock from which water flowed, to argue a typological interpretation in which the sea corresponds to baptism, and the spiritual food and drink point to Christ: "[A]ll were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ." (1 Cor. 10:2-4). Paul writes: "Now these things took place as examples (*τύποι*, *typoi*) for us . . ." (v. 6). Similarly, in Galatians, Paul interprets the Old Testament story of Sarah and Hagar typologically to contrast the old covenant of law and the new covenant of grace: "Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants." (Gal. 4:24).

With the single exception of Luke 3:38, the New Testament always uses Adam and Eve as typological figures, who cast light on current situations at the time of the writer. In 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, Paul draws a parallel between the serpent who deceived Eve and the danger of deception for Christians that parallels the passage in 1 Timothy: "But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning thoughts, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ." (v. 3). In Romans 5:12-21, Paul draws a typological parallel between Adam and Christ to argue that, as sin came into the world through Adam, so justification comes through Christ. In Rom. 16:20, Paul echoes Gen. 3:15: "The God

of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”<sup>79</sup>

To interpret the passage typologically is consistent with what Paul does elsewhere in his writings, and makes sense in the context. As in 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, Paul is using the example of Eve's deception to warn of the dangers of deception for Christian women at Ephesus. To argue that the passage should be interpreted as a causal explanation creates serious problems. Grudem and other complementarians argue that the key issue of the text concerns creation order. Women cannot teach or exercise authority over men because man was created first, and woman second. This is to misread Paul's argument selectively, however. Paul does not simply mention creation order, but draws a deliberate connection between creation order and deception: "For Adam was created first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." (1 Tim. 2:13-14). Numerous scholars write as if Paul were providing two separate reasons, but the most straightforward reading is that he rather provides a single reason that follows a kind of logical progression, and provides the warrant for Paul's prohibition in verse 12:

The man was created first → The woman was deceived.

The man was not deceived → Women should not teach or exercise authority over men.

Paul is clearly drawing a connection between the order of creation and the deception of the woman, and a connection between the woman's deception and women at Ephesus not exercising authority over men. If Paul's argument is causal and focused on creation order (as Grudem and other complementarians claim), then Paul is necessarily assuming that Eve was susceptible to deception because Adam was created first. And contemporary women should not teach, not only because Adam was created first (creation order), but because women are inherently more subject to deception than men. Numerous scholars recognize this as the necessary import of a



causal interpretation of Paul's argument.<sup>80</sup> Such an argument would indeed be "lame," (as Hays suggests),<sup>81</sup> not only because it gets Adam off the hook (contrary to Romans 5:12), but also because it is simply not the case that women are inherently more subject to deception than men.

That women were inherently more subject to deception than men was a key reason that theologians historically argued for the subordination of women,<sup>82</sup> and some complementarians seem to have embraced this position that women are more susceptible to deception. However, the official complementarian position is that women are not inherently inferior to men, but simply have different roles assigned them by God. Complementarians cannot then consistently appeal to the argument from deception.<sup>83</sup> Moo suggests that the point of the reference to deception is "to remind the women at Ephesus that Eve was deceived by the serpent . . . precisely in taking the initiative over the man whom God had given to be with her and to care for her. In the same way, if the women at the church at Ephesus proclaim their independence from the men of the church . . . seeking roles that have been given to men in the church (verse 12), they will make the same mistake Eve made and bring similar destruction on themselves and the church."<sup>84</sup> This is to read something into the text that is not there. Nothing in either the Genesis account nor in Paul's argument suggests that the woman was deceived by taking initiative over the man or that God had forbidden her to take such initiative.<sup>85</sup>

Grudem's own reading seems intent on ignoring the clear implication of the reference to deception. He resists any suggestion that Paul's prohibition against women teaching had anything to do with women teaching false doctrine or being deceived, and focuses exclusively on the argument from creation order.<sup>86</sup> He resists the implication that Paul's concerns have anything to do with deception, but passes over

the clear implications of what the text much teach on his own reading:

*Paul makes no reference to his culture or to women being susceptible to deception in the first century. Paul is talking about Adam and Eve, and he says that another reason women should not “teach” or “exercise authority over a man” is that “Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor . . .” However we understand that passage, it is evident that Paul is saying that something is true of Eve in relationship to Adam that has transcultural significance for women and men generally in the New Testament church.*<sup>87</sup>

Although he seems reluctant to draw this conclusion, the logical implication of Grudem’s statement is that women should not teach because they are inherently subject to deception. Paul does not give Eve’s deception as *another* reason. It is *the* reason, and it has an inherent connection to the reference to creation order. Eve was deceived because Adam was created first. Women should not teach in the situation Paul was addressing either because (a) the Ephesian women, like Eve, have been deceived; or (b) because of a reason of “transcultural significance,” all women (like Eve) are inherently subject to deception. These are the only two possible options.

