

# WOMEN ARE PROHIBITED FROM TEACHING MEN IN CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLIES

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There are voices today insisting that women are permitted by God to teach men in Christian assemblies. Thus we see women now being trained to preach and actually preaching on occasion in some congregations. I am convinced this is contrary to God's will. This paper is my attempt to explain why. It involves a brief explanation of 1 Tim. 2:8-15, 1 Cor. 11:2-16, and 1 Cor. 14:33b-36. Much more could be said, but I hope this is sufficient to make the point.

## 1 Timothy 2:8-15

*<sup>8</sup>I want, therefore, the men in every place to pray, lifting holy hands, without anger or argument. <sup>9</sup>Likewise, [I want] women [to pray] in appropriate attire, to adorn themselves with modesty and decency, not with elaborate hairstyles and gold or pearls or expensive garments <sup>10</sup>but [with] what is fitting for women who profess reverence for God by good works. <sup>11</sup>Let a woman learn in quietness with full submission. <sup>12</sup>I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; rather, she is to be in quietness. <sup>13</sup>For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup>And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, by being deceived, came to be in transgression. <sup>15</sup>But she will be saved through childbearing, if they continue in faith and love and sanctification, with decency.*

In **1 Tim. 1:18-20** Paul tells Timothy that his entrusting to him the command to silence the false teachers is in keeping with the prophecies that had earlier been made about Timothy. Paul is referring to that time, probably very early in their relationship, when Timothy received a spiritual gift for ministry, the giving of which was accompanied by the laying on of hands (by the elders and Paul) and by a prophetic recognition of the gift (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:5). By recalling these prophecies, what God had said about the gift and about Timothy's use of it in ministry, Timothy may be encouraged to wage this noble war against the false teachers.

In light of the charge to oppose the false teachers (Therefore), Paul says in **1 Tim. 2:1-7** that Timothy's first order of business was to see that all sorts of prayers were offered in the assembly for *all people*, to see that no group or class of people, including rulers and authorities, was excluded from the prayerful concern of the church, treated as being outside the scope of the gospel. Given that this instruction relates to Timothy's commanded opposition to the false teachers and that Paul through his emphasis on universality seems to be pushing back against a limitation on the scope of the gospel, it appears the false teachers had a sectarian or exclusivist theology that emphasized God's love for some people *at the expense of* his love for all mankind, perhaps most notably at the expense of his love for pagan rulers. Note how Paul emphasizes that his own sinfulness and persecution of the church did not put *him* beyond God's mercy. Their restriction of God's loving concern possibly was related to their misuse of genealogies or the law generally, finding in them a divine favoritism of Jews regarding salvation.

As I. Howard Marshall observes, "This universalistic thrust is most probably a corrective response to an exclusive elitist understanding of salvation connected with the false teaching."<sup>1</sup> Gordon Fee writes:

The best explanation for this emphasis [on the universality of the gospel] lies with the false teachers, who either through the esoteric, highly speculative nature of their teaching (1:4-6) or through its "Jewishness" (1:7) or ascetic character (4:3) are promoting an elitist or exclusivist mentality among their followers. The whole paragraph attacks that narrowness.<sup>2</sup>

Correcting this exclusivist praying that was spawned by the false teaching was a matter of first importance because failing to pray for all people had a detrimental effect on evangelism in both a direct and indirect way. In a direct sense, failing to pray for all people deprived those who were not prayed for of whatever effect those prayers would have had on God's work in their lives. Praying for people changes things, even though we may not see or understand how. In an indirect sense, this elitism or exclusivity in assembly prayers, especially regarding governing authorities, could cast the church as an enemy of the society. This could *needlessly* disrupt their lives and thus the usual practice of their religion, which is living *within the society* lives of godliness and respectability (see 1 Thess. 4:11-12).

Praying for *all people* is good and welcomed in God's sight, as he wants *all people* to be saved, meaning to come to a knowledge of the truth. For he is the God of all people, there being only one God; and Christ, who is the one mediator between God and mankind, gave himself a ransom for all people. So why pray inconsistently with that divine desire, especially when doing so risks hindering the spread of the gospel by disrupting the normal social context for its dissemination? Paul declares in v. 7 that because of God's desire to save all men and Christ's having given himself as a ransom for all men he was appointed (by God) a herald and an apostle, a teacher of Gentiles in faith and truth.

Given the significance God places on the prayers of the church for all people ("therefore"), Paul says in **1 Tim. 2:8** that he wants the men to pray lifting *holy* hands, meaning hands that are not stained by anger and argument. Anger and argument, division and disharmony, are hindrances to effective prayer, to communion with God. This instruction is almost certainly related to the false teaching in that it produced controversy and disputes (1 Tim. 6:4-5; 2 Tim. 2:23-24). Paul is not *prescribing* the prayer posture of lifting hands. Rather, he takes for granted, based on a common prayer posture at that time and place, that they will pray with raised hands. What he prescribes is that they avoid anger and argument so as not to hinder their prayers.

Paul says literally in the first clause of **1 Tim. 2:9**: "Likewise [also]<sup>3</sup> women<sup>4</sup> in appropriate attire with modesty and decency to adorn themselves." There is broad agreement that the verb "I

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<sup>1</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 420.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 62.

<sup>3</sup> The *kai* ("also") is textually suspect. It is absent in such notable manuscripts as Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus, placed in brackets in Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (28th ed.), and is not included in *The Greek New Testament* produced by Tyndale House (2017).

<sup>4</sup> Though some claim *gunaikas* in this section refers to wives rather than to women generally, most commentators recognize that such a limitation is highly improbable. Thomas R. Schreiner, "An Interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:9-15" in

want" from v. 8 is implied in v. 9: As Paul *wants* the men to pray in a certain way, he likewise *wants* the women to do something. Some translations supply "I want" in v. 9 to make that implication express (e.g., NAS, NASU, NIV), and others convey the idea by saying "women *should*" (RSV, NAB, NRSV, ESV), "women *are to*" (HCSB, CSB, NJB, NET), or "women *must*" (REB, NEB), but what Paul wants the women to do is debatable.

Paul could be saying in **1 Tim. 2:9**, "Likewise [I want] women to adorn themselves in appropriate attire, with modesty and decency," in which case "women" serves as the subject of one infinitive ("to adorn"). That has a nice balance: I want the men *to pray* and the women *to adorn*. But that seems like an abrupt change of subject from a focus on praying to a completely unrelated focus on dress, especially with the connecting word "likewise." As Marshall puts it, "[T]he introduction of the reference to women's adornment is an unmotivated digression if it is not related to prayer in some way or other; after an injunction to the men about how they are to worship, it would be strange if something parallel was not being said to the women."<sup>5</sup>

Alternatively, Paul could be saying, "Likewise [I want] women [to pray] in appropriate attire, to adorn themselves with modesty and decency." In that case, "women" serves as the subject of two infinitives ("to pray" and "to adorn"). Either translation is grammatically acceptable,<sup>6</sup> and the latter is favored (in meaning if not in actual translation) by many scholars.<sup>7</sup> The choice is governed by the context of the passage and by the view one has from other texts of the propriety of women praying in the assembly. Given the focus on prayer throughout this section of Scripture, my understanding of 1 Cor. 14:33b-36 and 11:2-16, and the example of Acts 1:14 and 4:23-24, I am convinced that Paul here assumes the women will be praying, just as he assumes the men will be praying.

