

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE CRUX OF THE MATTER:  
Paul's Pastoral Pronouncements  
Regarding Women's Roles  
in 1 Timothy 2:9–15\*

The issue of women's roles in the church spans cultures, times, denominations, and, of course, genders. It spans cultures: believers in North America may not always realize that this issue is not merely an in-house debate among American evangelicals. "Es hat ja Priesterinnen gegeben" ("There were indeed female priests") trumpets a recent headline in an Austrian national newspaper, arguing for the apostolic origins of the priesthood of women.<sup>1</sup> "More than three years after they cracked the stained-glass ceiling to become priests, Australia's female Anglican clergy say they still are fighting against the church's male leadership," reads a current report from Australia.<sup>2</sup> "Female priests may be church's salvation," opines a contemporary assessment of the situation in the Anglican church in Great Britain.<sup>3</sup> American Episcopalians ordained their first female bishop in 1989, Anglicans in England followed suit in 1994, and Germany saw the ordination of its first female Lutheran bishop in 1992.<sup>4</sup>

---

\*This essay first appeared in *Faith & Mission* 14 (1997): 24–48 and is reprinted with permission.

<sup>1</sup>Maria Regina Pisa in *Die Presse* (November 13, 1995): 2.

<sup>2</sup>Listed under "International News in Brief" in a 1995 issue of the *Chicago Tribune*.

<sup>3</sup>Veronique Mistiaen, *Chicago Tribune*, August 13, 1995, 6/1, 8.

<sup>4</sup>Werner Neuer, *Mann und Frau in christlicher Sicht* (5th ed.; Gießen: Brunnen, 1993), 6. Regarding the German Lutheran scene, see esp. "Wer 'verläßt den Boden der in der evangelischen Kirche geltenden Lehre'?": Zur EKD-Stellungnahme von 1992 'Frauenordination und Bischofsamt' " (Gr. Oesingen: Harms, 1995). Cf. also Manfred Hauke, *Die Problematik um das Frauenpriestertum vor dem Hintergrund der Schöpfungs- und Erlösungsordnung* (KKKTS 46; Paderborn, 1982; 3rd ed. 1991); idem, *God oder Goddess? Feminist Theology: What is it? Where does it lead?* (San

Indeed, the role of women in the church, and in particular the issue of women's ordination, is a world-wide phenomenon.<sup>5</sup>

The issue spans times: as Daniel Doriani demonstrated in a thorough recent survey, we must avoid the notion that we are here confronted with an unprecedented issue in the history of the church.<sup>6</sup> The issue of women's roles in the church is not a new one. This renders it all the more remarkable that the "progressive" reading of biblical texts such as 1 Tim 2:9–15 is a comparatively recent phenomenon. In a current essay, Robert Yarbrough argues persuasively that radical egalitarianism regarding gender roles mirrors societal developments more than it issues from an exegesis of the biblical texts themselves.<sup>7</sup> While there were precursors of egalitarianism, an egalitarian school of biblical interpretation did not fully take hold until a few decades ago. However, nineteen centuries of virtual unanimity in this matter constitute strong presumptive evidence that the "historic" reading of the relevant texts is valid.<sup>8</sup>

The issue spans denominations: Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Episcopalians, and many other denominations around the world have recently had to wrestle with the issue of whether women should be placed in positions of ultimate responsibility in their respective bodies.<sup>9</sup> For now, the Roman Catholic hierarchy stands firm in its opposition to women's ordination, not merely on biblical, but primarily on traditional and dogmatic grounds.<sup>10</sup> Anglicans and

---

Francisco: Ignatius, 1995).

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Paige Patterson, "The Meaning of Authority in the Local Church," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood—A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 248–59.

<sup>6</sup>"Appendix 1: A History of the Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2," in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15* (ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 209–67.

<sup>7</sup>Robert W. Yarbrough, "The Hermeneutics of 1 Timothy 2:9–15," in *Women in the Church*, 167–71.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Köstenberger et al., *Women in the Church*, 209.

<sup>9</sup>"Positions of ultimate responsibility" may bear a variety of designations: bishop, priest, (senior) pastor, elder, or deacon (in some denominations).

<sup>10</sup>Pope John Paul II issued an encyclical on qualifications for the priesthood entitled "Ordinatio Sacerdotalis" on May 22, 1994. For a discussion of the Roman Catholic stance toward women's ordination and for a complete list of recent Catholic texts pertaining to the women's issue, see "Emanzipiert oder diskriminiert?," *Die Furche* 8 (February 22, 1996): 13. See also the compendium

(German) Lutherans have recently begun to ordain women.<sup>11</sup> Presbyterians and Baptists have been divided over the issue, which continues to be hotly debated in their respective circles.<sup>12</sup> And no consensus appears to be on the horizon.

Finally, the issue spans genders: what constitutes proper roles for women in the church is, of course, a topic of vital interest to every Christian woman who cares to know the will of God on the subject. But this matter affects men as well, since women and men are to serve Christ together in the church, and to settle the issue of God-pleasing role distinctions is vital for an effective ministry carried out harmoniously by representatives of both genders. Some men seem afraid to appear chauvinistic by teaching that positions of ultimate responsibility in the church are reserved for qualified men. But in the end the issue is not conformity to cultural norms but fidelity to Scripture. When a leading American journalist excoriates a complementarian understanding of male-female roles as contemptible, even inhuman, "doctrinaire reductionism," proponents of the church's historic position on male-female relationships must not be intimidated.<sup>13</sup> Sadly, many churches have already surrendered to the enormous pressure brought to bear on them in this regard; yet other congregations are in the process of intense, even divisive, debates over the issue and its implications.<sup>14</sup>

---

edited by Helmut Moll, *The Church and Women. A Compendium* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988) for valuable contributions by Catholic authors.

<sup>11</sup>For a recent treatment from an Anglican perspective, see Michael Harper, *Equal and Different: Male and Female in Church and Family* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994). Regarding the German Lutheran scene, see Jobst Schöne, "Hirtenbrief zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen zum Amt der Kirche" (Groß Oesingen: Verlag der Lutherischen Buchhandlung Heinrich Harms, 1994).

<sup>12</sup>Regarding the Baptist scene, see esp. Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 249-50, 271-72, 292-93. Apparently the first Baptist woman to be ordained was Addie Davis by the Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, NC. But in 1984, a resolution opposing women's ordination was passed. The ordination of women is one of the major planks in the Southern Baptist moderates' platform.

<sup>13</sup>Lance Morrow in *TIME*, October 3, 1994, p. 71.

<sup>14</sup>For a perceptive critique of the feminist movement, see Mary Kassian, *The Feminist Gospel: The Movement to Unite Feminism with the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1992; note also Kassian's essay in this present issue). For recent radical egalitarian works and further bibliography, see Carol E. Becker, *Leading Women* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) and Sally B. Purvis, *The*

How can this difficult question be brought closer to a satisfactory solution? Different answers have been given by egalitarians that may be divided into secular, liberal, and “biblical” feminists on the one hand and complementarians and traditionalists on the other.<sup>15</sup> I myself have argued in a recent essay that the issue is ultimately not merely the interpretation of biblical texts, but that the underlying interpretive assumptions may influence views on the matter.<sup>16</sup> In the final analysis, the problem even extends to one’s stance toward Scripture as a whole and to the issue of what constitutes one’s final point of reference in answering the question of whether women should be put in positions of ultimate responsibility over men in the church or not.<sup>17</sup> Despite extreme assertions to the contrary in recent years, this does not render biblical exegesis irrelevant, impossible, or unnecessary.<sup>18</sup> It merely means that it is illusory to hope to persuade

---

*Stained Glass Ceiling* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

<sup>15</sup>For a helpful discussion of different kinds of feminists, see Guenther Haas, “Patriarchy as an Evil that God Tolerated: Analysis and Implications for the Authority of Scripture,” *JETS* 38 (1995): 321, n. 1, who distinguishes between (1) “evangelical (or biblical) feminists” who claim to hold to the authority of Scripture (R. Tucker); (2) “mainline (or liberal) feminists” who accept as authoritative in Scripture only those elements that promote the full liberation of women (R. Ruether, P. Tribble); (3) “radical feminists” who reject the Bible entirely as divine revelation owing to the pervasive influence of patriarchy; among these, some continue to consider themselves as Christians (E. S. Fiorenza) while others do not (M. Daly).