If Paul is using the story of Eve’s deception typologically, as an example, not a causative explanation, then the argument changes. Paul is not saying that all women everywhere and at all times are inherently more subject to deception than men. Given a typological interpretation, what would be the point of the connection that Paul draws between creation order and Eve’s deception? The most helpful suggestion I have come across is a reference made by Craig S. Keener to a rabbinic interpretation of the passage that Paul could have adapted. Because Eve, not having yet been created, was not present in

Genesis 2:16-17 when God gave the commandment not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she was not directly informed by God, but indirectly informed by Adam, and therefore subject to deception.<sup>88</sup> On this typological interpretation, Paul would be suggesting that, like Eve, the women at Ephesus are not well-informed, and thus are subject to deception. They should not teach, but rather learn quietly in submission to the subject matter, so that they will be better informed and no longer deceived. Presumably, once they had learned, they could well teach.<sup>89</sup>

Are there other examples where Paul uses a similar kind of reasoning in the pastoral epistles? It seems to me that there is just such a similar parallel in Paul's discussion in Titus where he introduces what is sometimes called the "liar's paradox." In Titus 1:10, Paul again uses the language of deception, along with similar references to subordination, to dangers of false teaching, and a solution that silences the trouble-makers: "For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach." As in 1 Timothy, Paul then provides a warrant, and while it does not mention Scripture, it does make an absolute statement without exceptions: "One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.' This testimony is true." (Titus 1:12-13). Moreover, Paul goes on to describe these Cretans as "defiled and unbelieving," having "defiled consciences," as "detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work." (v. 15-16).

There is here an example of what is sometimes called the liar's paradox. If a Cretan has made the true statement that Cretans are always liars, then when the Cretan made the statement, he must himself have been lying. But if he was lying when he said that Cretans are always liars, then he was

not in fact telling the truth when he said that Cretans are always liars, in which case it is not a true statement that Cretans are always liars. Leaving aside the logical conundrum, if someone were to read Paul's statement using the hermeneutical principles of complementarians, then he or she would have to presume that under no circumstances could Cretans ever exercise church leadership. If Paul is arguing causally and without restriction (as it is said that he is in 1 Timothy 2:13), then "Cretans are always liars" would have "transcultural significance," and would necessarily imply that no Cretan could ever be trusted with authority. Yet Paul makes clear in the previous chapter that Titus is to appoint Cretan elders (Titus 1:5), who are to hold firmly to the word they are taught, so that they can give instruction in sound doctrine (v. 9). Paul is not silencing all Cretans (even though "Cretans are always liars") but only those who are deceivers (2:10-11). Those who hold fast to what they are taught can later become teachers themselves. Concerning those who are subject to deception, Paul exhorts Titus to "rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith" (2:13). The parallel to 1 Timothy 2 is illuminating. Presumably, even though Eve was deceived, Paul's statement that he "is not permitting a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man" would not imply a permanent prohibition anymore than Paul's warnings about Cretans would imply a permanent injunction to silence (Titus 2:10). Rather, like the Cretans, who, after having held fast to the trustworthy word they are taught, are then able to give instruction in sound doctrine (Titus 1:9), the women at Ephesus, who, like Eve, were in danger of deception, could "learn quietly with all submissiveness" (1 Timothy 2:11), after which, like the Cretans, they also could presumably give instruction in sound doctrine.

I close this discussion by noting a point not often enough addressed. The crucial issue in addressing Paul's prohibition of women teaching or exercising authority in 1 Timothy is primarily hermeneutical, not exegetical. That is, the concern

is not so much what Paul wrote to address his own situation in Ephesus, but how we appropriate what he wrote then to address a very different situation today. In the passage, Paul does not provide an imperative – “Do not allow women to teach or exercise authority over a man” – but an indicative – “I am not allowing women to teach or exercise authority (probably better, “domineer” or “assume authority”) over a man.” Paul is describing a particular historical situation and his response to it, and the reason he gives is not a timeless warrant, but an example. Because certain women had been deceived at Ephesus, Paul suggests they should not teach, but rather should learn. Nothing in his statement or his example presumes that his indicative is intended to be permanent.