Some are persuaded that Paul's desire expressed in 2:8 for "the *men* in every place to pray" means that women are not to pray (thus eliminating the second option),<sup>8</sup> but that does not follow.

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Andreas Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds., *Women in the Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 180. The context is rejecting the effect of the false teaching on the prayers that are offered in the assembly, and since v. 8 clearly refers to men generally rather than to husbands, there is no sound basis for limiting *gunaikas* to wives. It is noteworthy that all the standard English versions render the word in this section as "women" not "wives" (KJV, ERV, ASV, RSV, NEB, NAS, NKJV, NRSV, REB, NASU, HCSB, NAB, CEB, NIV'11, NET, LEB, ISV, CSB).

<sup>5</sup> Marshall, 447.

<sup>6</sup> Korinna Zamfir and Joseph Verheyden state in "Text-Critical and Intertextual Remarks on 1 Tim 2:8-10," *Novum Testamentum* 50 (2008), 404, "[T]he ellipsis can be supplied with the entire clause in v. 8, with Βούλομαι or with Βούλομαι προσεύχεσθαι. The latter reading does not interfere with the text, it can work grammatically, and it provides a thematic unity between w. 8 and 9-10."

<sup>7</sup> E.g., C. K. Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New Clarendon Bible (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 55; Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Hermeneia, trans. by Philip Buttolph and Adela Yarbro (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 45; Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, TNTC, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 84; Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 263 (fn. 203); Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 102-103; Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 215-216; Liefeld, 93-95; Marshall, 446-447; Köstenberger, 109; Yarbrough, 165-166; Hutson, 67. Collins does not supply "to pray" in the translation of v. 9 but clearly understands vv. 9-10 as a reference to women praying in the worship assembly. Raymond F. Collins, *I & II Timothy and Titus*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 64-65.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., J. W. Roberts, *Letters to Timothy* (Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing, 1964), 21.

He does not say he wants the men to pray; he says he wants the men to pray *without anger and argument*. He assumes they will be praying and urges them to do so with the proper attitude so that their prayers will not be hindered (e.g., 1 Pet. 3:7).<sup>9</sup> If on the brink of a recess a teacher said, "I want the boys to play without fighting," no one would think the teacher was thereby excluding girls from playing. Rather, they would conclude that the boys had a problem with fighting that the teacher did not want carried over into recess.

Whether it is permissible for women to "lead" prayers in a church gathering is complicated by the fact such terminology is foreign to the New Testament. It boils down, in my judgment, to whether female participation in that role would violate the biblical principle of male leadership, be contrary to the submission women are required to express in the assembly (1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11-12). I am inclined to think it would because that role has a sense of leadership that is not present in some other prayer contexts. The person who "leads" prayer in our assemblies is not merely praying personally; rather, that person is appointed to speak to God on behalf of the assembly. I do not think that is the kind of public praying women did.<sup>10</sup>

Women were to pray in appropriate attire, meaning they were to be metaphorically clothed with an attitude of modesty and decency that eschewed the over-the-top adornment he is describing in favor of modest and proper dress that is fitting for women who profess reverence for God by good works, women who live a God-revering life (**2:10**). This extravagant ornamentation – elaborate hairstyles and gold or pearls or luxurious garments – was contrary to the faith-based attitudes of modesty and decency because it was a flaunting of wealth and status and an abnormally seductive and sexually enticing way to dress.<sup>11</sup>

As the men were to pray free of the hindrance of anger and argument, the women were to pray free of the hindrance of pride and carnality, attitudes that were implicit in the excessive ornamentation that marked the loss of their modesty and decency. God desires a spirit of humility and contrition in those who approach him not a spirit of superiority and self-exaltation or a heart that is trolling for sexual interest.

In addition to the hindrance to *women's* prayers caused by the attitudes implicit in their excessive ornamentation, such dress may hinder the prayers of the men to the extent it is perceived as sexually daring in that culture. Men are highly prone to visual stimulation by women, so when a woman goes above and beyond cultural norms to invite that stimulation by her appearance, especially in the close settings of house churches, it readily could become a spiritual distraction.

Having instructed the women about the modesty and decency necessary for their effective *praying* for all people, attitudes expressed in their rejection of wealth-flaunting and seductive attire, Paul notes in **1 Tim. 2:11** how that modesty and decency is to manifest with regard to *teaching* in

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<sup>9</sup> See Fee, 71.

<sup>10</sup> In an atypical context like "open praying" (i.e., where all are invited to pray without any appointment or designation to speak for the assembly), which I suspect was more common in the house churches of the early church, that concern would not seem to apply. Of course, even in a congregation today that utilized "open praying" in its assemblies, the potential impact on congregational unity would have to be considered in any shift in practice from all men to both men and women.

<sup>11</sup> Schreiner states (p. 183), "In both Jewish and Greco-Roman literature, sexual seductiveness is linked with extravagant adornment."

the assembly. It includes submission to male leadership in the church, which in the assembly means women are to learn in quietness and with full submission.

**1 Timothy 2:12** clarifies what it means for women to learn in quietness and with full submission: they cannot teach or exercise authority over a man. The former ("teach") means they cannot instruct the mixed assembly in the word or will of God, as it means elsewhere in 1-2 Timothy (1 Tim. 4:11, 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:22). The latter ("exercise authority") is defined in BDAG as "to assume a stance of independent authority, give orders to, dictate to."<sup>12</sup> BDAG says the practical meaning in 1 Tim. 2:12 is "tell a man what to do." In this context, I suspect it includes correcting or challenging what was taught by a male teacher, what we might call "setting him straight" or "putting him in his place." A similar concern is expressed in 1 Cor. 14:35, where women were apparently challenging the prophets by quizzing them under the pretext of wanting simply to learn.

This fits well with the fact "quietness" (*hēsuchia*) refers not to complete silence but "to a quiet demeanor and spirit that is peaceable instead of argumentative."<sup>13</sup> Rather than being outspoken and argumentative about the teaching, the woman is to "hold her peace," as we might say. The fact it is not a prescription of absolute silence means there is no problem with a woman asking sincere questions in a class or commenting at the request of and under the leadership of the teacher. That is part of the teacher's method of instruction. It would only become a problem if the woman took the opportunity to take over and try to set people straight.