<sup>16</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Gender Passages in the NT: Hermeneutical Fallacies Critiqued,” *WTJ* 56 (1994): 259–83.

<sup>17</sup>It seems helpful to frame the crux of the question regarding women’s roles in the church in these terms. This must not be the end of the discussion of women’s ministries, which are varied and of vital importance to the function of God’s people. As Satan asked Eve in the garden, however, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat *from any tree* in the garden?’ ” thus twisting God’s word, those who appear satisfied with nothing less than radical egalitarianism today appear obsessed with claiming as legitimate the *only* ministry apparently reserved for men in the church for women while charging their opponents with “devaluing the ministry of women.”

<sup>18</sup>See David L. Thompson, “Women, Men, Slaves and the Bible: Hermeneutical Inquiries,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 25 (1996): 326–49, who claims that “attempts either to support or to deny egalitarian relationships between men and women solely on the basis of the interpretation of individual biblical texts in their contexts *lead inevitably to eisegesis* [emphasis added]—to reading the interpreter’s agenda into the text” (327). This extreme argument, however, denies both the necessity and possibility of genuine biblical exegesis. For a decisive rebuttal of Thompson, see Wayne Grudem, “Asbury Professor Advocates Egalitarianism but Undermines Biblical Authority: A Critique of

someone of one's position *solely on exegetical grounds* while this person is committed to a grid of contrary hermeneutical presuppositions and a worldview that *a priori* excludes particular exegetical outcomes.

Having stressed the importance of these larger considerations, however, and armed with a healthy dose of realism regarding the likelihood of persuading adherents of opposing views to one's position, we may therefore venture on the interpretation of 1 Tim 2:9–15, arguably the “crux of the matter.” It is the most difficult passage for those who *on biblical grounds* argue for radical egalitarianism, and the most important ground of appeal for those who claim that Scripture limits women from assuming positions of ultimate authority and responsibility in the church.<sup>19</sup> In light of the fact that the recent book *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, co-edited by the present author, lays out the various aspects of the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2 in considerable detail, we will follow the procedure of summarizing some of the most salient arguments made there, supplemented where appropriate, with further material for discussion. We will conclude with an appraisal of the possibility of tracing a biblical theology of women's roles in the church.<sup>20</sup>

*The Ancient Background: The Goddess Artemis  
and Ephesian Women*

Battles have raged with little respite regarding the most proper reconstruction of the ancient background for 1 Timothy 2.<sup>21</sup> How this background

---

David Thompson's "Trajectory" Hermeneutic," *CBMW News* 2/1 (1996): 8–12.

<sup>19</sup>This is acknowledged by Stanley Grenz: "I think the strongest argument that the complementarian has is the argument that the Bible indicates that God ordained a hierarchy of male over female from the beginning—that is, in creation. And that this understanding then lies beneath the 1 Timothy 2 text. You can use that presupposition to make sense out of some very difficult texts . . ." and Denise Kjesbo: "[T]he 1 Timothy 2 passage . . . that text can nag at me . . . it's a hard passage." See "Putting Women in Their Place," *Academic Alert* 5/1 (Winter 1996): 2.

<sup>20</sup>In order not to exhaust the reader and to prolong the discussion unnecessarily, documentation below will be representative and illustrative rather than exhaustive. For detailed bibliographic references, see the various essays and the bibliography in *Women in the Church*, ed. Köstenberger et al.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. esp. Catherine Clark and Richard Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11–15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) and the decisive response by Steven M. Baugh in *Women in the Church*, ed. Köstenberger et al., 13–52. See also the devastating critiques

is construed is indeed significant for the interpretation of the present passage, since in recent debate it has been argued that the relevance of this text is limited to the original occasion. It must be noted, however, that, in the final analysis, this is a question of *hermeneutics*, not background. In other words, a limited application of 1 Timothy 2 cannot be established *on the basis of a particular reconstructed background* of this text, but only on the basis of proper hermeneutical considerations, such as the genre of the Pastoral Epistles, the nature of the normativity of biblical commands, and other such factors. The relevance of the message of 1 Timothy 2 to the issue of contemporary women's roles is therefore not contingent on a solution (or the lack thereof) of the debate regarding the most plausible background to 1 Timothy 2. If it is decided on hermeneutical grounds that the text transcends its immediate occasion and therefore possesses perennial pertinence for the church, it should be applied today.

Nevertheless, the background to 1 Timothy 2 remains significant in order to elucidate the text. Before providing a brief overview of the issue, however, one more word of caution must be registered: it must not be assumed that every piece of evidence regarding life in ancient Ephesus in the latter half of the first century CE will of necessity be *relevant* background information for 1 Timothy 2. It is not enough for so-called progressive interpreters to postulate a given feature of ancient life in the city of Ephesus. What must further be demonstrated, ultimately in terms of the most plausible reconstruction of the epistle's occasion *from the text*, is that a given feature of ancient life in Ephesus *was relevant for the writer of 1 Timothy in addressing the issue of women's teaching or assuming authority over men in the church*. Only this system of checks and balances retains ultimate authority for Scripture and guards the latter from an undue domestication in light of extrabiblical data that are used to supersede statements found in the biblical texts themselves.

What, then, is the nature of the debate regarding the background to 1 Timothy 2? It has been argued that Ephesus was "a bastion and bulwark of women's rights" in the midst of a uniformly unfeminist Graeco-Roman world, in which Democritus' saying, "For a man to be ruled by a woman

---

of the Kroegers' work by Robert W. Yarbrough, "I Suffer Not a Woman: A Review Essay," *Presbyterion* 18 (1992): 25–33; Albert Wolters, "Review: *I Suffer Not a Woman*," *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993): 208–13; and Steven M. Baugh, "The Apostle Among the Amazons," *WTJ* 56 (1994): 153–71. For hermeneutical observations regarding the use of background data, see Köstenberger, "Gender Passages," 271–73.

is the very height of hubris” ruled the day.<sup>22</sup> Artemis Ephesia is said to have been “a powerful female deity who elevated the status of women,” “a symbol of Women’s Liberation” and “matriarchy.”<sup>23</sup> On the strength of this assessment, it is argued that Paul’s prohibition against women teachers extended only to *Ephesian* women in his day, since they were infected by an anomalous cultural outlook.<sup>24</sup> But in a comprehensive, well-informed piece of painstaking scholarly reconstruction based on the first-hand study of thousands of inscriptions from first-century Ephesus, Steven M. Baugh lays this theory of “feminist Ephesus” to rest once and for all.<sup>25</sup> What makes his contribution particularly valuable is that it is not merely written in reaction to egalitarian views but in an effort to provide an independent, all-encompassing survey of Ephesian society during the second half of the first century CE.