The disagreement about what to do with this text in our own setting has similarities to the earlier disagreement between Anglican Divine Richard Hooker and his Puritan opponents. The Puritans seemed to have had a rather simplistic understanding of how to apply Scripture in a contemporary setting, one that assumed that it was only necessary to read a biblical text to understand not only what it meant at the time it was written, but also how it might be applied in the church at a later time. Of great significance for issues of contemporary application, Hooker insisted that merely historical statements recorded in Scripture cannot be presumed to provide permanent warrants for later Christian practice. Hooker asked: “When that which the word of God doth but deliver historically, we counter without any warrant as if it were legally meant, and so urge it further than we can prove it was intended, do we not add to the laws of God, and make them in number seem more than they are?”<sup>90</sup> Complementarians who read this passage seem to be making the same error that the Puritans made, presuming that an historical example dealing with a specific situation provides a permanent warrant for the church to follow at all times.

## **Conclusion**

In this last essay examining what I have called Protestant objections to the ordination of women – those focusing on issues of male authority over women and a hierarchical subordination of women to men – I have focused on the two passages in Paul's writings to which complementarians regularly appeal, because the passages speak explicitly about women not speaking in public worship or not teaching or exercising authority over men. As with the previous passages in Paul's writings to which complementarians appeal, these two passages are beset with interpretive difficulties because we do not know the particular details of the situation that Paul was trying to address. As noted several times in this discussion, all attempts to understand such passages must rely on a certain amount of speculation in which interpreters necessarily must attempt to fill in the missing details.

Assuming that Paul is the author of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36, and it is not an interpolation by a later editor, the conundrum becomes that of reconciling what appears to be an absolute command for silence on the part of women worshippers and Paul's earlier statements about women prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11, a passage that makes clear that Paul did not suppress women speaking in church. Accordingly, all scholars who accept the genuineness of the passage (including complementarians) agree that Paul is not demanding absolute silence of women in worship, but is restricting some kind of disruptive speech leading to disorderly worship. All attempts to identify the nature of this disruptive speech are necessarily speculative. Numerous suggestions have been proposed, and the most plausible focus on the nature of the speech as in some way disruptive in itself, "chatting in church," "asking questions," "judging prophets" in a manner that creates public shame. What gives these interpretations their plausibility is that they seek clues within the text itself to provide an answer to the question "what kind of disruptive speech was Paul correcting?" What distinguishes the complementarian attempt to provide an explanation for the

disruptive speech is that it goes outside the text to provide an answer based on a priorly assumed hierarchical scheme that is then imposed on the text. Although Paul says nothing in the text about the authority of men over women, about women challenging the authority of men in their speaking, or about women challenging prophecies in a manner that would involve an attempt to teach or exercise illegitimate authority over men, the complementarian approach simply assumes that this must be the nature of the problem that Paul is addressing in the text, and then reads an interpretation into the text for which there is no warrant in the text itself.

Initially, the complementarian case seems stronger in the case of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in that contemporary English translations render the text as if it would be a straightforward prohibition of women either teaching or exercising authority over men. A closer examination of the passage casts doubt on this reading. The general context of the pastoral epistles indicates that a concern with false teaching and deception is a prevailing theme throughout the letters. Several references to women in these letters indicate that their author was concerned in particular that at least some of this false teaching involved women, either as teachers or as disciples of the false teachers. This context would indicate that Paul was addressing a specific problem, not giving a universal prohibition. Second, a more careful reading of the Greek text indicates that modern English translations are misleading. Comparisons with Paul's use elsewhere as well as the way that the verb *epitrepō* is used in the rest of the New Testament indicates that Paul was not giving a timeless imperative, but rather describing a current policy: "I am not permitting." Comparison of the verb *authentēin* with its rare uses elsewhere in ancient culture, indicates that at the time the pastoral epistles were written, the verb did not refer to a neutral exercising of authority, but had the stronger connotation of "domineer," "usurp authority," or "assume authority." Debates between Greek scholars are difficult for non-experts to

settle, but there seems to be a strong indication that the passage should more properly be translated something like "I am not permitting women to teach or to domineer over men" or "I am not permitting women to teach so as to assume authority over men."

More important than the grammatical issues, I would argue, is the warrant that Paul provides for his prohibition, based on a summary of the story of Adam and Eve. A crucial issue is whether this passage should be read typologically to provide an example for a point that Paul wants to make, or, rather, whether it provides a timeless warrant for Paul's prohibition. Complementarians argue that Paul is providing such an unconditional warrant. Coupling this passage with 1 Cor. 11:3,8-9, they argue for a hierarchical understanding of permanent male authority and female subordination based on creation order: man was created first, then woman. Complementarians insist that this reading is the historic reading of the church. Historically, there has been a tradition of subordinating women to male hierarchy in church tradition, and advocates did indeed appeal to 1 Timothy 2:13-14. However, the appeal was consistently to the second half of the passage. Women were held to be subordinate to men because they were subject to an inherent ontological incapacity: as a class, women were considered to be more gullible, less intelligent, more easily deceived, and more subject to temptation than men.