In contexts outside gatherings of the church, women are free to take issue with and to attempt to enlighten Christian men, including those of us who teach. This is part of how the body of Christ functions as set out in Eph. 4:11-14. As ministers of the word of God deliver that word to the gathered church, the members of the body are thereby equipped to disseminate the truth of Christ throughout the body, to widen and deepen the impact of that truth and thus to nourish the body. The ministers of the word condition the saints for the work of service (or ministry) so that the body of Christ is built up.

I have had many insightful questions and helpful, gentle challenges from sisters through the years. In addition to engaging brothers personally in non-assembly contexts, sisters in Christ can write books, articles, and newsletters and disseminate their wisdom in podcasts and other forums. What they cannot do is teach gatherings of male and female Christians in the word or will of God or exercise authority over men in the church. That is a rejection of how God calls the church to mark its acceptance of his sovereign bestowal of the leadership responsibility on men.

I suspect Paul here addresses the prohibition of women teaching because he has just given instructions about the praying he assumes women are doing in the assembly. He wants to be clear that praying is a different kind of speech than teaching. It is a nondidactic expression of personal gratitude, praise, and devotion to God, like singing, whereas teaching is delivering to men the

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<sup>12</sup> Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 150.

<sup>13</sup> Schreiner, 186. Even *sigāō*, which means "to be silent," can refer contextually to refraining from (being silent with regard to) a specific kind of speech. For example, in 1 Cor. 14:28 it refers to refraining *from tongues-speaking* when no interpreter is present. See Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1982), 242-244.

authoritative word of God.<sup>14</sup> As such, teaching is inconsistent with the submission that women are called to manifest in the assembly. The same point is made in 1 Cor. 14:33b-36 with regard to women prophesying in the assembly or challenging the prophecies of others: *As in all the churches of the saints, <sup>34</sup>let the women be silent in the churches, for it is not permitted for them to speak, but let them be in submission as even the Law says. <sup>35</sup>And if they want to learn something, let them question their own husbands at home, for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. <sup>36</sup>Or did the word of God go out from you or reach only to you?*

It is also quite possible this submission was being threatened by the overrealized eschatology in the false teachers' doctrine, which led to belief that the distinctions of the old age in terms of sex roles were no longer significant. You see the same coupling of overrealized eschatology and ignoring of sex distinctions in 1 Corinthians.

Paul explains in **1 Tim. 2:13** that the reason women are not permitted to teach or to exercise authority over a man is simply that "Adam was formed first, then Eve." It has nothing to do with women's intellect, character, devotion, knowledge, education, or speaking skill; it is not because they are *incapable* of teaching or leading. It is rooted in the order of creation, which as Köstenberger notes "strongly suggests that vv. 11-12 are permanently applicable."<sup>15</sup> Both here and in 1 Cor. 11:7-9, the Spirit of God through Paul makes clear that Genesis 2 posits role differences between men and women.

We would like for Paul to have explained how Adam's being created first translates into male leadership, but the notion of the "firstborn" being the leader required no explanation in the first century. The concept of primogeniture, the leadership right of the firstborn, is all over the OT and was taken for granted.<sup>16</sup>

The assertion that male leadership rests on the fact Adam was created before Eve raises the deeper question of *why* God made man first instead of making woman first or making them at the same time from the dust of the ground. Ultimately the answer is that God is sovereign (Ps. 103:19; 1 Tim. 6:15) and that he chose to do it that way. One could just as well ask why God gave the tribe of Levi the exclusive responsibility to care for the Tabernacle (Num. 1:50-51; 1 Chron. 6:47, 23:26), or why he gave the family of Aaron the exclusive responsibility of serving as priests (Ex. 28:1, 29:4-9). Why limit those roles to people who happen to be born in a certain lineage rather than allowing everyone equal access to the roles?

That precise attitude is what led to Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16. Korah, a Levite, and 250 community leaders opposed Moses and Aaron on the basis that they should have equal access to God. All Israel was holy, so no one family line should be exalted to the priestly function. It was a challenge to God's right to choose select groups for specific roles. And, of course, Korah, Dathan,

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<sup>14</sup> Singing is not equated with teaching in Col. 3:16. Rather, Paul there gives two means for fostering in the community of faith the rich indwelling of the word of Christ that he commands: teaching and instructing in all wisdom and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. As the church offers heartfelt praise and thanks to God in song, we also communicate indirectly to each other through that praise and thanksgiving and build each other up as a result (Eph. 5:19), but that is distinct from teaching as prohibited in 1 Tim. 2:12.

<sup>15</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, BTCP (Nashville: Holman, 2017), 117.

<sup>16</sup> James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 207-209.

and Abiram were swallowed by the earth, and the 250 community leaders were incinerated by God. The spirit of Korah is alive and well today.

Despite Paul stating expressly that women are not permitted to teach or to exercise authority over a man because "Adam was formed first, then Eve," those bent on having women teach in Christian gatherings claim the prohibition was because the women in Ephesus were teaching the heresy or were uneducated. As Schreiner points out, "Paul could easily have said that women were prohibited from teaching and exercising authority over men because they were spreading heresy or were uneducated. Yet he does not breathe a word about these matters."<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, the claim that the women in Ephesian church were all uneducated is just made up. The congregation clearly included some wealthy women (1 Tim. 2:9, 6:17-18), and as Baugh has shown, some of them would have been educated and a few may have been highly accomplished in letters or poetry.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Priscilla was in Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19; 2 Tim. 4:19), and she, with her husband, Aquila, had explained the way of God to the well-educated Apollos (Acts 18:26).

As for the claim the prohibition was motivated by the fact women were spreading heresy, it is unknown whether women were teaching the heresy rather than simply being influenced by it. And as Schreiner points out: "But Paul doesn't ground his prohibition in women teaching falsely. If both men and women were involved in the heresy (and we know that men were certainly involved), why does Paul forbid only the women from teaching men?" In other words, if the prohibition was because women were teaching heresy, forbidding *only* women and *all* women from teaching would make sense only if it was *only* women and *all* women who were teaching the heresy. But we know some men were teaching it (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17-18, 3:5-9), and it would be very unlikely that all women were teaching it. So that claim just does not wash; it smacks of desperation.

