

A CASE FOR THE UNRESTRICTED MINISTRY OF WOMEN

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Why is the question about limitations of the ministry of women being asked? Are women inferior, somehow less human than men? While in the past some have believed this, most do not argue this way today. Would women do the job inappropriately? Not unless, like some men, their hermeneutic, exegetical method, and/or moral compass were skewed. Women should arrive at the same kinds of theological conclusions, should convey the same gospel, should operate by the power of the same Holy Spirit, and should show the same concern for truth and love and the same resistance to sin and error.

Why is this question being asked? The early church may well have thought the question strange. Only three reasons exist to restrict the ministry of women: the tradition of patriarchy, the influence of two NT texts (1 Cor 14:33-38 and 1 Tim 2:9-15), and an unjust and inflated view of church office. The question does not derive from the OT, which has no concept of ministry other than priest and prophet, but OT prophetesses were known, and the OT priesthood is *not* the basis for a Christian understanding of ministry.

At least three misconceptions should be set aside at the beginning. The first views the concern for women in ministry as a result of feminism and an assault on traditional values. The issue of women in ministry has *not* emerged merely because of feminism, although feminism and other cultural factors have certainly heightened the discussion. Traditionalists – or the new traditionalists – think they are resisting a cultural deviation from what is right, but *that presumes the past had things right*. Some traditional values do *not* have enough value. The traditional view is not necessarily Christian; it is present in virtually every culture and has led to patriarchy, views of the inferiority of women, abuse, and limitation of women's roles. If we think we are preserving some greater spiritual practice by limiting women, why is it that Christian practices in traditional churches and most other churches relating to sexuality, divorce, abuse, etc. do not differ from practices in the broader secular society, at least in the U.S. and Europe? The NT challenges the cultural deviations of both past and present. Christianity needs to stand for and embody a rejection of the failures of society. It is clear that women have a role, a responsibility, and gifts to help the church communicate and live its message. Without the exercise of their gifts the church is diminished.

The second misconception is that a decision on this issue depends on whether one is theologically liberal or conservative generally or whether one believes fully in the authority of Scripture. Neither is true. Especially early in the renewed discussion that began in the 1970s, denominations that were more hierarchical structurally (such as the Anglicans) had difficulty accepting the full ministry of women, not because of Scripture but because of their hierarchy. Denominations that were more Spirit oriented (such as Pentecostals) had the least difficulty.¹ Regarding Scripture, people with equally high views of Scripture are on both sides of the debate. Indeed, many of us argue for the full ministry of women *because* Scripture pushes us to that conclusion.

A third misconception is that acceptance of women in ministry is a step towards acceptance of the legitimacy of homosexual practice. The fear of homosexuality is a motivating

¹ These stances have now changed to some degree for a variety of reasons.

factor for some arguing against the unlimited ministry of women,² but there is no necessary relation between the two issues and significant hermeneutical differences in the discussion of the pertinent biblical texts on these two subjects. The same biblical text that urges the ministry of women, in my opinion, rejects the legitimacy of homosexual practice.

In addition to setting aside misconceptions, we need to point out that there are not merely two positions on this question. There is a variety of positions just as there is a variety of types of feminism, some very unsympathetic to others. Positions range from saying women should not speak at all, not teach men and boys, not teach from behind a pulpit, not teach authoritatively, not teach except under emergency conditions as on the mission field or when no qualified male is present, to not teach except under the authority of a male senior pastor. Some would allow women to teach in a seminary but not in a church; some would allow neither. Some view women as equal; today fewer view women as inferior, less capable intellectually and spiritually. Obviously some of these positions are not the “traditional” position. The traditionalists have changed the paradigm, but for nearly everyone the discussion has changed. Apart from the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, few churches look like they did even forty years ago, to say nothing of much of the church’s history. To avoid being viewed negatively some in English speaking churches define themselves as “complementarians” to avoid the term “hierachialists,” but I do not find the word “complementarian” clear or communicative.³

There are four major questions that must be answered.

1. How do we deal hermeneutically and exegetically with the biblical passages relevant to women in ministry?
2. What does it mean to be human and specifically to be male and female?
3. What is ministry and who may do it?
4. What is authority and who may have it?

Another way to approach the subject is to realize that both negative and positive reasons exist for arguing for the unrestricted ministry of women. With regard to negative reasons:

1. I do not believe that women are less capable intellectually, spiritually, or administratively or that they are more prone to sin, error, or heresy. The same range of gifts, abilities, and failures evident in men are evident in women.⁴
2. I do not believe the NT has offices from which to exclude women. This may well be the determining issue.
3. I do not accept that the NT views prophets and prophecy as inferior to teachers and teaching.
4. I do not accept the view of authority presupposed by those who oppose the ministry of women.