The complementarian position may not be a genuinely new position insofar as it embraces an ontological subordination of women to men, but (at least in its official formulations) it is a new position in that it does not regard this subordination as based in an ontological inferiority or susceptibility to deception, but rather in creation order. The subordination of women to men is said to be the consequence of different male and female "roles," not because women are considered less intelligent or more gullible. It would seem



that, for this reason, complementarians necessarily must read the passage selectively. Focusing on Paul's reference to creation order ("Adam was formed first, then Eve"), they quietly ignore the second half of the passage with its implications for a subordination rooted not merely in creation, but in the fall: ("Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived.").

If the passage is read typologically, however, this uncomfortable dilemma is avoided. The writer of 1 Timothy was not making a timeless injunction based on either creation order or on woman's inherent susceptibility to deception, but providing a typological illustration to address a particular local problem. As Eve was deceived, so the women in Ephesus were in danger of being deceived, and consequently should not teach until they were better informed. The concern is almost exactly parallel to another reference to Eve in Paul's writings: "But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning thoughts, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ." (1 Cor. 11:3).

Finally, this passage provides a warning about hermeneutical carelessness. It is all too tempting to look to isolated verses here and there in the Bible addressing historical situations in different contexts, only to make a leap of application to a contemporary setting without regard to either the immediate context of the passage in its own setting, or to a careful consideration of a very different contemporary setting. The timeless appeal to women's "silence" in 1 Corinthians 13 or to Paul's prohibition of "teaching" or "exercising authority over men" in 1 Timothy 2 seems too easily to yield to just such a temptation.

### **Appendix: Women and Public vs. Private Settings**

One of the problems with reading 1 Timothy 2:12 as a timeless prohibition of women teaching men is that it seems to stand in blatant contradiction to the New Testament account of

Priscilla, wife of Aquilla, who is mentioned, along with her husband, as having taught Apollos in Acts 18:1-3, 24-26. The passage indicates that both she and her husband taught Apollos, and, since her name is mentioned first, she was presumably the primary instructor. Apollos is portrayed as already knowing the Scriptures, and as being "instructed in the way of the Lord," so the assumption is that Priscilla and Aquilla were providing additional knowledge to someone who already had a strong background in basic Christian faith. Priscilla is mentioned as a regular companion of Paul (Rom. 16:3, 1 Cor. 16:19, 2 Tim. 4:19), so she clearly played a significant role in his ministry. If the prohibition of women teaching in 1 Timothy 2:12 is a universal prohibition, then it presumably would have prohibited the teaching of Priscilla as well.

To avoid this difficulty, complementarians regularly make a distinction between private and public ministries of women, arguing that women are not only allowed to engage in ministry to and to teach other women and children, may teach and evangelize unbelievers (including men), but may also talk with Christian men about the Bible and Christian doctrine, but only in a private context. The sole warrant for this distinction seems to be the reference to Priscilla and Aquila teaching Apollos in Acts 18:26: "[Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila, heard him, they took him and explained to him the word of God more accurately." Grudem states that the phrase "they took him" "indicates that they waited to speak to him until they could take him aside, out of public view." Grudem denies that the case of Priscilla can provide a warrant for women's teaching, appealing to 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15: "[I]t is specifically the situations where the whole church is assembled that Paul restricts governing and teaching activities to men . . ." Unfortunately, this is, once again, an example of reading something into the text that is not there. As noted above, 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 says nothing

about women teaching. 1 Timothy 2:11 does mention teaching, but places no restriction on a public context: if read as an absolute prohibition, it would prohibit all teaching of men by women, full stop. Grudem reads the prohibition of teaching from 1 Tim. 2:11 into 1 Cor. 14:33-36 where no such prohibition exists to prohibit *teaching* in a context of Christian worship; Grudem reads what we have argued is a restriction on disruptive speech leading to disorderly worship in 1 Cor. 14:33-36 into 1 Tim. 2:11 to argue that the teaching prohibited must be *public* teaching, although no such qualification exists in 1 Timothy 2:11. Grudem takes the isolated verse of Acts 18:26, and reads an historical account of an incident in the life of Priscilla and Aquilla into other parts of the New Testament to provide a prohibition of public teaching that is mentioned neither in 1 Cor. 14:33-36 nor 1 Timothy 2:11 nor in Acts 18:26. Finally, Grudem's reading of the Acts passage itself is tendentious. The passage does not say that Priscilla took Apollos aside, but that *both* Priscilla and Aquila took him aside. If the reference to Priscilla implies that women can only teach privately, then the mention of Aquila would necessarily imply the same about men. But Grudem draws no conclusions about limitations on men teaching from that verse. Witherington's assessment is more to the point: "The fact that this took place in at least semi-privacy is probably not very significant in terms of implication for correct church practice, since there is no indication that Luke was trying to avoid having Priscilla teach Apollos in a worship context."<sup>91</sup>