The fact women have a submissive or nonleading role in church does not mean they are inferior to or less worthy than men. Jesus is God; he is one in nature, being, and essence with God the Father. So the Son is not inferior to or less worthy than the Father, yet he is functionally subordinate to the Father; he willingly submits to the Father's authority. This is made explicit in 1 Cor. 11:3 and is demonstrated by the fact he was sent by the Father (Mat. 10:40, 15:24, 21:37; Mk. 9:37, 12:6; Lk. 4:43, 9:48, 10:16, 20:13; Jn. 3:34, 4:34, 5:23, 5:30, 5:36-38, 6:29, 6:38-39, 6:44, 6:57, 7:16, 7:28-29, 7:33, 8:16, 8:18, 8:26, 8:29, 8:42, 9:41, 10:36, 11:42, 12:44-45, 12:49, 13:20, 14:24, 15:21, 16:5, 17:3, 17:8, 17:18, 17:21, 17:23, 17:25, 20:21; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 3:2; 1 Jn. 4:9-10, 4:14); spoke the words of the Father (Jn. 7:16, 8:26-28, 8:38-40, 12:49-50, 14:24, 15:15); came to do the Father's will (Jn. 4:34, 5:19, 6:38, 14:30; Heb. 10:5-9); revealed the Father (Jn. 1:18, 12:45, 14:7-9, 17:6, 17:26; Heb. 1:1-4); seeks to please, glorify, and honor the Father (Jn. 5:30, 8:29, 14:13, 17:1-5); and judges only as he hears from the Father (Jn. 5:30).

If Jesus, being in very nature God, can submit to the Father's authority, then women can submit to the leadership of men in the church without denying their equal dignity or value. They are acting like Christ! That parallel is specifically drawn in 1 Cor. 11:3. Schreiner states:

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<sup>17</sup> Schreiner, 205.

<sup>18</sup> S. M. Baugh, "A Foreign World" in Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds., *Women in the Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 57-60.

A difference in role or function in no way implies that women are inferior to men. Even the Son submits to the Father (1 Cor. 15:28), and yet he is equal to the Father in essence, dignity, and personhood. It is a modern, democratic, Western notion that diverse functions suggest distinctions in worth between men and women. Paul believed that men and women were equal in personhood, dignity, and value but also taught that women had distinct roles from men.<sup>19</sup>

In **1 Tim. 2:14** Paul gives an additional reason why women are not permitted to teach or to exercise authority over a man. Referring to Genesis 3, he says that Adam was not deceived but the woman, by being deceived, came to be in transgression. His point is simply that Eve rather than Adam was the one deceived *by the serpent*, that qualification being understood from the Genesis account. So it is not necessary to "conclude that Adam was undeceived in every respect."<sup>20</sup> The fact the serpent went after Eve supports male leadership, the prohibition of women teaching or exercising authority over a man, not by suggesting women are innately more gullible than men and thus incompetent to teach, but by showing the harm that occurs when the divinely ordained pattern of leadership is subverted. Schreiner expresses the point well:

[Paul] wants to focus on the fact that the Serpent approached and deceived Eve, not Adam. The significance of the Serpent targeting Eve is magnified when we observe that Adam was apparently with Eve during the temptation (Gen. 3:6). In approaching Eve, then, the Serpent subverted the pattern of male leadership and interacted only with the woman. Adam was present throughout and did not intervene. The Genesis temptation, therefore, stands as the prototype of what happens when male leadership is abrogated. Eve took the initiative in responding to the serpent, and Adam let her do so. Thus, the appeal to Genesis 3 reminds readers of what happens when humans undermine God's ordained pattern.<sup>21</sup>

The point of **1 Tim. 2:15** seems to be that, contrary to what the false teachers were claiming, women remain faithful, and thus are saved, by accepting their God-given role, which role is symbolized by the distinctly female ability of childbearing. In other words, they are not to define their faithfulness, to define their Christian calling, in terms of the male role. Their salvation is to be "worked out" (Phil. 2:12) in a somewhat different way or on a somewhat different path than the salvation of men. Schreiner comments:

This does not mean that all women must have children in order to be saved. Though the underlying principle is timeless, Paul is hardly attempting to be comprehensive here. He has elsewhere commended the single state (1 Cor. 7). He selects childbearing because it is the most notable example of the divinely intended difference in roles between men and women and because many women throughout history have had children. Thus, Paul generalizes from the experience of women by using a representative example of women maintaining their proper role. To select childbearing again indicates that the argument is transcultural, for childbearing is not limited to a particular culture but is a permanent and ongoing difference between

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<sup>19</sup> Schreiner, 201-202.

<sup>20</sup> Schreiner, 215.

<sup>21</sup> Schreiner, 215-216.

men and women. The fact that God has ordained that women and only women bear children signifies that the differences in roles between men and women are rooted in the created order.

When Paul says that a woman will be saved by childbearing, he means, therefore, that they will be saved by adhering to their ordained role. Such a statement is apt to be misunderstood (and often has been), and thus a further comment is needed. Paul says that women will be saved "if they remain in faith and love and sanctification along with discretion." Thereby Paul shows that it is not sufficient for salvation for Christian women merely to bear children; they must also persevere in faith, love, holiness, and presumably other virtues. The reference to "discretion" (*sōphrosunēs*) hearkens back to the same word in verse 9 and also functions to tie the entire text together. Paul does not imply that all women must bear children to be saved (cf. v. 10). His purpose is to say that women will not be saved if they do not practice good works. One indication that women are doing good works is if they do not reject bearing children as evil but bear children in accord with their proper role.<sup>22</sup>

The early post-apostolic church understood that women are prohibited from teaching men in Christian assemblies. That is very difficult to explain if, as alleged by modern advocates of women teachers and preachers, Paul taught the contrary. As expressed in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (Book III, Ch. VI), a collection of preexisting materials on church order compiled in the fourth century, "We do not permit 'our women to teach in the church,' but only to pray and hear those that teach." After surveying the relevant evidence, the renowned church historian Everett Ferguson concludes:

From the standpoint of history, the evidence of Christian writings of the second to fourth centuries is in continuity with the New Testament. . . . Women were not appointed as elders, nor did they take public speaking roles in the assembly as prophets, teachers, or leaders in the assembly. Where women did take these roles in heretical and schismatic groups, the practice was a basis for objection to these groups.<sup>23</sup>

### **1 Corinthians 11:2-16**

*<sup>2</sup>Now I praise you because you have remembered me in all things and hold fast the traditions, just as I delivered [them] to you. <sup>3</sup>And I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God. <sup>4</sup>Every man who prays or prophesies having [a covering] upon the head disgraces his head, <sup>5</sup>and every woman who prays or prophesies uncovered as to the head disgraces her head, for she is one and the same thing with the woman who has been shaved. <sup>6</sup>For if a woman does not cover herself, let her also have her hair cut short; and if it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut short or to be shaved, let her cover herself.*

*<sup>7</sup>For a man ought not to cover [his] head, being the image and glory of God; the woman, on the other hand, is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup>For man is not from woman but woman from man; <sup>9</sup>for neither was the man created on account of the woman but the woman on account of the man. <sup>10</sup>For this reason, the woman ought to have authority on [her] head, on account of the angels. <sup>11</sup>Nevertheless,*

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<sup>22</sup> Schreiner, 222-223.

<sup>23</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Women in the Church* (Chickasha, OK: Yeomen Press, 2003), 54.