When all is said and done, the society described by Baugh turns out to be nothing like the “feminist Ephesus” alleged by egalitarians but rather a city very much in keeping with other Graeco-Roman metropolitan centers of its day. As Baugh sums up his discussion, “Ephesus was in most ways a typical Hellenic society.”<sup>26</sup> He even argues that Paul was more “liberal” than the Roman writer Plutarch, who wanted a virtuous wife to be hidden away when not accompanied by her husband and not to make her own friends but be content with her husband’s (*Mor.* 139C, 140D), while Paul encourages them to learn in the church, to exercise their gifts in form of public good works and in the discipleship of younger women.<sup>27</sup> Baugh concludes, “If this chapter has added anything concrete to [the] discussion of 1 Timothy 2:9–15, it is that exegetical treatments can proceed with the assumption that Ephesus was not a unique society in its era. Specifically, it was not a feminist society [as commonly

---

<sup>22</sup>Baugh, “Foreign World,” 14, n. 4.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Catherine Clark Kroeger, “1 Timothy 2:12—A Classicist’s View,” in *Women, Authority and the Bible* (ed. Alvera Mickelsen; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 227–28; Marcus Barth, “Traditions in Ephesians,” *NTS* 30 (1984): 16; Kroegers, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, passim.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Kroegers, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, 93; Sharon Hodgkin Gritz, “The Role of Women in the Church,” in *The People of God: Essays on the Believers’ Church* (ed. Paul A. Basden and David S. Dockery; Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 308.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Baugh, “Foreign World,” 14–52, who on p. 15 mentions that there are almost four thousand extant inscriptions from Ephesus, more than from any other city in the region.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 49–50.

alleged].”<sup>28</sup> Thus it seems inadmissible to rule 1 Tim 2:12 out from consideration by the argument that the women in this church were unusually unruly or emancipated.

But were women perhaps prohibited from teaching men merely because of the presence of heretical female teachers in the congregation? If this had been Paul’s intent, he arguably would have said so: there is a perfectly good Greek word for “teaching error,” that is *ἑτεροδιδασκαλεῖν* used in 1 Tim 1:3 and 6:3), which could have been used in 1 Tim 2:12. Moreover, why would Paul merely forbid *women* the teaching of false doctrine and not also men? This seems strange, especially since all the *explicitly named* false teachers in the Ephesian church are male (Hymenaeus and Alexander in 1 Tim 1:20; Hymenaeus and Philetus in 2 Tim 2:17; Demas in 2 Tim 4:10), with women featuring, not primarily as *perpetrators*, but as *victims* of false teaching (1 Tim 2:14; 2 Tim 3:6).

Were women then disqualified from teaching men merely owing to their lack of proper education?<sup>29</sup> The evidence provided by Baugh from ancient Ephesus explodes the myth of women’s general lack of education in that day.<sup>30</sup> While women were indeed less involved in formal public education in the ancient world, that does not necessarily imply that they were uneducated. According to Baugh, other avenues of learning were available to women, particularly private lectures in salons (cf. 2 Tim 3:6). Still more important, all interpretations limiting the application of 1 Tim 2:12 on the basis of alleged background information ultimately flounder on the stubborn fact that they substitute unstated rationales in the place of the reasons actually supplied by the text (cf. 1 Tim 2:13–14). Finally, women are not barred by 1 Tim 2:12 from teaching altogether, but only from the teaching of *men* (*ἄνδρας*), which in context refers to the authoritative doctrinal instruction of a local church gathered for worship.

As argued above, none of these background considerations precludes the actual exegesis and hermeneutical evaluation of the passage. It does, however, exclude the setting aside of 1 Tim 2:9–15 *solely on the basis of background considerations*. And so we may proceed with an assessment of the genre of the Pastoral Epistles and the issue of the normativity of biblical injunctions.

---

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>29</sup>Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 107–13, is an influential recent advocate of this position.

<sup>30</sup>See the section on “Women and Education” in Baugh, “Foreign World,” 45–47.



*The Genre of the Pastorals and the Nature of the  
Normativity of Biblical Injunctions*

It is of some importance for the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2 whether or not the Apostle Paul penned the epistle or whether a later follower of Paul is responsible for the composition of 1 Timothy. Even the alleged pseudonymity of this letter, however, would not by itself remove it from the sway of normativity for the universal church since, whether from Paul or not, the passage is part of the church's canonical Scriptures, which provide the framework for its faith and practice. Nevertheless, if the "I" of "I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man" is the Apostle Paul, this would add significant weight to the injunction, since the New Testament indicates that the church is founded on the foundation of the apostles and their teaching (cf. Eph 2:20; Acts 2:42). This is not the place to argue for the Pauline authorship of the Pastorals, though such a case can be, and recently has been, convincingly made.<sup>31</sup> The epistle's overt claim of having been penned by Paul (1:1) and the presence of several autobiographical pieces of information throughout the epistle (e.g. 1:2–4, 12–16 or 4:13) must be given full weight, especially since there is no evidence that pseudonymous *epistles* were an established genre in the first century AD, and even if this were the case, that the church would ever have incorporated such a document into its canon. For these reasons we may proceed on the basis of the assumption that 1 Timothy 2:12, like the entire epistle, has Paul as its author.

It is often argued that, as a "difficult" text "of limited application," 1 Timothy 2 should be interpreted in the light of "clear" texts "of universal applicability" such as Gal 3:28.<sup>32</sup> But a closer look reveals that the converse is true. To begin with, the text in Galatians is likewise part of an

---

<sup>31</sup>See Stanley E. Porter, "Pauline Authorship and the Pastoral Epistles: Implications for Canon," *Bulletin of Biblical Research* 5 (1995): 105–23. Cf. also T. David Gordon, "A Certain Kind of Letter: The Genre of 1 Timothy," in *Women in the Church*, ed. Köstenberger et al., 53–55. Gordon also provides further bibliography on pp. 53–54, n. 1 in his article.

<sup>32</sup>For a survey of the relevant issues, see Köstenberger, "Gender Passages," 260 and 273–79. See also Gordon D. Fee, "The Great Watershed—Intentionality & Particularity/Eternity: 1 Timothy 2:8–15 as a Test Case," in *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 52–65 and the response by Bruce K. Waltke, "1 Timothy 2:8–15: Unique or Normative?" *Crux* 28/1 (1992): 22–27.

epistle that was written to confront a very specific heresy plaguing the Galatian churches, so that it cannot be said that the Galatian passage is free from concrete conditions that faced a local church at a particular time. Hence both 1 Tim 2:12 and Gal 3:28 need to be interpreted in light of the circumstances that occasioned a given teaching. Moreover, the argument can be made on the basis of *genre* that, since 1 Timothy 2 is part of a *Pastoral Epistle*, whose very nature is that of apostolic instruction regarding the organization of the apostolic and postapostolic churches, the injunctions of 1 Timothy 2 should be considered *paramount*, exceeding in their finality even texts in earlier Pauline epistles or the Gospels in their authority for the church of all time. In other words, while the purpose of a letter such as Galatians was demonstrably *not* primarily to lay down permanent guidelines on the organization of the church in terms of qualifications for elders or the roles of men and women in the church, the injunctions of 1 Timothy 2 are part of an epistle whose entire purpose for writing is wrapped up in the purpose of providing such normative instruction. This is the power and significance of genre identification: it sets the parameters for interpretation by providing a framework for exegesis.<sup>33</sup> Genre precedes exegesis as a vital part of hermeneutics.

As David Gordon contends, the canonical Pastoral Epistles “contain norms that are especially germane to the issues of life in the church, ‘the household of God’ ” (cf. 1 Tim 3:15).<sup>34</sup> He lists the following pronouncements:

- instructions regarding the duties and qualifications of officeholders (1 Tim 3:1–13; 5:1–2; 2 Tim 2:1–26; 4:1–5; Titus 1:5–9; 2:1–15; 3:1–11);
- instructions regarding the enrolling of qualified widows for diaconal assistance (1 Tim 5:3–16);
- instructions regarding public prayer (1 Tim 2:1–15);
- instructions regarding remuneration of the ministers of the Word (1 Tim 5:17–19);
- instructions regarding the suppression of heresy (1 Tim 1:3–7; 2 Tim 4:3–4; Tit 1:10–11)

Gordon’s primary contribution, however, lies in his clarification of the issue of the normativity of biblical injunctions. He shows that the

---

<sup>33</sup>See esp. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., “3. The Concept of Genre,” *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), 68–126.