1 "Concerning Women's Ordination: Mutual Submission," <http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-mutual-submission>; "Concerning Women's Ordination: Women in Worship" and "Headship," <http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-women's-ordination-women-in-worship>.

2 George W. Knight III, *The Role Relationships of Men and*

*Women: New Testament Teaching* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1977, 1985), 33.

[3](#) Origen, Commentary on First Corinthians, fragment 74, text in Claude Jenkins, ed. "Origen on 1 Corinthians," *Journal of Theological Studies* 10 (1908-9): 29-51; Citations from Patricia Cox Miller, ed. *Women in Early Christianity: Translations from Greek Texts* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 29.

[4](#) "Apostolic Constitutions," 3.9.1-4; *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries*, vol. 7; Philip Schaff ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994).

[5](#) *Summa Theologiae* 1-1.92.3; Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, O.P. (Lander, Wyo: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012); *Summa Theologica* (NY: Benziger Bros, 1948; reprinted Christian Classics, 1981); <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa>; <http://www.dhspriority.org/thomas/summa/index.html>.

[6](#) Richard Hooker, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, 2 vols. (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1907), Book 5, 62.2.

[7](#) John Knox, *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, Edward Arber, ed. (Southgate, London, 1878); <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/knox/blast>; <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/9660>.

[8](#) See my earlier essay, "Concerning the Ordination of Women: The Argument from Tradition is not the Traditional Argument," <http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-the-argument-from-tradition-is-not-the-traditional-argument>.

[9](#) Complementarians recognize that this must be the case: "The interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 is by no means easy. The rub of the difficulty is that in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Paul is quite prepared for women to pray and prophesy, albeit with certain restrictions; but here, a first reading of the

text seems to make the silence he enjoins absolute.” D. A. Carson, “‘Silent in the Churches’: On the role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 140. “The passage never did require complete silence of women, even when Paul wrote it. This is evident because Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11, just three chapters earlier, that women who pray and prophesy should have their heads covered, which assumes that they could pray and prophesy aloud in church services.” Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 232.

[10](#) Complementarian Douglas Moo rejects as untenable that Paul meant that all women are inherently susceptible to deception: “[T]here is nothing in the Genesis accounts or in Scripture elsewhere to suggest that Eve’s deception is characteristic of women in general.” “What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men? 1 Timothy 2:11-16,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 183.

[11](#) Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 270-271.

[12](#) Scholars who would endorse this conclusion include Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987); Richard Hays, *First Corinthians, Interpretation* (Louisville, Knox, 1997); Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman: One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009). “The best explanation is that the passage is a gloss, inserted in the text at this point . . . The whole passage is much more coherent without these extraneous verses. Paul never told women to be silent in churches: the order is the work of a subsequent Christian generation.” Hays, 248.

[13](#) “Thus, these two verses simply lack any genuine

correspondence with either the overall argument of chaps. 12-14 or the immediate argument of vv. 26-40." Fee, 702.

[14](#) Fee, 699-706. Similar and lengthier arguments appear in Payne, 217-267. Also see Hays, 245-248.

[15](#) Ben Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); 91-92; Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1148-1150.

[16](#) Of course, given the centrality of the text for their position, complementarians defend its authenticity. For the sake of argument, this essay does as well.

[17](#) A point noted by Johnson, 272.

[18](#) Kenneth Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 295-299, 409-410.

[19](#) "It is evident from what precedes and follows 1 Cor 14:33b-36 that Paul is concerned with proper order in the Christian worship. . . . it is reasonable to expect Paul is dealing with some sort of disorderliness here." Witherington, 96.

[20](#) I am assuming that the prepositional phrase, "as in all the churches," belongs with verse 33, not with the beginning of verse 34 (as in the ESV translation). The problem with assuming that "as in all the churches" refers to 34 is that it leads to a redundancy: "As in all the *churches* of the saints, let the women be silent *in the churches*."

[21](#) Alan G. Padgett, *As Christ Submits to the Church: A Biblical Understanding of Leadership and Mutual Submission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 72-73.