² See John Piper and Wayne A Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2006), e.g., 60.

³ “Complementarian” would fit nearly anyone in the discussion, for the term does not indicate the degree of complementarity; it could mean an equal sharing or an extremely unbalanced sharing.

⁴ This is not to say there are no differences between men and women, but even if we accept differences generally, that says nothing about individuals. Further, I reject that some traits, such as tenderness or aggressiveness, are feminine or masculine. They are human traits, and we have allowed genders to be stereotyped in unhealthy ways.

5. I do not accept a prooftexting approach hermeneutically.
6. I do not accept that 1 Cor 14:33-38 and 1 Tim 2:9-15 are universal and timeless prohibitions.
7. I do not accept that any of the NT texts discusses gender roles. We lay gender roles on texts like 1 Tim 2:13. First Timothy 2:15 may come closest to treating a role, but that verse is difficult for any position and needs careful attention.
8. I do not accept that an emphasis on the *responsibility* of the husband in relation to the wife found in 1 Cor 11:3 and Eph 5:22 (but not in Gen 2) is justifiably transferred to church leadership. (By the way, what Paul really understands for husbands and wives is mutual submission, which is evident in Eph 5:21-22 and presented in a surprising way in 1 Cor 7:4 using the verb ἐξουσιάζειν [*exousiazerein*], “to have authority over.”)

With regard to positive reasons, the following should be said:

1. The biblical text reports on the ministries of women and uses the same language for them it does for men doing ministry.
2. The risen Lord specifically gives women the task of communicating the message of the resurrection.
3. After the resurrection and Pentecost circumstances are different. *An eschatological theology changes the way women are perceived and, indeed, the way all relations are perceived.*
4. The gifts of the Spirit are distributed to both male and female without any hint of distinction.
5. The real issue is power. The gospel requires a new understanding and implementation of power. This is directly related to the teaching on servant leadership – which in my experience very few actually believe.

All of these statements require explanation, and most will be treated in some fashion below.

A caution is in order before looking at biblical texts. Sometimes translations make assumptions and decisions that can mislead and often insert words (such as “man” or “men” in English) when no corresponding Greek word is used or when the masculine is used in a generic sense for both sexes.⁵ Reference to the original languages is essential.

⁵ Among many examples note that in 1 Cor 1:20 the *NIV* has “Where is the wise man?” but the Greek has only “Where is the wise?” using the masculine σοφός (*sophos*), which should be left generic. In 1 Cor 1:25 the *NIV* has “For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.” In this case the word ἀνθρώπων (*anthrōpōn*) is present, but is *plural*: The foolishness of God is wiser than [that] of *humans* and the weakness of God is stronger than [that] of *humans*. The *NIV* changed the plural to a singular for some unknown reason. In 1 Cor 4:6 the *NIV* has “Then you will not take pride in one man over against another,” but the Greek merely has “so that you are not puffed up one over the other against the other.” The masculine εἰς (*heis*) is generic, for the concern is not merely for men who are puffed up. Cf. the *NIV*’s insertion of “man” at Matt 16:17 and “men” in John 12:32.

The Biblical Witness

We need to take seriously that *women are the source of specific biblical texts*. Miriam's prophecy, Deborah's song, Hannah's song, the words of the wise woman of Tekoa, and Mary's "Magnificat" are all beloved and authoritative passages, to say nothing of other women like Anna who are mentioned in passing. Dare we suggest the voice of women may be heard in Scripture but not in the church?

We also need to take seriously that women were bearers of the gospel tradition. Surely no one would say there is some defect in women that makes them less trustworthy as bearers of the tradition, especially if Richard Bauckham is any where close to correct in saying people are named in the Gospels because they were the guarantors of the tradition.⁶ Junia, who Bauckham argues is Joanna in Luke 8:3 and 24:10, is a Jew who became a Christian before Paul, and like Paul was also in prison for being a Christian.⁷ Regardless of whether the identification with Joanna is correct, Junia is called an *apostle* probably because she had seen the risen Lord and was a foundational witness to the validity of the gospel. The earlier attempts to take Junia as a man named Junias, as some translations have it, have been shown to be unquestionably wrong. This supposedly shortened form of the masculine name Junianus does not occur *anywhere*, while the female name Junia occurs with some frequency. Further, no one thought Junia was a man before Aegidius of Rome in the thirteenth century.⁸ Nearly all grant today that Junia was a woman, but a few have attempted to say she was only esteemed *by* the apostles, not esteemed *among* them as one of them.⁹ This attempt to avoid the text founders as well.¹⁰ There is no reason or parallel for Paul to say the apostles thought these people were honorable. Here is an early Jewish Christian woman known and respected as an *apostle*, a foundational witness to the truth of the gospel.