<sup>34</sup>Gordon, “Certain Kind of Letter,” 60.

occasional nature of the New Testament epistles in no way precludes the abiding normative force of injunctions contained therein. What is crucial in this regard, according to Gordon, is *the distinction between the actual injunction and the underlying norm informing the injunction*. In other words, Paul may issue a particular command to a given church and substantiate it by stating a particular norm that informs it. But while the specific formulation of the injunction may be occasional, *the informing norm is not*. This is precisely what makes it a *norm*: that it is an abiding principle that is capable of an unlimited number of specific applications to a variety of occasions and circumstances. Moreover, while it is possible to make such a distinction in certain instances, such as 1 Cor 11:2–16, where the wearing of a veil is but one possible concrete cultural expression of a woman’s submission to male authority in the church, there are other occasions where the injunctions are so inextricably tied to the norms informing them that the injunctions themselves assume permanent validity beyond the original context to which they were addressed.

Arguably, this is the case in 1 Timothy 2. There the command, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man” is substantiated in the following verses both by the order of creation and the scenario of the Fall.<sup>35</sup> The informing norms, positively the order of creation (i.e. Adam first, then Eve), and negatively the inappropriate role reversal at the Fall (i.e. Eve first, then Adam), ground the apostle’s pronouncement that, in God’s household, it should likewise be the man, not the woman, who bears ultimate responsibility for the church.<sup>36</sup> While there may be some room for discussion as to exactly what roles would therefore be inadmissible for women in the church, it seems clear that this includes at a minimum the role of overseer, as is made clear in the verses immediately following 1 Tim 2:9–15, when one of the qualifica-

---

<sup>35</sup>This runs counter to the claim of egalitarians who argue that male-female role distinctions are merely a function of the fall. Cf. e.g., “Men, Women & Biblical Equality,” a statement issued by the organization called “Christians for Biblical Equality”: “The Bible teaches that the rulership of Adam over Eve resulted from the Fall and was therefore not a part of the original created order.”

<sup>36</sup>Grant R. Osborne, “Hermeneutics and Women in the Church,” *JETS* 20 (1977): 347, maintains that the normative principle is the woman’s submissiveness and the cultural application, not to teach but to be silent. But it is hard to see how Paul would substantiate a mere temporary cultural application with a rationale from both creation order and the Fall, events of abiding relevance for humanity even after Christ’s provision of redemption. Moreover, the text of 1 Tim 2:11–12 presents “submission” and “not teaching or having authority over a man” as two sides of the same coin rather than respectively as normative principle and cultural application, as Osborne asserts.

tions of an overseer is that of “being the husband of one wife” (**μῑς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα**; 1 Tim 3:2).<sup>37</sup> Thus read, 1 Tim 2:9–15 and 3:1ff provide a close-knit argument that coheres very well indeed.

Moreover, it is significant that the norm explicitly stated in 1 Tim 2:13–14 as informing Paul’s injunction in 2:12 is that of Adam’s temporal priority over Eve in creation and the latter’s priority over the former at the Fall. As Gordon incisively comments, this effectively waylays the contention that the thrust of Paul’s teaching is here directed toward women’s lack of education, their teaching of heresy or unruly behavior in the Ephesian church, or other matters.<sup>38</sup> In other words, if Paul had stated that he did not want women to teach men *because he wanted the church to conduct itself in an orderly fashion or because he wanted to ensure the teaching of sound doctrine*, the state of orderliness or education of the Ephesian woman in Timothy’s church would be significant. But Paul, of course, states nothing of this sort. To the contrary, the norm explicitly stated in the text is that of preeminence and ultimate responsibility, which, according to the apostle, would be violated if women taught men or exercised authority over them in the church. Hence he enjoins them to refrain from doing so.

*The Word “Assume Authority” and the  
Sentence Structure of 1 Tim 2:12*

We may briefly survey jointly the issue of the meaning of the word **ἀυθεντέω** and the sentence structure of 1 Tim 2:12.<sup>39</sup> Here it has been the contention of egalitarians that the word may have a negative connotation, such as “domineer,” so that Paul merely forbids the *inappropriate*

---

<sup>37</sup>This expression probably refers to a “faithful husband,” i.e., a “one woman-kind of man.” Not the parallel phrase found in 1 Timothy 5:9, “wife of one husband” (**ένὸς ἀνδρὸς γυνή**), which hardly serves to exclude those widows who were subsequently married to more than one husband, but merely requires eligible widows to have been faithful wives, “one husband-kind of women.”

<sup>38</sup>The question of whether women were teaching false doctrine in the Ephesian church is therefore ultimately not decisive. Apparently, however, Paul’s primary concern was, not with women as the *perpetrators* of false teaching, but as its *victims* (cf. e.g., 2 Tim 3:6).

<sup>39</sup>For a detailed discussion, see H. Scott Baldwin, “A Difficult Word: **ἀυθεντέω** in 1 Timothy 2:12,” and Andreas J. Köstenberger, “A Complex Sentence Structure in 1 Timothy 2:12,” both in *Women in the Church*, ed. Köstenberger et al., 65–103.

exercise of authority by women rather than their exercise of authority altogether. Apart from the fact that this already flies in the face of mere logic—why would Paul only forbid *women* to exercise authority inappropriately, especially since it is clear from the text that it was men in particular who were responsible for heretical teaching?—this can also not be sustained from the meaning of the word itself in the light of the sentence structure of 1 Tim 2:12.

Scott Baldwin, in a recent comprehensive study of the term **αὐθεντέω**, leaves no stone unturned in examining all the available instances of this term in ancient literature. In short, he concludes that there is not a single unambiguous reference where the word means “domineer.” Demonstrating that a negative connotation of the word has frequently been postulated owing to the fallacy of linking the meaning of the noun *authentēs* (αὐθεντής) with the verb **αὐθεντέω**, the author does prove that **αὐθεντεῖν** does not ordinarily have a negative meaning. Nevertheless, it can, of course, not be excluded that the term could conceivably be supplied with a negative connotation in a given context, so that Baldwin’s study, while doubtless supplying a solid foundation for the *plausible* meaning of **αὐθεντέω** in the present passage, falls short of absolute proof.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, while Baldwin surveys a total of eighty-two instances of **αὐθεντέω** in ancient Greek literature, only two (!) date prior to the writing of First Timothy, a sample size so small as to preclude any certainty regarding the meaning of the word at the time the epistle was written.<sup>41</sup>

For this reason it appeared necessary to look for additional, alternative strategies at arriving at a definitive conclusion regarding the meaning of the word **αὐθεντέω** in 1 Tim 2:12.<sup>42</sup> Sophisticated computer searches of large amounts of ancient Greek literature<sup>43</sup> yielded, strikingly, a fixed

---

<sup>40</sup>This he frankly acknowledges in a section entitled “The Limitations of Word Studies,” 69–71.

<sup>41</sup>These two references are: Philodemus (1st cent. BCE): “Ought we not to consider that men who incur the enmity of *those in authority* (σὺν αὐθεντοῦσιν) are villains, and hated by both gods and men”; and BGU 1208 (27 BCE): “I exercised authority (Κάμοῦ αὐθεντηκότος) over him, and he consented to provide for Catalytis the Boatman on terms of full fare, within the hour.” For full Greek texts and translations, see Baldwin, “Appendix 2” in *Women in the Church*, 275–76.

<sup>42</sup>Cf. Köstenberger, “Difficult Sentence Structure,” chap. 4 in *Women in the Church*, ed. Köstenberger et al.

<sup>43</sup>For a detailed account of the methodology used in those computer searches, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Syntactical Background Studies to 1 Timothy 2.12 in the New Testament and Extrabiblical Greek Literature,” in

pattern in the Greek language, according to which the two elements of a “neither/nor” construction (two verbs connected with **οὐδέ**) share the same force with one another, be it positive or negative. This finding renders a translation of **αὐθεντέω** with “to teach in a domineering way” or the like impossible and in violation of the rules of Greek grammar. Rather, it suggests that the phrase be understood in terms of the exercise of any kind of authority, not just an inappropriate one. Consider the following words of Jesus as further examples of this kind of grammatical construction: “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them” (Matt 6:26); “sow,” “reap,” and “gather into barns” all are legitimate activities, even though the subjects of Jesus’ discourse (birds) are said not to engage in them for particular reasons. An example of the converse can be found in Matt 6:20, where Jesus is quoted as saying, “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in nor steal.” In this instance, both “breaking in” and “stealing,” while not synonymous (thieves first break in and then steal), possess an intrinsically negative connotation. In other words, two verbs conjoined by **οὐδέ** always relate either in terms of +/+ or -/-, never +/- or -/+.