[22](#) Bailey describes some of his own experiences in village churches in Egypt, but also refers to John Chrysostom's own reflections on Paul's passage: "Then indeed the women, from

such teaching keep silence; but now there is apt to be great noise among them, much clamor and talking, and nowhere so much as in this place [the cathedral] . . . Thus all is confusion, and they seem not to understand that unless they are quiet, they cannot learn what is useful. For when our discourse [sermon] strains against the talking, and no one minds what is said, what good can it do to them?" Chrysostom, Homily IX [1 Timothy ii: 11-15]," *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Volume 13: Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, Philip Schaff, ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 13:435; cited by Bailey, 414-415.

[23](#) Bailey, 408-417.

[24](#) The following is just one of numerous examples: Dan Rockmore, "The Case for Banning Laptops in Class," *The New Yorker* (June 6, 2014); <http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-case-for-banning-laptops-in-the-classroom>.

[25](#) Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: 1992, 2004), 80,81. Also see "Craig S. Keener, "Learning in the Assemblies: 1 Corinthians 14:34-35," *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (DownersGrove: InterVarsity, 2004), 161-171. Keener's view is also embraced by Johnson, 274-275; Witherington, 103-104, Thiselton, 1156-1158.

[26](#) Keener, "Learning in the Assemblies," 165; *Paul, Women and Wives*, 82.

[27](#) Keener, "Learning in the Assemblies," 166. "These passages [1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-12] . . . reflect the same conviction articulated by Plutarch, namely that a woman's words are for her husband's ears, not for the public ear."

David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity* (DownersGrove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 34.

[28](#) Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 82-83; "Learning in the Assemblies," 169.

[29](#) Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 85-86; "Learning in the Assemblies," 168; "In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul's chief concern appears to be the impression that will be made on the visitor to the congregation – the one 'outsider.' I would consider it likely that the passages limiting women's public voice and presence are introduced as part of the early church leaders' attempts to show the outsider that the Christian movement is not subversive . . . The reason for this is first to diminish the slander against the Christian group . . . and second, to make the group more attractive to the people around it." deSilva, 35 note.

[30](#) Keener, "Learning in the Assemblies," 171.

[31](#) Grudem, 243.

[32](#) Grudem, 544-599.

[33](#) Grudem, 243.

[34](#) Grudem, 233.

[35](#) "Perhaps the greatest weakness of the position is that there is nothing in the text that specifically leads us to suppose that 'judging prophecies' is the particular sort of speech in view . . ." Keener, "Learning in the Assemblies," 163.

[36](#) Witherington, 101-104; Thiselton, 1156-1162.

[37](#) Witherington, 101-103.

[38](#) Witherington, 103-104, 259 note.

[39](#) "This passage requires women to be silent with respect to



the activity under discussion, which is the judging of prophecies.” Grudem, 233. “There is nothing in 1 Corinthians that says women were being disruptive.” Grudem, 243.

[40](#) “It also makes sense . . . for Paul to say that women could prophesy but could not speak out and judge prophecies in the church, for the judging of prophecies was assuming governing authority over the assembled congregation.” Grudem, 230. Grudem insists that “in all the churches” in verse 33b belongs with verse 34: “As in all the churches of the saints, women should keep silent in the churches.” (ESV). Grudem, 234.

[41](#) Grudem, 234-235.

[42](#) Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 79.

[43](#) Witherington has an extended discussion of the distinction between prophecy and teaching (Witherington, 93-94).

[44](#) “[O]ne view that has *no* support in the context is that Paul’s requirement that women be silent just means that they are not allowed to *teach*.” Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 79.

[45](#) Johnson, 274, 276; “If the reason for the counsel to silence and submission is caused by disorder in the worship service, not disorder in family relations, then this explains why ὑποτάσσω is used in the *absolute form*. Women are not being commanded to submit to their husbands, but to the principle of order in the worship service, the principle of silence and respect shown when another is speaking.” Witherington, 102-103.

[46](#) Thiselton, 1153-1154.

[47](#) Witherington, 104.

[48](#) “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. These restrictions are permanent, authoritative

for the church in all times and places and circumstances as long as men and women are descended from Adam and Eve. . . . The activities involved in 1 Timothy 2:12 are, by definition, transcultural in the sense that they are permanent ministries of the Christian church, and the prohibitions of 1 Timothy 2:12 are grounded in theology . . . we are justified in requiring very good reasons *from the text itself* to limit the application of this text in any way.” Douglas Moo, 180, 193. “However we understand that passage, it is evident that Paul is saying that something is true of Eve in relationship to Adam *that has transcultural significance for women and men generally in the New Testament church.*” Grudem, 296. The passage is so crucial to the complementarian case that an entire book has been written on it: Andreas Köstenberger, Thomas Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin, eds. *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 1995).