*neither is woman apart from man nor man apart from woman, in the Lord. <sup>12</sup>For just as the woman is from the man, so also the man is by the woman, and all things are from God.*

*<sup>13</sup>Judge among yourselves: Is it proper that a woman pray to God uncovered? <sup>14</sup>Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a dishonor to him <sup>15</sup>but if a woman wears long hair it is a glory to her? For long hair has been given [to her] as a covering. <sup>16</sup>But if anyone is disposed to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor [do] the churches of God.*

### Preliminary remarks

1. The impropriety involved in 11:2-16 is not women praying and prophesying but their doing so uncovered. Paul doesn't suggest that they should not pray or prophesy; he says only that they must be covered when they engage in those activities. So it is clear to me and to virtually all commentators that Christian women were indeed authorized to pray and prophesy publicly in some setting.

2. That makes it easier to understand how removing the head covering, which I take to be a culturally expected piece of female attire, had become an issue. Public speaking in that day and age was a male activity. If women in Christ were authorized to pray and prophesy publicly, you can see how that authorization would feed the notion present in Corinth that sex distinctions were no longer relevant to Christians (1 Cor. 7:1-7). They had entered the new age of the Spirit and were now "like the angels." They easily could interpret the fact that as Christians they were authorized to engage in the male activity of public speaking as supporting their view that sex distinctions were obsolete.

3. For those women who believed that male-female differences were indeed irrelevant in the church, it would make sense to discard cultural symbols of sex distinction. Since sex distinctions were no longer relevant, neither were items of apparel that marked those differences. In Christ they were free to pray and prophesy *as men*, which meant without the covering that distinguished them.

4. A question we wish Paul had answered clearly is *where* the women were authorized to pray and prophesy. More specifically, we want to know whether either or both of those activities were authorized in the worship assembly. But Paul is not concerned here with the issue of what public forums were appropriate for women to pray and prophesy. His point is that wherever such speech is appropriate, something he previously would have passed on to them, it is appropriate only if done with the covering, that cultural mark of femaleness. So we are left to do some detective work, and people come to different conclusions in that process.

5. Rather than go through all the possibilities, I will just tell you how I see things. It seems to me that at least some of the female speech Paul is addressing in 11:2-16 took place in the worship assembly. This is suggested by several lines of evidence.

- 11:17-34 deals with an assembly in which the Lord's Supper is shared, so that is clearly a reference to the gathering of the church for worship on the Lord's Day. Not only is there no hint of a change in setting between 11:2-16 and 11:17-34, but the parallel language in

11:2 and 11:17 ("Now I praise you"; "But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you") is a rhetorical clue that there is some connection between the two discussions.

- The phrase "on account of the angels" in 11:10 is best understood as a reference to angelic oversight of the worship assembly of the people of God. Angels were said to be present at the community gatherings at Qumran, and certain people (those with a bodily defect) were excluded from the assembly "out of reverence for the angels."
- When Paul appeals to the practice of "the churches" in 14:33b, he clearly does so with reference to the gathering of the whole church for worship. He makes a similar appeal in 11:16.

6. So I am convinced that at least some of the female speech Paul is addressing in 11:2-16 took place in the worship assembly. You say, now wait a minute, 1 Cor. 14:33b-36 forbids any kind of female speaking in the assembly. Paul there commands the women to be silent. So neither female praying nor prophesying could have taken place in the worship assembly.

7. But as I will explain below, I do not believe 1 Cor. 14:33b-36 is a blanket prohibition of female speech in the assembly. In context, I believe Paul there says that women are forbidden from participating in the prophetic process in the assembly, meaning they can neither prophesy nor challenge (weigh) the prophecies delivered by others. The rationale for the prohibition is the same as in 1 Tim. 2:11-14: women in the assembly are to express their divinely ordered submissiveness to men by refraining from *authoritative* speech. In other words, in the assembly women are not to direct the men, not to set them straight, by delivering God's authoritative message to them. Women are forbidden from doing that either directly by prophesying or teaching or indirectly by challenging the prophecies or teaching of others.

8. Now, if I am correct in thinking that at least some of the female speech addressed in 11:2-16 took place in the worship assembly and if I also am correct in thinking that 14:33b-36 precludes female prophesying in the assembly, then the female speech that took place in the worship assembly was prayer. In other words, my understanding is that women in Christ were authorized to pray publicly both in and out of the worship assembly but were authorized to prophesy publicly only outside the assembly.

9. Prayer, being a nondidactic expression of devotion to God, is not a way of directing men, and therefore it is not inconsistent with the submission a woman is required to manifest in the assembly. I think Acts 1:14 and 4:23-24 probably are examples of women praying publicly with the gathered church. I am aware that some believe that 1 Tim. 2:8, where Paul says he wants "the *men* in every place to pray," means that women are not to pray in the assembly, but as explained above, I do not think that follows.

10. The issue Paul is addressing arose regarding women in the assembly who were seeking to pray without the covering. *Paul in 11:13 identifies the specific focus of his concern: "Judge for yourselves: Is it proper that a woman pray to God uncovered?"* Though the immediate issue is covering during prayer in the assembly, Paul mentions women prophesying because the argument being made to justify women praying in the assembly uncovered also would justify women

prophesying outside the assembly uncovered. If the right to engage in the traditionally male activity of public speech justifies doing so "as men," meaning without the culture's distinctive mark of femaleness, then it would justify doing so whether that public speech was in or out of the assembly. Any ruling on the assembly situation would by logic also be a ruling on the non-assembly situation, so for this purpose, Paul treats the two situations as indistinguishable.

11. If, as I have suggested, the rationale for jettisoning the covering was that in Christ women were authorized to speak publicly as men, who did so without a covering, why were not women also pushing to *prophesy* in the assembly as men did? In other words, why focus only on the head covering rather than also challenge the restriction against prophesying in the assembly? Would not prophesying "as men" include doing so in the assembly? I can imagine challenges to ongoing practice being presented incrementally, proceeding one step at a time. Perhaps the advocates of the view that distinctions between men and women were *passé* in the age of Christ wanted to downplay the impact of that view on the assembly by first seeking only to discard the covering as a test case of the principle. Or perhaps, less calculatingly, an individual had raised the specific question of the covering in the assembly, which put that particular question front and center. The fact Paul makes clear, in my judgment, in 14:33b-36 that women may not prophesy in the assembly indicates he is aware that the propriety of women prophesying in the assembly is related to the questions being raised.

12. Wherever the women were praying and prophesying, the problem here is that some women were pressing to do so without the customary female covering.