The women at the tomb were obvious bearers of the gospel message and were explicitly told by the risen Lord or an angel (or both – the accounts vary) to go tell his brothers that he is risen (Matt 28:7-10 and parallels). Does this not count as authoritative teaching? As some put it, these women were apostles to the apostles. Note too the confession of Martha in John 11:27, which is as strong a confession of Jesus as any in the NT. The Samaritan woman has no such foundational role, but she too provides an essential witness to Jesus' identity (John 4:29, 39).

Even though some women in the OT were recognized as leaders (most notably Deborah, a judge and prophetess, and Miriam and Huldah, also prophetesses),¹¹ something new happens

⁶ *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

⁷ Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 165-202.

⁸ For discussion of issues pertaining to the identification of Junia as an apostle see Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 21-81; and Linda Belleville, "Ιουνιαν...ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις: A Reexamination of Romans 16.7 in Light of Primary Source Materials," *New Testament Studies* 51 (2005): 231-49.

⁹ Michael H. Burer and Daniel B. Wallace, "Was Junia Really an Apostle? A Reexamination of Rom. 16.7," *New Testament Studies* 47 (2001): 76-91.

¹⁰ See Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels*, 172-80; Belleville, "Ιουνιαν...ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις," 231-49; Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*, 69-78. Also abortive is the attempt to say Junia merely was sent as an emissary for the church similar to the use of the term "apostle" in 2 Cor 8:3. This would make no sense in Rom 16:7.

¹¹ Also note the use of feminine participles in Ps 68:11[12] and Isa 40:9 for those who announce good tidings. Of course, some women, like Queens Athaliah and Jezebel, were leaders, but like some men not positive models.

with Jesus and the eschatological inbreaking of the kingdom. While these OT women leaders are important, this paper will focus mostly on NT texts which are the center of the debate.

Women were central to the Jesus movement and the growth of the church. Women were followers of Jesus, recipients of his teaching and care, the last at the cross and the first at the tomb, witnesses of the resurrection, present at prayer and at Pentecost in Acts 1-2, persecuted and active throughout the story related in the book of Acts. A surprising number of women are named in the NT, including eight of twenty-five people mentioned by name in Rom 16.

Jesus' attitude toward and association with women is different from the tone set in the OT, but the clear marker of change is Pentecost. Peter's sermon quotes Joel 2:28-32 (adding the words "In the last days says God" in v. 17 and the second mention of "they will prophesy in v. 18) and emphasizes that the Spirit is poured out on both sons *and daughters*, with the result that both prophesy, and even on *male and female slaves* so that they too prophesy. Things cannot be the same after the coming of the Spirit. The church lives in an eschatological framework and orders its life differently, and explicitly so with regard to women.

Not only are we told that Philip's four daughters were prophetesses (Acts 21:9), in 1 Cor 11:5 women clearly were praying and prophesying in the church. In several respects 1 Cor 11:1-16 is a difficult text,¹² but even so, why this text affirming women's activity in worship was so long ignored is a mystery. Here there is no concern to keep women silent. The only concern is that women pray and prophesy with proper decorum maintaining their identity as women. The distinction of the sexes is important, even if men and women are valued equally.

The quotation from Joel was important for the early church, not least in its use to describe faith in Christ (Rom 10:13; 1 Cor 1:2), but this quotation stands behind a key text regarding the role of women. Galatians 3:28, which is part of an early baptismal liturgy, underscores that in Christ the old divisions of Jew and Greek, slave and free, and male and female no longer are determinative. The focus on slave and free and on male and female appears to come straight from Joel 2:28-29.¹³ Sometimes people seek to lessen the impact of Gal 3:28 by saying the verse applies only to salvation, standing before God, and not to relations on this earth. This will not do, for the problem Paul addressed was the *social relations* – eating at table – of Jews and Greeks (Gal 2:11-14). For the same reason one cannot say that Gal 3:28 describes conditions of the new age, but we live under the conditions of the old age. Christians take their identity from the newness the Spirit brings, not from the old order.