The significance of this axiomatic feature of ancient Greek language for the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2 is that it settles conclusively the meaning of **αὐθεντέω**, which can only be approximated on other grounds (such as word studies, see above). The two verbs conjoined by **οὐδέ** (“or”) in 1 Tim 2:12 are **διδάσκειν** (“to teach”) and **αὐθεντεῖν**, and since it is demonstrable that **διδάσκειν** here has a positive force as elsewhere in the Pastorals, it follows that **αὐθεντέω** does as well.<sup>44</sup> Thus, far from connoting merely the *negative* exercise of authority by women, the term in 1 Tim 2:12 can therefore be shown to pertain *to any* such exercise of authority (which by itself is positive), owing to considerations adduced in the context (cf. 1 Tim 2:13–14). Thus the egalitarian position, as in the

---

*Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson; JSNTSS 113; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 165–66.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. esp. 1 Tim 4:11; 6:2; 2 Tim 2:2. In cases where a negative connotation is intended, the term is usually **ἑτεροδιδασκαλεῖν**, as in 1 Tim 1:3 and 6:3. In Titus 1:11, the heretical nature of teaching is made abundantly clear by contextual qualifiers (“They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching *things they ought not to teach*—and that for the sake of dishonest gain”). Contra Kroegers, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, 81.

case of background and genre, again founders on the hard evidence based on the text itself.

*The Exegesis of 1 Tim 2:9–15*

The previous discussions of the background of 1 Timothy 2, the genre of the Pastorals and the issue of normativity, and the meaning of **ἀνθεντέω** in 1 Tim 2:12, have prepared the way for a full-fledged exegesis of the passage. Extensive research has cleared away improper assumptions such as that of first-century “feminist Ephesus,” the restriction of the application of 1 Timothy 2 to the original context on larger hermeneutical grounds, or the giving of a negative connotation to the term **ἀνθεντέω**. It remains now to build on these insights and to illumine the passage as a whole. In what follows, we will not attempt to be comprehensive. Tom Schreiner, in a very thorough chapter in *Women in the Church*, has already rendered us this service.<sup>45</sup> In our survey, we will merely focus on the most significant issues, beginning with earlier verses, and occasionally suggest alternative detailed interpretive conclusions.

We begin with an observation regarding the structure of 1 Timothy. The key question presents itself as follows: is 1 Tim 2:12 part of the author’s negative polemic directed toward the false teachers and aspects of their heretical teaching? If so, this would support the notion that 1 Tim 2:12 was written likewise to combat a specific abuse or error in the Ephesian church. If not, however, the teaching in 1 Tim 2:12 may be viewed as more programmatic and constructive rather than narrowly constrained by the correction of a current heresy. Indeed, commentators differ on the extent to which the statement in 1:3–4 is determinative regarding 1 Timothy as a whole. Some believe that the reference places the entire letter in the purview of correcting heresy, seeking to find a specific heretical teaching behind every positive instruction in the epistle. Others believe that 1:3–4 provides the general occasion for the correspondence, without, however, limiting Paul’s teaching in 1 Timothy completely to the refutation of specific aspects of heresy.

While it is clear that the author returns to this issue in 4:1, it is less clear whether the section of 2:1–3:16 is to be subsumed under the refutation of heresy. Fee thinks so; on the strength of the introductory preposi-

---

<sup>45</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, “An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9–15: A Dialogue with Scholarship,” in *Women in the Church*, ed. Köstenberger et al., 105–54.

tion οὐν in 2:1, he seeks to identify a specific heresy in relation to virtually every single positive statement made by Paul. When prayers are urged for people in authority, this is mirror-read as an indication that heretics counseled against such prayers (2:1); when Paul asserts that God wants *all* to be saved, it is conjectured that this statement is designed to refute the false teachers' claim that salvation was intended only for *some* (2:4); when Jesus is called the only mediator between God and men, this is to counter the notion that there are other mediators as well (2:5), and so forth.<sup>46</sup> But it is far from clear whether οὐν should be taken to tie in the entire contents of 2:1–3:16 narrowly with 1:3–4. Hence the NASB, for example, translates the term “first of all, then,” in the sense of starting a new section that is not merely to be subsumed under what precedes.

Several arguments support the thesis that Paul in 2:1–3:16 moves beyond a narrow concern of refuting specific heresies to a pattern of more positive instruction regarding how Timothy should organize the church entrusted to him: first, the absence of specific explicit references to heresy in chapters 2 and 3; and second, the conclusion of this section in 3:15: “I write so that you may know *how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God*, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.” This conclusion implies that Paul views the instructions in this section as befitting the church of all times, not merely for the Ephesian church in Timothy’s day—note the solemn description of the church—and that his purpose is more positive and constructive than merely rebutting false teachers.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, it stretches credulity to argue, as hermeneutical consistency would appear to require Fee and others to do, that behind every attribute that is to be characteristic of an overseer stands a heresy: when Paul requires him to be prudent, some argued he was to be foolish; when he expects him to be uncontentious, heretics taught overseers should be contentious; when Paul demands the overseer to have a good reputation with outsiders, the false teachers contended that his reputation did not matter; and so forth. At the very least it should be agreed that if Paul had had a

---

<sup>46</sup>Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), *ad loc.*

<sup>47</sup>If 1 Timothy 2 is to be set aside as merely addressed to correct abuses in the Ephesian church, hermeneutical consistency would demand that 1 Timothy 3, with its instructions on what requirements are “necessary” (δεῖ) for “anyone” (τις) aspiring to the office of overseer, likewise be set aside from universal application, since 1 Timothy 2 and 3 form a close-knit unit. This, however, even most egalitarian interpreters are unwilling to do. But if 1 Timothy 3 is accepted as normative, 1 Timothy 2 should be afforded the same treatment.



specific heresy regarding, for example, women's teaching men in mind, he could have made it explicit rather than leaving it for his readers to draw this out. In the end, it should be noted that the arguments made by egalitarians regarding particular heresies underlying Paul's injunction particularly in 2:12 are arguments *from silence*—a fact that makes them not only unverifiable but often doubtful. As a result, we will tread lightly on supplying extra-textual information in order to interpret the explicit statements of the text, relying rather primarily on the latter to tell us what we need to know to understand Paul's message.

We need not tarry unduly at the introductory verses in 1 Tim 2:8–10.<sup>48</sup> Suffice it to say that Paul's desire for men "everywhere" to pray should be taken to imply that his instructions for women in the following verses are likewise pertinent for women "everywhere," not merely in Ephesus.<sup>49</sup> His exhortation for women not to be unduly concerned with their external appearance but rather to focus on inner beauty is very much in keeping with New Testament instruction elsewhere (cf. e.g., 1 Pet 3:1–6) as well as with Old Testament wisdom (Proverbs 31) and insights from the surrounding culture.<sup>50</sup> The underlying norm is that of a proper spiritual focus for women, to be exhibited in modest external adornment. The charge must therefore be rejected that conservative interpreters are inconsistent when they do not apply the words of verses 8 and 9 "literally" while taking seriously the injunction in verse 12.

But what does the crucial verse 12 itself mean? It should be stated at the outset that, especially in the light of the above findings regarding the meaning of *ἀθροῦν* in 1 Tim 2:12, the presumption lies heavily in favor of interpreting the text to mean what it actually says: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man." As Robert Yarbrough states perceptively, he is no fool who is slow to reject the overt message of a biblical text in favor of more "sophisticated readings."<sup>51</sup> The Reformation hermeneutical principle of the preferred status of the "natural" reading still stands. Clearly, the burden of proof lies with those who urge a reading other than this natural reading, and as has been shown, research regarding the passage's background, normativity, lexis, and

---

<sup>48</sup>See Schreiner, "Interpretation," 112–21.