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**11:2-6:** <sup>2</sup>*Now I praise you because you have remembered me in all things and hold fast the traditions, just as I delivered [them] to you.* <sup>3</sup>*And I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God.* <sup>4</sup>*Every man who prays or prophesies having [a covering] upon the head disgraces his head,* <sup>5</sup>*and every woman who prays or prophesies uncovered as to the head disgraces her head, for she is one and the same thing with the woman who has been shaved.* <sup>6</sup>*For if a woman does not cover herself, let her also have her hair cut short; and if it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut short or to be shaved, let her cover herself.*

After praising the leaders for following the practice he had passed on to them, Paul proceeds to give them reasons for the practice, something they could surely use in defending their position against the current challenge. He begins by denying the notion that sex is completely irrelevant in the church. He does so by asserting that the relationship between men and women in Christ is not identical or reciprocal in terms of leadership. Rather, men are given the leadership responsibility in the church. Man is the head of woman but woman is not the head of man, and Christ is the head of man in a distinctive way, presumably because of man's leadership responsibility. Paul phrases the difference in these terms because "head" plays into the issue of head coverings. Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner state:

If some Corinthians were arguing that Christ, as head of the church, was head over men and women in the same way (since in the new creation there is no longer any "male and female") Paul seems to be affirming that the creation pattern is still

significant and cannot be shrugged off. While there is tension between creation and new creation (esp. *fallen* creation and new creation), creation is the context in which Christians live out their lives and it cannot be passed off as irrelevant.<sup>24</sup>

I am aware of the claim that "head" does not here connote leadership authority and the claim that "man" and "woman" should instead be rendered "husband" and "wife," but I am in broad scholarly company in concluding that those claims do not stand up. Regarding the meaning of "head," one can consult the standard Greek lexicons and theological dictionaries. Regarding the translation "man" and "woman," Anthony Thiselton notes, "A few commentators defend *husband*, but the overwhelming majority of writers convincingly argue that the issue concerns gender relations as a whole, not simply those within the more restricted family circle."<sup>25</sup> This is why the vast majority of English translations render the words "man" and "woman."<sup>26</sup>

As I have said, the fact man has been given the leadership role does not mean men are superior to women in character, intellect, or capabilities. They simply have been given different roles or functions. The man is to lead and the woman is to be a helping partner in the joint enterprise of glorifying God. That being "head of" need not include intrinsic superiority or greater worth is evident in the statement that "the head of Christ is God." A basic confession of the Christian faith is that the Son is one with the Father in nature; he is in no way less worthy or inferior in being. The difference between the Father and the Son is one of role or function. The Son freely embraces the leadership of the Father.

Given the continuing relevance of sex for those who are in Christ, it is inappropriate to reject cultural sex distinctions in attire, to engage in a kind of "cross dressing," when publicly speaking to or on behalf of God. The cultural expectation regarding female head coverings in Greek and Roman society of the mid-first century is debated, but such a covering for women appearing in public certainly was the traditional practice. Ben Witherington concludes: "How do we assess this evidence? It seems sufficient to show that the wearing of a head-covering by an adult woman in public (especially in a ritual context) was a traditional practice known to Jews, Greeks, and Romans."<sup>27</sup>

The practice continued during and after the time of Paul, but as a cultural norm it seems it was being "chipped at" (rebelled against) by certain classes of women in certain social contexts. That does not mean, however, that it had been displaced as a norm, especially in a public assembly in which men and women mixed together. If, for example, Hollywood rejects or rebels against some cultural norm that does not mean doing so is no longer viewed as shameful in the larger culture (though in our age of celebrity worship and mass communication it often does not take them long to displace cultural norms).

David Garland notes it was widely regarded as a disgrace for a Hebrew woman to go out uncovered and then states: "Paul is not imposing Palestinian customs on the Corinthians, however.

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<sup>24</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 510.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 822.

<sup>26</sup> KJV, ERV, ASV, NEB, NAS, NKJV, REB, NASU, HCSB, CEB, NIV'11, NET, LEB, ISV, CSB.

<sup>27</sup> Witherington III, 82.

The Corinthian culture also looked askance at women going out in public without a head covering."<sup>28</sup> Ciampa and Rosner state:

Perhaps more central to Paul's thinking is the need to maintain a strict distinction between the sexes, one that was traditionally associated with some type of antithetical manifestation (e.g., men were associated with public life, women with the privacy of the household, men were to be in the open and women covered, etc.). . . . In Paul's context, men and women were expected to have contrasting head styles, especially in public. Women were more commonly expected to have their heads covered while in public.<sup>29</sup>

William Baker states, "Covering the head with a hood or veil outside the home was standard practice for women in Roman, Greek, and Jewish culture (3 Macc. 4:6; *b. Nedarim* 30*b*; *m. Bava Qamma* 8:6; *m. Ketubbot* 7:6; Plutarch *Moralia* 232C, 267A)."<sup>30</sup> Just as it would be disgraceful for any man to pray or prophesy with a female covering on his head,<sup>31</sup> so it would be disgraceful for a woman to do so without it. It is disgraceful because it is an act of rebellion against the created order and as such it brings shame both on the rebel and the rebel's leader/head.

The sexual nature of the shame is evident in vv. 5b-6. The woman who prays or prophesies without the cover disgraces her head, "*for* she is one and the same thing as the woman who has been shaved." Verse 6 emphasizes the closeness of the parallel. The shame of the woman who had been shaved was the shame of appearing as a man, appearing contrary to her sex. A couple of passages in the writings of Lucian, a second-century Greek satirist, clearly show that short hair on a woman was considered mannish.<sup>32</sup> New Testament scholar James De Young comments, "The shame seems related to a woman's becoming like a man in her style of hair, becoming 'mannish.' This suggests that the women at Corinth were blurring distinctions between men and women, especially sexual distinctions."<sup>33</sup>

Her shame was not from the short hair itself but from the fact short hair was culturally defined as the hair of a man. In the same way, the shame of going uncovered was not from the attire itself but from the fact the lack of a cover was culturally defined as the attire of a man.

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<sup>28</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 520.

<sup>29</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, 514.

<sup>30</sup> William Baker writes in "1 Corinthians" in Philip W. Comfort, ed., *Cornerstone Bible Commentary, 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2009), 157.

<sup>31</sup> In "When Men Wore Veils to Worship: The Historical Context of 1 Corinthians 11.4," *New Testament Studies* 34 (October 1988), 481-505, Richard Oster showed that Roman men pulled a toga over their head in the context of prayer and prophecy, but that covering must be distinct from the covering under discussion, as the covering under discussion is *required* for women and *forbidden* for men. Men praying covered is not an actual problem Paul seeks to correct (Garland, 517) but something that would be recognized as inappropriate. Garland's suggestion that men pulling togas over their heads would be recognized as inappropriate because of its connection to pagan devotional practices stumbles on the fact women are commanded to wear the covering.

<sup>32</sup> There also is evidence that a shaved head marked a woman as an adulteress (see, Garland, 520), but that seems less relevant than the sex angle.