Clarity here is crucial. It is not the distinctions between the three groups that are set aside but *valuations* based on the distinctions. Paul still is proud of being Jewish, but he will not sacrifice oneness in Christ by elevating Jews over Gentiles (cf. Rom 2:28-29 and 3:9). He knew of the difference between slave and free, but he relativized both positions so that both slave and free stand in the same relation to Christ and to each other (1 Cor 7:17-24). He also insisted on the distinction between the sexes (1 Cor 11:1-16), but he would not allow one sex to be elevated above the other. Rather, he stressed a mutuality (1 Cor 7:1-16; 11:8-12). The *oneness* in Christ effected by baptism and believers being inserted into Christ prohibits valuations that prioritize

¹² Not least in the meaning of v. 10, which says a woman is to have authority on her head, not as some translations have it "a sign" or "a symbol" of authority. Is that her own authority on her head?

¹³ Gal 3:28 may intentionally counter the blessing said by Jewish men: '[Blessed art thou . . .] who hast not made me a heathen,' ' . . . who hast not made me a woman'; and ' . . . who hast not made me a brutish man' (*b. Menahoth* 43b). A Greek version of this blessing exists as well. (See Diogenes Laertius: *Thales* I.33,34; and Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes* 3.1.9, who attributes a similar saying to Plato.)

one group over another, whether such valuation is based on race, social standing, or gender. Implicit here is the “body” theology that is expanded in other letters. Galatians 3:28 must be given its due.

Not surprisingly then, Paul used the same expressions to describe the ministry of women that he does to describe the ministry of men or even his own ministry. Paul frequently used the verb κοπιᾶν (*kopian*, “to labor”) to describe his own ministry or that of people doing ministry. For example, in 1 Cor 15:10 he used it of himself, in 1 Thess 5:12 of leaders in the church, and in 1 Tim 5:17 of elders who teach. In Rom 16:6 and 12 it is used of four women: an otherwise unknown Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis, and regarding the last three they are said to have labored *in the Lord*. Similarly Paul used συνεργός (*sunergos*, “fellow worker”) of himself (1 Cor 3:9), Timothy (Rom 16:21), Urbanus (Rom 16:9), Philemon (Philem 1), Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke (Philem 24), Justus (Col 4:21), Titus (2 Cor 8:23), and Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25). It is also used of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom 16:3) and of Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:3). The language used of Euodia and Syntyche is especially important. They “struggled alongside Paul in the gospel along with Clement and the rest of my [Paul’s] fellow workers.” Cf. Col 4:11 where Paul spoke similarly of “my fellow workers for the kingdom of God.”¹⁴ Whatever Paul’s other fellow workers were doing, laboring for the Lord, these women were doing.

Paul used the word διάκονος (*diakonos*, “deacon” or “servant”) to refer to himself and Apollos (1 Cor 3:5), Tychicus (Eph 6:21), leaders in Philippi (along with overseers in Phil 1:1), Epaphras (Col 1:7), and apparently both men and women (1 Tim 3:8-12).¹⁵ Although translations sometimes hide the reality, in Rom 16:1 Phoebe is called a διάκονος (*diakonos*)¹⁶ of the church at Cenchrae. It is fair to conclude that whatever the *diakonoi* were in Philippi Phoebe was in Cenchrae.

We should pause to remind ourselves how unusual the activity of women in the church might appear to both Greco-Roman and Jewish first century societies. I do not want to overstate the case, and there were variations in attitudes toward women;¹⁷ still, both societies viewed women as inferior, rarely provided education for women outside the home, thought respectable women should be shielded from the public sector, and thought women should not speak much in public, and especially should not converse with other women’s husbands.¹⁸ Among Jews female disciples of rabbis are virtually unknown, quite unlike what we see with Jesus and the women who were part of his traveling group of disciples (Luke 8:1-3). Some Jews at least would not

¹⁴ Cf. the use of the verb συνεργεῖν (*sunergein*) of Paul’s work in 2 Cor 6:1 and in 1 Cor 16:16 of all those, like the household of Stephanas, working together and laboring, to whom the church was asked to submit.

¹⁵ Some think deacons wives are in view here, but more likely the reference is to women deacons.

¹⁶ There is not a feminine form of this word until much later. The masculine is used for women as well.

¹⁷ On attitudes toward women see Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women’s Life in Greece and Rome: A Source Book in Translation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); and Leonard J. Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1976). Bruce W Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2003) argues women in the first century Roman world experienced new freedom and public life at the expense of family responsibilities. He sees this as the context for the problems encountered in the Pastorals.