[49](#) James D. G. Dunn, “The First and Second Letters to Timothy and the Letter to Titus,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible Volume XI* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 802. Richard Hays refers to the “lame exoneration of Adam.” Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 67. I include the quotations from Dunn and Hays not because they are notorious “liberal” theologians but because they are not. They are rather two of the foremost critically orthodox New Testament scholars.

[50](#) Dunn, 778-779; Brevard Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 379.

[51](#) Padgett, 84-89.

[52](#) Payne, 293-294.

[53](#) Payne suggests that Luke might have been Paul’s amanuensis; Payne 292-293.

[54](#) Dunn, 781; Hays, *Moral Vision*, 61; Childs, 382-395.

[55](#) Witherington, 118; Payne, 295-299. Grudem claims that “No clear proof of women teaching false doctrine at Ephesus has been found either inside the Bible or outside the Bible,” (Grudem, 282), but this is really to ignore the central concern of all three pastoral letters. Payne provides numerous parallels between the language that Paul uses of false teachers in the pastorals and the language he uses to describe the problematic women at Ephesus (Payne, 299-304). Grudem also ignores the significance of Paul’s reference to “deception” in 1 Tim. 2:14. Paul is clearly making a connection between Eve’s deception and the teaching that he is forbidding. In Titus 1:10-12, he makes a clear connection between “deceivers” and “teaching what they ought not to teach.”

[56](#) “The artificial augmentations of beauty Paul addresses here were the sort that only the wealthy could afford, . . . symbols of status inseparable from the cultural expressions of beauty they signified . . . [T]hat these women could be wearing gold at all suggests that they were well-to-do.” Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 105.

[57](#) Payne, 311-312; Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 107-108.

[58](#) “The false teachers were encouraging women to discard what we might call traditional female roles in favor of a more egalitarian approach to the role relationships of men and women. This is not stated explicitly as a plan in the false teachers’ platform anywhere in the pastoral epistles. Nevertheless, it is an inference with a high degree of probability . . . . There is good reason to think that the underlying issue in verse 11 is not just submission to the teaching of the church but the submission of women to their husbands and, perhaps, to the male leadership of the church. This is suggested by Paul’s use of the word submission (*hypotage*). Submission is the appropriate response of Christians to those who are in authority over them . . .” Moo,

181, 183.

[59](#) Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 107-108; Payne, 311-317. “[T]he submission here enjoined specifically modifies ‘to learn.’ . . . verse 11 is about submission to Christian doctrine.” Payne, 315, 316. Witherington notes that “in all submission” “describes the proper attitude of receptivity to the teaching. Women are being ordered to observe the proper attitude in which one may learn.” Witherington, 120.

[60](#) See my essay “Concerning Women’s Ordination: Women in Worship and ‘Headship,’” <http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-women’s-ordination-women-in-worship>.

[61](#) Moo, 185.

[62](#) Grudem, 301.

[63](#) Witherington, 120.

[64](#) 1 Cor. 7:6, 7, 8, 25, 26, 28, 29, 32, 35, 40; Phil. 4:2.

[65](#) See Payne’s detailed discussion, pp. 319-325.

[66](#) The KJV has “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.” Linda Belleville notes that post-World War II translations routinely translate the verb “to have authority over,” but lists fifteen translations beginning with the Old Latin where it is translated along the lines of “dominate” or “usurp authority.” Linda Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 209-210.

[67](#) Rom. 9:21; 1 Cor. 6:12, 7:37; 9:4, 12 and elsewhere. Payne, 375.

[68](#) Grudem, 675-702. This originally appeared in Köstenberger et al, *Women in the Church*, 269-305.

[69](#) Payne notes that there are only two cases of *authentēō* “unambiguously documented” up to Paul’s time (Payne, 361, 385). In a response on his blog to a review of his book, Payne states: “[T]here is not a single instance where it can be demonstrated to mean ‘exercise authority’ prior to ca AD 370.” <http://www.pbpayne.com/?p=456>; Grudem is thus disingenuous when he writes (308), “What should be evident from this chart is that there are no negative examples of the word *authentēō* at or around the time of the New Testament.” Since the vast majority of the usages occur centuries after the New Testament period, they say nothing about the period “at or around the time of the New Testament.”

[70](#) See the detailed discussion in Payne, 361-397, and Belleville, 205-223.

[71](#) Grudem, 318.