<sup>49</sup>Contra Fee, *ad loc.*

<sup>50</sup>Baugh ("Foreign World," 52) quotes Joannes Stobbaeus: "A woman's particular virtue is modesty (*σωφροσύνη*), for by it she is enabled to honor and love her husband."

<sup>51</sup>Yarbrough, "Hermeneutics," 155–56.

syntax, all join in supporting the notion that the natural reading is indeed the correct one.

This, however, is not the end of the story. Some “biblical feminists” would agree with this interpretation. They concur that Paul indeed meant to restrict women from teaching men. Rather than arguing that Paul was wrong in doing so, they merely contend that, for a variety of reasons, the contemporary situation differs from the one in Paul’s day, so that his command should no longer be considered applicable today. We have already addressed this issue in our discussion of genre and normativity above and need therefore merely briefly remind the reader of our conclusion there. The key, apart from the wording of verse 12 itself, is the reasons given in verses 13 and 14, stating as the informing norms for Paul’s teaching in verse 12 not culture-relative circumstances but realities rooted in the very order of creation and, conversely, the role reversal occurring at the Fall.<sup>52</sup> Efforts to marginalize or explain away the force of this connection (such as efforts to minimize the force of the conjunction “for” [γάρ]) completely fail to convince.<sup>53</sup>

We may therefore conclude that the verse means what it says, and that efforts to limit its applicability to Paul’s day do not do justice to the force of the text itself. If the text is reasonably clear, how should one account for sustained efforts to limit the verse’s applicability? We will need to address this issue in the next section. Before tackling this question, however, we may briefly deal with the reference to women’s “salvation by childbearing” in verse 15.

#### *Women’s Preservation by the Bearing of Children*

In another article I argue that none of the current proposals for the interpretation of 1 Tim 2:15 is entirely adequate.<sup>54</sup> There is no need here to

---

<sup>52</sup>Cf. Köstenberger, “Gender Passages,” 267–71. We take exception to the contention by Schreiner, “Interpretation,” 145–46, following Doriani, “Appendix 1: A History of the Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2,” in *Women in the Church*, ed. Köstenberger et al., that Paul in 1 Timothy 2:14 teaches that women are to be excluded from positions of ultimate responsibility in the church owing to their greater relational and nurturing nature, which would inhibit them from confronting people regarding doctrinal error. It is unclear how this conclusion could be drawn on the basis of an exegesis of the biblical text itself.

<sup>53</sup>See the discussion in Schreiner, “Interpretation,” 134–35, including bibliographic information on p. 134, n. 132.

<sup>54</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Ascertaining Women’s God-ordained Roles: An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15,” *Bulletin of Biblical Research* 7 (1997):

provide a long list of proposed interpretations only to discount them and to find them wanting.<sup>55</sup> At this point we will confine ourselves to arguing for what appears to be the most plausible understanding of this admittedly complex passage.

There are two primary difficulties in this verse: the meaning of **σώζω** (“saved”? “preserved?”), and the import of **τεκνογονία** (“childbearing”). Regarding both issues, recourse to a close parallel passage in the same epistle proves most illuminating. In 1 Tim 5:14–15, Paul writes, “Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children (**τεκνογονεῖν**), keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach; for some have already turned aside to follow Satan.” Two observations may be made: first, the bearing of children is in the latter passage presented as part of a package that also includes one’s marital relationship and the managing of one’s household; second, evidently, Paul’s primary concern underlying his command to young widows in this passage is their preservation from Satan. Arguably, 1 Tim 5:14–15 thus makes explicit what appears to be implied in 1 Tim 2:15: “childbearing” is merely a *pars pro toto* (a “part standing for the whole”), encompassing a woman’s entire range of marital, familial, and domestic responsibilities; and by adhering to this role, women will be “preserved,” i.e. *from Satan*, contrary to Eve, who, when stepping outside her God-ordained sphere, was *not* preserved from the serpent but fell into transgression (verse 14). People’s preservation from Satan is indeed a constant, albeit thus far overlooked, theme in the Pastorals (for brevity’s sake, only references in 1 Timothy are listed below):

- Hymenaeus and Alexander are handed over to Satan in order not to blaspheme (1:20);
- new converts should not be appointed as overseers, lest they become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil (3:6);
- an overseer must have a good reputation with those outside the church so that he might not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil (3:7);
- the false teacher’s forbidding of marriage and command to abstain from certain foods are doctrines of demons (4:1–5);

---

107–44. I disagree here with the interpretation presented in Schreiner, “Interpretation,” 146–53.

<sup>55</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 8–12 (orig. ms.).

- those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction (6:9–10; cf. 2 Tim 2:26).

In other places, Paul warns against unresolved anger (Eph 4:27) or a married couple's ill-advised, prolonged abstinence from sexual intercourse (1 Cor 7:5), both of which would make people vulnerable to Satan.

This reading also makes best sense of the flow of the argument in the entire passage. After telling women to focus on inner rather than external beauty, and after enjoining them not to step outside their proper role and teach or exercise authority over men in the assembly—which would violate creation order and reenact the scenario that led to the Fall—Paul concludes his instruction on this issue by elaborating on what women's role positively entails. By adhering to their God-ordained sphere involving their marital, familial, and domestic responsibilities, they will not make themselves vulnerable to Satan. This they would do, like Eve, if they stepped outside their proper domain by assuming public teaching or ruling functions in the church, thus being found in positions of ultimate authority over men. Arguably, this represents the reading of verse 15 that requires the least injection of additional information into the text. Moreover, this interpretation avoids the tendency of an inappropriate reading of the passage in the light of unrelated Pauline theology elsewhere, a fallacy frequently committed by evangelical commentators who take **σώζω** as a reference to women's eschatological salvation in order to avoid making Paul teach "salvation by works."<sup>56</sup>

*What Seems to Be the Problem? Reasons for the Rejection  
of the Natural Reading of the Passage*

If 1 Tim 2:12 means what it says, why then have people, especially in recent years, had such difficulty accepting the message of this verse?

---

<sup>56</sup>Cf. e.g., Schreiner, "Interpretation," 152, who strains to make this point: "The term **σωθήσεται** is used rather loosely here, so that Paul does not specify in what sense women are saved by childbearing and doing other good works. I think it is fair, though, *since Paul often argues elsewhere that salvation is not gained on the basis of our works* [emphasis added] (e.g., Rom. 3:19–4:25; Gal. 2:16–3:14; 2 Tim. 1:9–11; Titus 2:11–14; 3:4–7) to understand the virtues described here as *evidence* that salvation is genuine."

Robert Yarbrough lists three primary factors: (1) Western culture's liberalized views of women; (2) the putative meaning of Gal 3:28; and (3) an alleged tie between women's subordination and slavery. We refer readers to the able treatment by Yarbrough.<sup>57</sup> A few comments on the each question may, however, be helpful for the reader. Regarding the first issue, Yarbrough demonstrates that it has only been recently, after the rise of feminism, that the "progressive" interpretation of 1 Timothy 2 has emerged. Harold O. J. Brown echoes Yarbrough's concern when he asks, "Did God suddenly permit 'more light to break forth from his holy Word'?"<sup>58</sup> He observes, "[W]hen opinions and convictions suddenly undergo dramatic alteration, although nothing new has been discovered and the only thing that has dramatically changed is the spirit of the age, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that that spirit has had an important role to play in the shift."<sup>59</sup> Indeed, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that there is more at work in egalitarian readings of the relevant gender passages in the New Testament than mere exegesis of the biblical texts.