¹⁸ The sentiment expressed by Plutarch is illustrative: “Theano, in putting her cloak about her, exposed her arm. Somebody exclaimed, ‘A lovely arm.’ ‘But not for the public,’ said she. Not only the arm of the virtuous woman, but her speech as well, ought to be not for the public, and she ought to be modest and guarded about saying anything in the hearing of outsiders, since it is an exposure of herself; for in her talk can be seen her feelings, character, and disposition” (*Moralia* 142 C-D [*Advice to Bride and Groom* 31]).

accept women as witnesses in a court of law, which makes the testimony of women to the resurrection of Jesus that much more striking. While the activity of women in the NT may be hardly noticeable to us, in the first century patriarchal world it was a radical departure from accepted norms.

When we turn our attention to 1 Cor 14:33-36 and 1 Timothy 2:9-15, we encounter a host of problems and strenuous debate. What shall we do with these texts that seem to restrict the role of women? They must be given the same attention as any other text and must be brought into relation to the whole biblical witness. These passages are difficult, regardless of the approach one takes, and we may not pull out the parts we like and jettison the rest. For 1 Cor 14:33-36 the following issues must be decided:

1. Are vv. 34-35 a later non-Pauline addition to the text, as some suggest?
2. Are these verses the view of the Corinthians, a view which Paul rejects in v. 36?
3. How can vv. 34-35, which seemingly require the silence of women, be reconciled with 11:5, which affirms women praying and prophesying in church?
4. How should we understand the relation of the words “as in all the churches of God’s people [literally, ‘the holy ones’]” in v. 33b? Does it go with v. 33a or with v. 34? That is, did Paul intend “For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the churches of God’s people” or “As in all the churches of God’s people, let the women keep silent in the churches”?
5. Why are women not permitted to speak (v. 34b) and why is it shameful (or disgraceful) for them to speak in the church (v. 35)? Is it for cultural reasons or a “theological” reason?
6. Where does the law say women should be in submission? No specific verse says this. Is this a reference to OT law or to custom?

While some NT scholars are sure vv. 34-35 are a later addition, the evidence does not support such a view. Some Western manuscripts do place vv. 34-35 after v. 40, but earlier manuscripts retain the traditional order, and no manuscript omits these words entirely. Nor are there sufficient grounds for thinking these words come from the Corinthian church. These suggestions would make it easier to reconcile 14:34-35 with 11:5, but they seem to be an attempt to avoid the problems.

Some try to reconcile 14:34-35 and 11:5 by saying Paul did not really mean the latter – a desperate attempt – or that two different kinds of services are in mind, a more private service where women may speak and a more public one where they may not. No basis for such a distinction exists, especially when the next section (11:17-34) deals with the Lord’s Supper.

With regard to the connection of the words “as in all the churches of God’s people” (v. 33b), one cannot be certain, but it is preferable to take them with v. 33a. If they are joined to v. 34, a redundancy results with the words “the churches”: “As in all *the churches* . . . , let them keep silent *in the churches*.” Further, while it might seem unnecessary to say God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the churches, Paul does focus on peace as a regulative standard for decision making (1 Cor 7:15), and he does emphasize the common teaching he gives to all churches (1 Cor 4:17; 7:17; 11:16). The problems of pride and competition in the church at

Corinth have called forth this statement. The decision about the placement of these words does not take us far in solving the problems of the text though.

Despite the problems, this passage is not that difficult to deal with. The problem addressed is clearly the disruption of the worship service. Often people pay little attention to this passage except for its word to women, but the section of which it is a part, 14:26-40, is actually quite instructive about the worship of the early church. Each person was expected to contribute to the service for the edification of others. Why do people interpret the statement about women as universally valid but ignore Paul's directions for worship? That the problem is disruption and disorder in the service is obvious in the fact that women are not the only ones told to be silent or to submit. Three groups are asked to be silent: a person speaking in tongues when no interpreter is present (v. 28), a prophet who is speaking when revelation comes to another (v. 30), and women who are causing enough disturbance that they are instructed to wait and ask their husbands at home (v. 35). Prophets are asked to submit to other prophets (v. 32) similar to women (v. 34). To whom are women to submit? To their husbands, which would assume all the women were married? To God? To the church's instruction? The text does not say, but the last seems most likely. Is this directive required because women were exercising a new found freedom and throwing off cultural restraints? The head covering discussion in 11:2-16 points in that direction. If women deprived of education suddenly found the freedom full acceptance in the body of Christ brings, one can understand the problems that might emerge. Whether we can be specific about the exact nature of the problem, it is clear that the behavior of women was problematic culturally (11:2-16) and that they were one of several sources of disruption in worship (14:26-40). The fact of women praying and prophesying in 11:5 is not countermanded by 14:34-35. The latter relates to disruption of the service and does not call for absolute silence of women but silence in those areas causing disruption. Most today – regardless of their views on women in ministry – think women were being asked not to engage in the evaluation of prophets (14:29), which would potentially have them interrupting with questions and evaluating their own husbands' theology and conduct in public.¹⁹ The speaking that is disgraceful is not mere speaking but this kind of evaluation. The reference to law would be a general reference to the OT and God's created order. This focus on evaluating the prophets may be the right explanation, but I am not certain this is the case. What can be said with confidence is that women and others, motivated by pride and competition, were offending sensibilities and disrupting the service. If so, then the passage is not a universal and timeless prohibition of women speaking or of the ministry of women. It addresses a context specific, culturally nuanced situation. It still is pertinent for similar situations where wrongly motivated people cause disruption.