<sup>33</sup> James B. De Young, *Women in Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 26. There is no contemporary evidence for the view that short hair or a shaved head was the mark of Corinthian prostitutes.

**11:7-12:** <sup>7</sup>For a man ought not to cover [his] head, being the image and glory of God; the woman, on the other hand, is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup>For man is not from woman but woman from man; <sup>9</sup>for neither was the man created on account of the woman but the woman on account of the man. <sup>10</sup>For this reason, the woman ought to have authority on [her] head, on account of the angels. <sup>11</sup>Nevertheless, neither is woman apart from man nor man apart from woman, in the Lord. <sup>12</sup>For just as the woman is from the man, so also the man is by the woman, and all things are from God.

Verses 7-10 provide a further reason why a man should not wear the cover *about which he is speaking* (v. 7 begins with "For") but a woman should. This kind of sex-inappropriate dressing contradicts or rebels against God's creation of mankind as two distinct sexes and therefore is contrary to the fact woman's existence glorifies man (in addition to God) whereas man's existence glorifies only God. In other words, this difference in the object of glorification has implications for who is a suitable candidate for wearing female clothing. This requires some unpacking.

Woman's existence glorifies man because man "gave birth" to woman and because woman was made to help the man, to be a nonleading partner. According to Gen. 2:20-23, God made Eve from part of Adam's body, not independently from the ground, and he did so that she might be a helper for Adam. So woman's existence redounds to the glory of man, but man's existence does not redound to the glory of woman because he was not created from her nor created to be a helper for her.

Given that woman is the *glory of man*, it is fitting that she be under a sign of authority when publicly speaking to or on behalf of God, that is, when praying or prophesying. Paul does not explain why her being the glory of man means she needs "*authority on her head*," but I think the reason is that however glorious *man* may be, he remains under the authority of God. And as the glory of *man*, the woman needs to reflect that truth – the fact man is still under the authority of God – when speaking publicly to or on behalf of God. Since man, on the other hand, is the *glory of God*, a sign of authority over him would not be appropriate because there is no authority over God.

The head cover about which Paul is speaking functions as a sign of authority precisely because it was a distinctly female piece of attire. Notice Paul does not impose that significance; he assumes it. Given that women were assigned a subordinate or nonleading role by both culture and God, clothing that was distinctly female naturally symbolized being under the leadership (authority) of another. (Paul does not address how or why certain items of apparel came to be distinctly female; he simply accepts that some did.)

The end of verse 10 gives yet *another reason* (e.g., Ciampa and Rosner, 529) that a woman should have a sign of authority on her head, meaning the female covering. She should do so "on account of the angels." As I have already mentioned, the best way to understand this is to recognize that angels observe the worship assembly and are concerned that the creation order be honored in that forum. Ciampa and Rosner state, "Paul may well be referring to the angels as divinely appointed auditors of the community's worship who, like God, would be offended by any shameful displays during the worship."<sup>34</sup> Larry Hurtado writes:

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<sup>34</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, 530.

[Christians] experienced their assemblies as not merely human events but as having a transcendent dimension. They sensed God as directly and really present in their meetings through his Spirit. . . . In 1 Corinthians 11:10, the curious passing reference to the angels present in the worship assembly shows how familiar the idea was. Paul's Corinthian readers apparently needed no further explanation (though we could wish for one!). As the 'holy ones' (saints) of God, believers saw their worship gatherings as attended by heavenly 'holy ones', angels, whose presence signified the heavenly significance of their humble house-church assemblies.<sup>35</sup>

Verses 11-12 make clear that the sex differences about which he has been speaking and which must continue to be honored in dress are not a matter of superiority/inferiority. Men and women in Christ are mutually dependent, each needing the other that mankind may be what God intended it to be (v. 11). Evidence of this mutual dependence is that, whereas womankind initially came from Adam, all subsequent men have come from women, and all things (men and women) come from the one God.

**11:13-16:** <sup>13</sup>*Judge among yourselves: Is it proper that a woman pray to God uncovered? <sup>14</sup>Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a dishonor to him <sup>15</sup>but if a woman wears long hair it is a glory to her? For long hair has been given [to her] as a covering. <sup>16</sup>But if anyone is disposed to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor [do] the churches of God.*

Paul appeals to what they already recognized about long hair to make his point that women should not pray uncovered. (The fact he mentions only prayer supports to the claim that the two practices of praying and prophesying were in some way distinguished.) "Nature itself" taught them that long hair was a dishonor to men but a glory to women in that the distinction of mankind into two sexes is a fundamental aspect of the creation order. People have a natural sense from creation that "gender bending," confusing or masking sexual differentiation, is wrong. Given that sense of sexual distinction that is rooted in creation, the Corinthians would agree that if a man wore long hair it dishonored him but if a woman wore long hair it honored or exalted her. They would do so because long hair had been *culturally assigned* as a kind of female covering; it was therefore inappropriate on a man (in that cultural context).

Paul is well aware that male hair has the same capacity to grow long as female hair and he knows from Scripture that Nazirites were forbidden from cutting their hair, so he certainly is not suggesting that long hair is universally or transculturally contrary to sex distinctions. Garland remarks, "Long hair for men is unnatural for Paul because in his cultural context it conveys sexual ambiguity and hints of moral perversion."<sup>36</sup> S. Donald Fortson III and Rollin G. Grams state:

Paul is saying there is a natural distinction between men and women; if a man crosses this barrier and dons the appearance of a woman by growing his hair long, he is degrading himself. . . . Paul's point is not that long hair is impossible for a man to grow but that an effeminate appearance for a man is unnatural. In 1 Corinthians

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<sup>35</sup> Larry Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 50-51.

<sup>36</sup> Garland, 531.

11:2-16, Paul is saying that men should be men and women should be women, according to nature. While hairstyles are a matter of custom, in Paul's day long hair on men suggested effeminacy in Greek and Roman culture. For a man to have long hair, then, was like cross-dressing – purposefully appearing contrary to his nature.<sup>37</sup>

Paul's point is that the head covering in question functions like long hair. It too was culturally assigned as a female covering and is therefore inappropriate on a man. Regardless of whether some want to argue the point, Paul says that neither his group nor other churches of God engage in the practice of women praying or prophesying uncovered.

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

*As in all the churches of the saints, <sup>34</sup>let the women be silent in the churches, for it is not permitted for them to speak, but let them be in submission as even the Law says. <sup>35</sup>And if they want to learn something, let them question their own husbands at home, for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. <sup>36</sup>Or did the word of God go out from you or reach only to you?*

The context of this passage is Paul's discussion of how the gifts of tongues and prophecy are to be exercised in the assembly. The exercise of tongues is regulated in vv. 27-28. Only two or three individuals are permitted to speak in tongues and they are required to do so one at a time. If there is no one present to interpret the tongues for the congregation, the tongues-speaker is obliged to remain silent. Paul begins to regulate the exercise of prophecy in v. 29. Two or three prophets are permitted to speak and the others are instructed to weigh carefully their message. As I previously mentioned, the purpose of this weighing was to test whether the message was in fact from God (see, 1 Thess. 5:19-21; 1 Jn. 4:1), and it probably included some kind of oral examination of the prophets.