As Brown argues in a sweeping indictment against the profound rebellion of modern culture against God, the rejection of distinct gender roles ordained by the Creator is only one symptom of the world's defiance of the very notion of external, binding standards. Sinful man prefers to think of himself as an autonomous, rational individual, who is accountable to no one but himself and who has no other obligations than to maximize his own liberty, personal peace, and happiness—even as Francis Schaeffer characterized Western man decades ago. And in their rebellion against the Creator, men and women suppress the truth in unrighteousness and pervert God-ordained patterns of relating between

---

<sup>57</sup>Yarbrough, "Hermeneutics," chap. 6 in *Women in the Church*. Thompson, "Women, Men, Slaves, and the Bible," 326–49, has recently argued that "slavery provides a hermeneutical paradigm sufficiently parallel" to male-female relationships, with the implication that, since slavery has been found wanting and abolished, hierarchical male-female relationships should likewise be obliterated. But slavery is nowhere in Scripture presented as rooted in creation order, while the male-female relationship clearly is cast in such terms (cf. 1 Cor 11:8–9; 1 Tim 2:12–13). Moreover, Thompson's contention that Scripture moves toward an egalitarian target (pp. 338–39) fails to account for the crucial text of 1 Timothy 2:12: if the Bible's thrust is toward egalitarianism, why does the last word in the canon pertaining to the issue represent a clear affirmation of men's bearing of ultimate responsibility for the church?

<sup>58</sup>Harold O. J. Brown, "The New Testament Against Itself: 1 Timothy 2:9–15 and the 'Breakthrough' of Galatians 3:28," in *Women in the Church*, ed. Köstenberger et al., 197.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 199.

genders, leveling distinctions and preferring sameness over complementarity—was that not Paul’s verdict writing to the Roman church in the midst of the excesses of the Roman Empire? Indeed, more than biblical exegesis is at work here. The present issue entails an entire culture’s stance toward its Creator.

Regarding the second issue, the putative meaning of Gal 3:28 and its relation to 1 Tim 2:12, Yarbrough builds on the observations of David Gordon pertaining to genre and normativity which were already discussed above.<sup>60</sup> There it was observed that many egalitarian interpreters assign permanent validity to Gal 3:28 on the basis of its alleged universality of application while relegating 1 Tim 2:12 to a temporary and culturally relative status. However, we maintained that full weight must be given to the genre of the writing in which 1 Tim 2:12 is found, i.e., that of a Pastoral epistle. Yarbrough in his treatment traces the now customary egalitarian interpretation of Gal 3:28 to the Swedish bishop and Harvard professor Krister Stendahl, who used it with great effect to argue for the ordination of women in Scandinavia.<sup>61</sup> Essentially, Stendahl distinguishes between what is absolute and enduring in Scripture and what is ephemeral and nonbinding. Based on what criterion? On that of worldview.

According to Stendahl, Jesus, Paul, and the early church were part of a patriarchal society, which makes it necessary to reinterpret their teachings for modern society in keeping with its “enlightened,” egalitarian values and principles. Thus Gal 3:28 becomes for Stendahl the “break-through verse,” against which all other statements in Scripture must be measured. “There is neither . . . male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” is elevated as Scripture’s “Magna Carta of gender equality.” But Stendahl’s use of Gal 3:28 is not constrained by the passage’s original context in Paul’s argument in the Galatian Epistle; his primary concern is rather the verse’s potential for modern-day application. Christians dare not play “First-Century Semites,” accepting some “static ‘biblical view’ ” of the past no longer applicable in our day, nor pursue a “nostalgic attempt to play ‘First-Century’ ” or “First-Century Bible Land.”<sup>62</sup>

In Stendahl’s case, then, it is no longer the biblical text that is the measure of biblical interpretation but the values of contemporary culture.

---

<sup>60</sup>For a thorough discussion of the relationship between Gal 3:28 and 1 Tim 2:12, see also Köstenberger, “Gender Passages in the NT,” 273–79.

<sup>61</sup>Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women* (trans. Emilie T. Sander; Facet Books 15; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966 [1958]).

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 34–35, quoted by Yarbrough, “Hermeneutics of 1 Timothy 2:9–15,” 181.

While Stendahl was quite explicit regarding his motivation and method of interpretation, however, some of his followers have been less forthcoming, which has lent Stendahl's arguments a significant amount of credibility. In fact, none less than F. F. Bruce, one of the most respected evangelical scholars of this century, adopted and advocated Stendahl's position, and many less-recognized authorities as well.<sup>63</sup> By uncovering the background of the interpretation that elevates Gal 3:28 above all other biblical injunctions pertaining to gender roles including 1 Tim 2:12, Yarbrough has rendered a service to those who thus far may not have recognized that at the root of such arguments is an elevation of contemporary culture above the biblical text itself.

Third, Yarbrough tackles the alleged tie between women's subordination and slavery. What is the background to this supposed analogy? Since "slave and free" and "male and female" are both mentioned in Gal 3:28, the argument has been made with increasing frequency that, just as slavery was abolished, female subordination should likewise be, and egalitarianism should be put in its place. On the surface, this argument sounds plausible enough—but does it withstand closer scrutiny? First of all, it should be noted that, unlike female subordination, slavery is never in Scripture substantiated from the created order. In other words, slavery is considered by the biblical writers as a socioeconomic institution, albeit flawed, while the principle of female subordination is supported, not merely by an appeal to societal conventions, but by pointing to creation (cf. esp. 1 Cor 11:8–9; 1 Tim 2:12–13). Hence the authors of Scripture do not consider slavery and female subordination to be built on the same foundation.

But what about the juxtaposition of "slave and free, male and female" in Gal 3:28? All depends on the organizing principle underlying the reference. What is this principle? It is stated explicitly in the text itself: "All are one in Christ Jesus." Note that it does not say, "All are *equal* in Christ Jesus," but "All are *one* in Christ Jesus." In other words, there is no difference in how anyone comes to Christ: all must approach him the

---

<sup>63</sup>See F. F. Bruce, "Women in the Church: A Biblical Survey," in *A Mind for What Matters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 259–66, 323–25; Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); Richard Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); John W. Cooper, *A Cause for Division? Women in Office and the Unity of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1991); Clarence Boomsma, *Male and Female, One in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); and Rebecca Groothuis, *Women Caught in the Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

same way, that is, by faith (note that the word "faith" is used in every verse from Gal 3:22 to 26). Nothing is said about gender roles in relation to each other here. Manifestly, this is not the author's present concern; for this, we must turn to Eph 5:21–33 or similar passages, including 1 Tim 2:12. Hence the analogy between slavery and female subordination is shown to be born in the mind of the modern egalitarian interpreter and imposed on the biblical text rather than found in the text itself.

Yarbrough's response to such arguments, most recently revived by Kevin Giles,<sup>64</sup> is much more thorough that can be summarized here. We must conclude by noting that Giles himself bases his interpretation on the claim, "The Bible is authoritative in matters of faith and conduct but not necessarily in science, or on how to order social relations."<sup>65</sup> But if the Bible is not authoritative with regard to social relations, what is? And how can Giles claim to take Scripture seriously at all in his interpretation if he discards it as authoritative revelation concerning the ordering of human relationships? May the reader judge for himself or herself. We must conclude with some reflections of an integrative nature.

*Reflections on a Biblical Theology of Women's Roles in the Church*

Stanley Grenz and Denise Kjesbo recently ventured to construct a biblical theology of women's ministry.<sup>66</sup> Kjesbo makes the historical observation that women generally have been very involved in ministry and leadership during religious revivals. She contends that the transition from the charismatic to the credentialing phase in revival movements tends to lead to the loss of leadership for women. Her recommendation is therefore to ordain women as pastors to keep the church in a state of revival. But even if Kjesbo's historical research were correct, her argument is merely pragmatic and fails to engage Scripture seriously. Moreover, she does not adequately distinguish between "leadership" and pastoral ministry. The con-

---

<sup>64</sup>Kevin Giles, "The Biblical Case for Slavery: Can the Bible Mislead? A Case Study in Hermeneutics," *EQ* 66 (1994): 3–17.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>66</sup>Stanley J. Grenz with Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995); cf. also the summary in Stanley J. Grenz, "Anticipating God's New Community: Theological Foundations for Women in Ministry," *JETS* 38 (1995): 595–611. See the perceptive review by Mary A. Kassian in *Christian Week*; the extensive review by Thomas R. Schreiner in *TrinJ* 17 NS (1996): 114–24; and my review in *JETS* 41 (1998): 489–91.



clusion of the present essay is that women should not be placed *in positions of ultimate responsibility and authority over the church*, not that they should not engage in responsible positions of leadership in the church.