First Timothy 2:9-15 is more difficult and more important. Most of what I have said to this point would be acknowledged by many "complementarians." First Timothy 2 is the main source of disagreement. Those who would restrict the ministry of women usually base their argument here. However, we should not begin with v. 9; the section begins with v. 8, which is instructive for understanding the passage. With this passage the following issues need attention:

1. Is 1 Timothy a "church manual," or is it dealing with a specific problem?
2. Why were men instructed to pray *without wrath and disputing*?

¹⁹ D. A. Carson, "'Silent in the Churches': On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36," in Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, 140–53; and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1156-61. Thiselton argues that ἐπερωτάωσαν (*eperōtatōsan*) in v. 35 means "interrogate" (almost in a legal sense) rather than merely "ask."

3. With what should ὡσαύτως (*ōsautōs*, “likewise”) in v. 9 be connected? With “I desire” or “I desire . . . to pray”? That is, was Paul concerned with how men prayed and how women dressed or with the decorum with which both men and women pray? If the latter, the directions to women are very close to the instructions for women praying and prophesying in 1 Cor 11.
4. Should ἡσυχία (*hēsychia*) in vv. 11 and 12 be understood as “silence” or “quietness”?
5. In v. 12 how should ἀθεντεῖν (*authentein*) be understood? Is this a word for legitimate authority or does it have the negative connotation of domineer, and how does it relate to the idea of teaching? Does Paul prohibit women from teaching and having authority or from a particular kind of teaching?
6. Why is reference made to Adam and Eve?
7. What is the meaning of v. 15 with the statement that women will be saved through bearing children?
8. How is this text to be reconciled with 1 Cor 11:5 where women are clearly praying and prophesying?

First Timothy is definitely *not* merely a church manual. Already in 1:3-7 it is clear that false teaching is the concern of the letter and the reason Timothy was left in Ephesus. This concern continues throughout the Pastorals, and it is clear that women in particular were victimized by the false teachers, most evident in 2 Tim 3:6-7 which speaks of those who enter houses and capture foolish women laden down with sins and always learning but never able to come to knowledge of the truth. (See also 1:19-20; 4:1-3, 7; 5:6-16; 6:3-5, 20-21; 2 Tim 2:14-18, 23-26; 3:1-9, 13; 4:3-4, 14-15; Titus 1:9-16; and 3:9-11.) The problem of foolish controversies is, no doubt, the reason men are asked to pray without wrath and disputing. The whole section in 1 Tim 2 focuses on prayer for a “tranquil and quiet” life (2:2).

I am confident that the connection of ὡσαύτως (*ōsautōs*, “likewise”) in v. 9 is with the words “I desire . . . to pray.” The concern is the decorum of women in prayer in modesty and sound thought (or moderation). Women are to learn in quietness, not silence. The word used (ἡσυχία [*hēsychia*]) is the same word that appeared in 2:2 in the expression a “quiet life.” We must ask again with this passage why people interpret the prohibition on teaching literally but pay no attention to statements about women’s dress in v. 9 – or even more to directions about women’s head covering in 1 Cor 11:5-6 and 13.