[72](#) Payne, 337-359. “Interpreting 1 Tim 2:12 as a single prohibition of women teaching combined with assuming authority over men fits the context perfectly.” Payne, 351. Payne lists seven examples showing that *oude* can connect two verbs, one expressing a positive example and one negative. Paul usually understands teaching as something positive, but 1 Timothy 2:12 is clearly prohibiting something negative, “self-assumed authority, which is exactly what the false teachers were doing.” Payne concludes: “Understood as a single prohibition, 1 Tim 2:12 conveys, ‘I am not permitting a woman to teach and [in combination with this] to assume authority over a man.’ The only established category of *oude* that makes sense of this passage joins conceptually different expressions to convey a single idea.” Payne, 358.

[73](#) Belleville, 217-219.

[74](#) Moo, 190.

[75](#) Grudem, 287

[76](#) Grudem, 125.

[77](#) Witherington, 122. “The ‘for’ (‘for Eve was created’) can be understood either as the reason for the impropriety of Ephesian women’s teaching or as an explanation of it.” Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 115. “Either the explanatory or the illative sense of γάρ, or a mixture of the two, can make good sense in the context of 1 Tim 2:13.” Payne again provides an in-depth discussion of the grammar (Payne, 399-405).

[78](#) Padgett, 90-91.

[79](#) Padgett, 92-93.

[80](#) “If we read Paul’s injunction here as applying to all women in all cultures, then the passage must be understood to mean, ‘Eve was deceived, so all women are more easily deceived than all men.’” Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 116. “If [the passage provides a reason for the prohibition], then it might imply some sort of broad anthropological judgment about women’s susceptibility to deception, i.e., women should not teach because they are more susceptible to deception as Eve was.” Witherington, 122.

[81](#) Hays, *Moral Vision*, 67.

[82](#) See my essay “Concerning Women’s Ordination: The Argument ‘From Tradition’ is not the ‘Traditional’ Argument,” <http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-the-argument-from-tradition-is-not-the-traditional-argument>.

[83](#) Moo recognizes the problem: “If the issue, then, is deception, it may be that Paul wants to imply that all women, are, like Eve, more susceptible to being deceived than are men, and that this is why they should not be teaching men!” He finds this reading “unlikely”: “For one thing, there is nothing in the Genesis accounts in Scripture elsewhere to suggest that Eve’s deception is representative of women in general.” Moo, 190.

[84](#) Moo, 190.

[85](#) Payne, 409-410.

[86](#) “Paul gives the reason for his command, and it is the creation order . . . not any false teaching by women. . . . Paul’s reason is the Creation order: ‘For Adam was formed first, then Eve.’” Grudem, 287.

[87](#) Grudem, 296.

[88](#) Keener, *Paul, Wome and Wives*, 115. Grudem complains of a similar suggestion: “This objection removes the reason that Paul does give and replaces it with a reason that Paul does not give. . . . Paul does not mention anything about hearing a command from God or not hearing a command from God. . . . [This suggestion] claims that what Paul says is not a good reason for what Paul commands; and then [it] subsitutes a different reason for the one Paul actually gives. Are we free to treat Scripture this way, to change a verse we disagree with into something completely different, and then claim that that is what the verse really says? Is this the kind of treatment of God’s Word that we want to allow and endorse in our churches?” Grudem, 125. But, of course, Keener’s suggestion does no such thing. The key interpretative issue is how to explain the relationship between (1) creation order (Adam was formed first) and (2) the woman’s deception (Eve was deceived, not Adam). Grudem affirms the first (1), but carefully avoids talking about the second (2). Unless we understand Paul’s argument to be that all women are inherently subject to deception because Eve was deceived, and Eve was deceived because Adam was formed first, then it is necessary to posit a different plausible explanation for the connection between the order of creation and deception. Keener’s suggestion foots the bill. It is true that Paul does not mention anything explicitly about “hearing a command from God or not hearing a command from God.” But neither does Paul mention anything explicitly about male authority over women or

different male/female “roles.” Both Keener’s interpretation and Grudem’s are speculative attempts to make sense of something that Paul did write by suggesting plausible scenarios to account for something that Paul did not write, but presumed his readers understood, the connection between (1) and (2). One cannot solve the problem by focusing exclusively on (1) and simply ignoring (2).

[89](#) See a similar argument in Padgett, 94-101.

[90](#) Richard Hooker, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, 2 vols. (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1907) III. v. 1; cited in Stephen Sykes, “Richard Hooker and the Ordination of Women,” *Unashamed Anglicanism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 88.

[91](#) Witherington, 154.