This tendency to equate “leadership” with “pastoral ministry” can frequently be observed in egalitarian circles. For example, the title of a recent essay asks, “The Ordination of Women—Thirteen Years Later: Do we Really Value the Ministry of Women?”<sup>67</sup> The implication is, of course, that the only way to “value the ministry of women” is to ordain them to pastoral ministry. Wendy Cotter, in an article entitled “Women’s Authority Roles in Paul’s Churches: Countercultural or Conventional?” asks the question whether or not women occupied positions of leadership and authority in the Pauline churches.<sup>68</sup> She finds five women in this category: Chloe, who was “a patroness of some kind” (1 Cor 1:11), Prisc(ill)a, who operated in tandem with her husband Aquila (Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:19), Euodia and Syntyche who “visited friends and set up networks for ‘evangelization’ ” (Phil 4:2), and Phoebe, a “benefactress and guardian” and a deaconess (Rom 16:1–2).<sup>69</sup>

It may be concluded that (some) women functioned indeed in spheres of genuine, significant responsibility in the Pauline churches. The intriguing thing is that while Cotter appears to insinuate that all leadership positions should be opened to women in the churches indiscriminately, none of the women she identifies actually were overseers or pastor-teachers! Thus, while women were involved in exercising some sort of leadership, they do not seem to have occupied places of ultimate responsibility for God’s church. This evidence from the narrative portions of Paul’s epistles stands in perfect harmony with his explicit injunctions in passages such as 1 Tim 2:12. Rather than disproving the complementarian thesis, Cotter actually aids in establishing it. And once again, one is struck by the importance of defining one’s terms carefully, in the present case the term “leadership.”

---

<sup>67</sup>Klyne R. Snodgrass, “The Ordination of Women—Thirteen Years Later: Do we Really Value the Ministry of Women?” *Covenant Quarterly* 48/3 (1990): 26–43.

<sup>68</sup>Wendy Cotter, “Women’s Authority Roles in Paul’s Churches: Countercultural or Conventional?” *NovT* 36 (1994): 350–72. See further the present author’s review of Cotter in *CBMW News* 1/4 (1996): 14.

<sup>69</sup>On the women mentioned in Philipians, see also A. Boyd Luter, “Partnership in the Gospel: The Role of Women in the Church at Philippi,” *JETS* 39 (1996): 411–20.

In the remainder of the above-mentioned book, Grenz then presents the scriptural arguments for an egalitarian position. Apart from significant flaws in his discussion of individual texts which have adequately been exposed elsewhere,<sup>70</sup> the major weakness of Grenz's and Kjesbo's contribution lies in the fact that they present women's "teaching, leading, and exercising authority in the church as an all-or-nothing proposition."<sup>71</sup> Misleadingly, these authors fail to acknowledge "that there is a whole spectrum of ministry outside of the ordained office of pastor/elder wherein these gifts can be exercised."<sup>72</sup> This kind of presentation unduly dichotomizes the issue and also tends to misrepresent the alternative, complementarian position, which fully affirms women's exercise of spiritual gifts in a variety of responsible ministries, while, on the grounds of passages such as 1 Tim 2:12, holding that the pastoral ministry is an improper forum for women to do so.

Rather than embracing the radical feminist agenda and subscribing to the notion that women will only be able to live up to their potential if exactly the same church functions are open to them as to men, we affirm that Scripture teaches that man and woman are equally created in God's image; that man and woman are equally saved by grace through faith in Christ; that man and woman are fellow-heirs of grace, of equal worth in the sight of God. None of these affirmations does, however, imply *sameness in role*. For at the same time Scripture calls woman a "weaker vessel" whom husbands are to treat "in an understanding way" (1 Pet 3:7). As their "head," husbands are in positions of authority over their wives, and wives are to submit themselves voluntarily to their husbands (Eph 5:21–33; 1 Cor 11:2–16). As in the home, so in the church, for both spheres are to reflect God's creative design and are dignified by Christ. The church, made up largely of families, is to be conducted by the same principles that are to govern the home.<sup>73</sup> For the church is "God's household" (1 Tim 3:15), so that the one who does not manage his own

---

<sup>70</sup>See esp. the reviews by Schreiner and Köstenberger referred to above.

<sup>71</sup>Kassian, "Review."

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Cf. Vern Sheridan Poythress, "The Church as Family: Why Male Leadership in the Family Requires Male Leadership in the Church," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 233–47. See also Egbert Schlarb, *Die Gesunde Lehre: Häresie und Wahrheit im Spiegel der Pastoralbriefe* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1990), 321–56, esp. the section entitled "Das Verhältnis von οἶκος ἀνθρώπων und οἶκος θεοῦ" on pp. 342–56.

household well should not preside over God's as an overseer or deacon (1 Tim 3:5, 12; Tit 1:6).<sup>74</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Two professors, one an egalitarian, the other a complementarian, recently debated each other at a prestigious seminary in the United States. Afterwards, the student newspaper wrote up a brief account of their interchange. "The egalitarian professor," it reported, "affirmed that God created man and woman equal, that man and woman are of equal worth before God, and that they both have been called to exercise their spiritual gifts actively in the church." "The complementarian professor," the paper continued, "also affirmed all these things. Beyond this, however, he contended that men and women were created different and that they have been assigned different roles within which they are to fulfill their callings in the home and the church." What a wonderful way to summarize the essence of the argument! Egalitarians are largely correct in what they affirm but wrong in what they deny. It is not enough to affirm *part* of

---

<sup>74</sup>Ironically, egalitarians appear to fall prey to the very error committed by Paul's opponents in 1 and 2 Timothy: an over-realized eschatology (cf. the cautious endorsement of Philip H. Towner, *Goal of Our Instruction* [JSNTSup 34; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989], 21–45, by Schreiner, "Interpretation," 111. Cf. also Philip H. Towner, *1–2 Timothy & Titus* [IVPNTCS; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994], 22–26 and 75–76). In 2 Tim 2:17–18, we are told that "Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth *saying that the resurrection has already taken place*, and thus they upset the faith of some." And notably, in 1 Tim 1:18–20, Paul exhorts Timothy to "fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander." Thus the same heretic, Hymenaeus, is mentioned in both 1 and 2 Timothy as one of the targets of Paul's refutation, with the reference in 1 Timothy immediately preceding chapter 2. Likewise, contemporary egalitarians argue that, in Christ, "there is neither male nor female," which they take to mean that the paradigm of new creation in Christ replaces the old paradigm of man and woman under the Fall (cf. the critiques of Richard N. Longenecker's position as developed in *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984] by Köstenberger, "Gender Passages," 280; and Terrance Thiessen, "Toward a Hermeneutic for Discerning Moral Absolutes," *JETS* 36 [1993]: 203–206). But even the vast majority of egalitarians do not take this passage literally. They acknowledge that the distinction between male and female still remains in place in this life. Salvation in Christ does not transform men and women instantaneously into genderless, androgynous creatures devoid of sexually distinct, yet complementary characteristics. Paul's statement in Gal 3:28 only refers to spiritual *access* to and *position* in Christ, not to an obliteration of male and female biological or other functions in this life. To deny this duplicates the error of an over-realized eschatology.

God's truth: the imbalanced emphasis of *partial* biblical truth often results in dangerous distortions of Scripture. We must affirm *all* of God's truth, and do this in proper balance.<sup>75</sup> Only then can we claim to live by the *whole* counsel of God and credibly contend that Scripture is the sole and final authority for our faith and practice.

---

<sup>75</sup>For a plea for hermeneutical balance in the interpretation of New Testament gender passages, see Köstenberger, "Gender Passages," 263–67.