The real battleground is with v. 12 and the meaning of ἀθεντεῖν (*authentein*), but this word does not deserve to be the dividing line. Ἀθεντεῖν occurs only here in the whole Greek Bible. It is not related at all to the usual words for authority ἐξουσία (*exousia*) and ἐξουσιάζειν (*exousiazein*). In fact, early occurrences of ἀθεντεῖν are rather rare; the verb only appears six or seven times prior to the third century, depending on what one counts.²⁰ Occurrences are more

²⁰ See the treatments by Linda L. Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority: 1 Timothy 2:11-15,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 213-217; and Carroll D. Osburn, “ΑΥΘΕΝΤΕΩ (1 Timothy 2:12),” *Restoration Quarterly* 25 (1982): 1–12 and Carroll Osburn, *Women in the Church: Reclaiming the Ideal* (Abilene, Tex.: ACU Press, 2001), 212–19. In the latter Osburn excoriates the analysis by H. Scott Baldwin, “A Difficult Word: ἀθεντέω in 1 Timothy 2:12,” 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), 65-80 and 269-305.

frequent in the patristic period, but to what degree are later occurrences evidence for first century usage? Real caution must be exercised in analyzing patristic and later occurrences where assumptions about the word's meaning may bear little resemblance to first century use. Many occurrences that people list are from the sixth century A.D. or later, but in my estimation occurrences that late – and many in the patristic period – are of no use for understanding the NT. Also, people often exclude cognates of ἀθεντεῖν since they are quite negative and frequently refer to murder, suicide, or criminal activity (e.g., Wis 12:6), but is it fair to ignore cognates? These negative ideas stem from connotations the word group has of someone doing something from one's own hand or having independent jurisdiction. An examination of the early occurrences of the verb show that this is *not* a neutral word for authority, but a word that suggests “domineer” or “dominate.”²¹ For example, a letter from 27/26 B.C. (BGU IV. 1208) used it of someone who forced his will on another. Philodemus used it participially in the sense “powerful” as in “powerful lords.”²² It is used also of the planet Saturn dominating Mercury and the moon.²³ An early scholion on Aeschylus's *Eumenides* 42 used the verb to refer to one who has committed murder. Other and later occurrences could be listed,²⁴ and not all are so negative, particularly if reference is to deity exercising the authority. But, if we go by the limited early evidence, this is not a neutral word for authority, and its use does not point to typical leadership language. This is authority being misused. One suspects that the action referred to would not be acceptable for men either. What is being prohibited is an autocratic grab for power. If this occurred in the context of “new Roman women” pushing for freedom and power, the restriction would make good sense.²⁵

Contrary to some claims, “teaching” is not always a positive term,²⁶ and the reference to Eve makes clear that the teaching is of the wrong kind. The only other time Paul refers to Eve is in 2 Cor 11:3-4 when the subject is again false teachers. Elsewhere when Paul speaks of sin's impact he blames Adam, not Eve (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:20-22, 44-49). Verses 13-14 are not merely an “order of creation” argument but an *ad hominem* rejection of what was happening with the false teachers. Part of what happened with the false teaching is that traditional roles of women were being challenged, evidenced in marriage being forbidden (1 Tim 4:3). Verse 15, difficult as it is, asserts that women will be saved *as women*, an idea expressed by reference to bearing children, the primary role attached to women in the ancient world.²⁷

We may never have completely satisfactory answers about the exact nature of the false teaching the Pastorals condemn, but it is quite clear that 1 Tim 2:8-15 addresses a specific and local problem and that it does so from the perspective of first-century cultural sensitivities regarding the role of women in public life. This passage is not a universally applicable prohibition of the teaching of women.

²¹ In addition to Belleville and Osburn, see Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 116–19; and I. H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999), 458-60.

²² S. Sudhaus, *Philodemi, Volumina Rhetorica*, Lipsiae: B.G. Teubner, 1896, 133.

²³ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* 3.13 [157].

²⁴ Notably Hippolytus, *On the End of the World* 7:5; Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians* X (on 3:19; *NPNF* 13.304).

²⁵ See Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 97-122.

²⁶ See Matt 15:9/Mark 7:7; Acts 15:1; Tit 1:11; Rev 2:14-15, and 20; Heb 13:9; 2 Tim 4:3. False teachers are as common as false prophets.

²⁷ Cf. *Gospel of Thomas* 114, in which Peter asks Jesus to send Mary away because women are not worthy of life, to which Jesus responds that he will lead her to make her a male so that she too may become a living spirit, to which is added, “For every woman who makes herself a male will enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Various attempts have been made to reconcile this passage with women prophesying in 1 Cor 11:5. Some, of course, do not think Paul wrote the Pastorals and can blame 1 Tim 2 on a later more reactionary follower. The Pastorals are different in many respects, but I do not think they can be cut off from Paul.

Some attempt to reconcile the two texts by saying that prophecy is permitted to women but teaching is not. On this view prophecy is evaluated and less authoritative, whereas teaching is not evaluated and refers to the authoritative handing on of tradition. This suggests that prophecy functions on a lower level than teaching, but this cannot be supported from the NT. In fact teaching and teachers receive relatively little focus by Paul or elsewhere. The only time authority (ἐξουσία/*exousia*) is used in connection with teaching is with the teaching of Jesus. When leaders are listed, teachers always are listed *after* apostles and prophets, and it is clear that the latter two are the foundational people for the early church. (See 1 Cor 12:28-29; Eph 2:20; 3:5; 4:11.) Further, the attempt to distinguish prophecy and teaching is quite difficult; note in 1 Cor 14:3 that the one prophesying speaks edification, encouragement, and consolation. What more does teaching do? First Corinthians 14:6 seems to equate teaching and prophecy, as does Acts 13:1.²⁸

Some suggest women may teach but only under the authority of a male senior pastor, but the text does not say this, and I must ask Is not the authority of Jesus enough? From where does one get the idea of a senior pastor anyway?

Some assume there were established offices in the early church, but there is no uniform language for church offices. People point to overseers (or guardians) in 1 Tim 3:1-2,²⁹ but elsewhere the word ἐπίσκοπος/*episkopos* occurs only at Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; and Titus 1:7 (cf. ἐπισκοπή/*episkopē* in Acts 1:20). Some texts refer to elders, but Paul makes no reference to elders outside the Pastorals.³⁰ There is nothing specifically Christian about elders, older people with wisdom respected as leaders (cf. 1 Tim 5:1 and 17), for Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures had the same respect for older, wise people. The leaderships of elders is a logical but quite cultural understanding of community organization. There is no basis for elevating one category of leaders in the church above others. In fact, Matthew specifically rejects setting up humans as teaching authorities and the use of labels such as “Rabbi” or “Teacher,” for one is our teacher – Christ – and all Christians are brothers and sisters (Matt 23:8-12). Free churches have always been more comfortable with such descriptions of the church than with structures emphasizing office and gradations. The refusal to make a distinction between clergy and laity and the emphasis on the priesthood of believers both favor the full acceptance the ministry of women. Also, the issue is not the ordination of women, for ordination is not a biblical concept. I consider ordination an important and legitimate extension of biblical ideas, but if granted to men, I see no reason why ordination should not be granted to women as well.

The treatment of authority – that is, the legitimate communication of power – is crucial. Those seeking to limit the ministry of women seem often to defend a view of authority that does not fit the NT, where other than with the ministry of Jesus the words for authority (ἐξουσία – *exousia*) are rarely applied to ministry. The disciples are explicitly given authority to drive out

²⁸ Cf. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 765963.

²⁹ The claim that women cannot be pastors because they cannot be the husband of one wife is a literalistic reading of an expression for marital fidelity. The language is also used of deacons in 3:12, even though women deacons are referred to in 3:11 (cf. 1Tim 5:9 and Titus 1:6).

³⁰ Some suggest Luke was involved in the composition of the Pastorals; if so, the use of “elders” could stem from his influence. Cf. the use of the term in Acts.

evil spirits and to heal (Matt 10:1/Mark 6:7/Luke 9:1; Luke 10:19), but nothing is said about the authority to teach, as crucial as their teaching was. Paul frequently defended his authority as an apostle and would take a back seat to no one. Strangely though, Paul rarely used the word for authority (ἐξουσία – *exousia*) of his own ministry. Other than of his right to be paid, a right he did not exercise (1 Cor 9:4-18; 2 Thess 3:9), he used this language only twice, both cases in dependence on Jer 1:9-10 in asserting that the only authority he has is the authority to build up rather than tear down (2 Cor 10:8 and 13:10). The anxiety over authority is misplaced.

This is not to say that authority is unimportant, quite the contrary; it is to recognize that authority belongs to Jesus Christ and his gospel, not to the messengers. *We do not possess authority; we express it to the degree that we explain and embody the gospel.* The authority of the gospel has nothing to do with gender. Leaders are important, but we need a different view of authority and power than is present in our societies – and many of our churches. The exercise of authority for Christians should have nothing to do with self-seeking and certainly not with imposition of the will on other people. Authority in Christian understanding is not a position of power but the willingness to give oneself for the work of God and the people of God. It has nothing to do with a position to which some people are not allowed. It is about applying the gospel of identification with Christ's death and resurrection to the task of leadership. It is about giving oneself for the needs of the body of Christ and enabling people to understand and live the gospel. This "weakness" is not weak, for it permits no curtailing or diminishing of the gospel. Courage and power are required to oppose evil, but more is required than physical strength. Women are fully capable of guarding the gospel, of expressing it, of living it out, and of resisting evil. I know of no reason to limit their ministry.