Verses 39-40 are crucial to a proper understanding of Paul's instructions about women because they reveal that he has not changed subjects. He is still discussing the exercise of tongues and prophecy in the assembly, so his instructions about women speaking must be understood as part of that discussion, not as a new and unrelated topic. Since the discussion of tongues concluded at v. 28, no reader would think that Paul had returned to that subject without some clear indication of an intent to do so. Therefore, the context strongly suggests that vv. 33b-36 somehow relate to prophesying. In that light, the most natural reading of this passage is that Paul is prohibiting women from participating in the prophetic process during the worship assembly. (As explained in the discussion of 1 Tim. 2:8-15 and 1 Cor. 11:2-16, I believe the female speech that took place in the community worship assembly was prayer, though probably not the leading of prayers on behalf of the assembly.)

This means that women are forbidden to prophesy or to weigh (orally challenge) the prophecies that have been delivered by others. The rationale for the prohibition is the same as in 1 Tim. 2:11-14: women in the assembly are to express their divinely ordered submission to male leadership by refraining from authoritative speech.<sup>38</sup> This explains the universality of the

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<sup>37</sup> S. Donald Fortson III and Rollin G. Grams, *Unchanging Witness* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 327.

<sup>38</sup> Witherington says of prophecy (p. 94): "One gets the feeling both from the effect prophecy is said to have on non-believers, as well as from the terms used to describe its functions, that Paul sees prophecy as a form of moral or

command,<sup>39</sup> the statement that women are obligated to be in submission, the reference to the Law,<sup>40</sup> and the strong tone of moral condemnation.

Verse 35 poses no problem for this view. It had apparently been made known to Paul that some women were publicly quizzing the prophets and were thus engaged in weighing their messages. (Questions were a common way for teaching and challenging in the ancient world.)<sup>41</sup> This practice was defended by the claim that the women were only seeking to learn which, after all, was the purpose of prophecy (14:31). Paul exposes this claim as a pretext by making clear that if the women were truly interested in learning rather than in teaching, they could accomplish that outside the assembly by questioning their husbands at home. Paul's instructions in 1 Tim. 2:11 on *how* women are to learn (in quietness and in all submission) appear to address a similar concern.

It might be useful to state my understanding by way of a paraphrase of 14:33b-36:

As in all the congregations of the saints, the women must refrain from participating in the prophetic process in the assemblies, for they are not permitted to speak authoritatively but must be in submission as even the Law says. And if they want to learn something, they should question their own husbands at home rather than use that as a pretext for correcting the prophets, for it is shameful for a woman to speak

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ethical exhortation or encouragement. Thus, Barrett calls it, 'the moral truth of Christianity proclaimed in inspired speech . . .'

<sup>39</sup> Note "all the churches" (v. 33b) and "the churches" (v. 34). It is possible that v. 33b belongs with what precedes, but even if that is correct the universality remains clear by the reference to "the churches" in v. 34. Many modern commentators (e.g., Orr and Walther, Carson, Witherington, Blomberg, Soards, Garland, Thiselton, Gardner, and Schreiner), Greek versions, and most English versions recognize that v. 33b fits better with v. 34 than with v. 33a. For example, D. A. Carson states in *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 122:

Do we read, "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the congregations of the saints"; or "As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches"? The latter is stylistically inelegant, in that in Greek the words rendered "congregations" and "churches" by the New International Version are the same word: that is, "As in all the churches of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches." On the other hand, what some see as stylistic inelegance, others see as powerful emphasis. Moreover, if verse 33b is linked with what precedes, it is difficult to see what the line of thought is. The sentence "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the congregations of the saints" is either trite (Of course God will be the same God everywhere!) or meaningless (Exactly what is being compared? God and the congregations of the saints? God's peaceful order with what is in all the congregations of the saints?). On the whole, it seems best to take verse 33b with what follows. But even if someone prefers the other option, little is changed in the interpretation of verses 34-36, since the phrase in the churches (in the plural) is found in verse 34.

<sup>40</sup> Paul does not identify a specific text from the Old Testament (note that his use of "Law" can be broader than the Pentateuch – e.g., 1 Cor. 14:21) that expresses the principle of male leadership, but he probably has in mind a text like Gen. 2:21-23 in which Eve is shown to have been created after Adam and out of Adam and to have been named by Adam. In 1 Tim. 2:13 Paul cites the fact Adam was created first as a basis for male leadership in the church (see also, 1 Cor. 11:8-9). This is consistent with the Old Testament pattern of "primogeniture," the idea that the firstborn in any generation in a human family has leadership in the family. Other texts certainly could have factored into Paul's reference to the Law. For example, in Gen. 3:16 God tells Eve that as part of the curse her desire will be for her husband, probably meaning that woman in her fallen nature will desire to dominate her husband (see the use of "desire" in Gen. 4:7), contrary to God's created order, and that this desire generally will go unsatisfied because the husband has the leadership role. In Gen. 18:12 Sarah referred to Abraham as "her lord," and for that reason Peter cites her in 1 Pet. 3:6 as a paragon of wifely submission.

<sup>41</sup> William Loader refers in *The New Testament on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 385, to Okland's observation "that the question-answer technique was widespread as a teaching device."

authoritatively in the assembly. Did the word of God originate with you, or reach only to you?

Many evangelical scholars recognize that 14:34-35 prohibit women in the assembly from weighing, orally challenging, the prophecies delivered by others, but they reject the idea that the prohibition includes prophesying itself because they believe Paul in 1 Cor. 11:2-16 acknowledged implicitly that women are permitted to prophesy in the assembly as long as they wear the appropriate covering when doing so.<sup>42</sup> Ciampa and Rosner express the motive succinctly:

Despite the fact that the most recent reference to "speaking" had to do with prophesying, it does not seem possible that prophecy is the specific form of speech from which Paul is prohibiting female participation, given his discussion of it in chapter 11 (which indicates that women may prophesy as long as they do so with their heads covered).<sup>43</sup>

As I explained in the section on chapter 11, I do not think Paul authorized women prophesying in the assembly in 11:2-16. Paul acknowledged there only that women are permitted to *pray* in the assembly (not necessarily to "lead" prayers for the group); that was the issue precipitating the discussion. He included the reference to women *prophesying* because, though that was authorized only outside of the assembly, his ruling about the covering when praying in the assembly would by logic also be a ruling about the covering when prophesying outside the assembly. That is why I labored to make that point.

Because they recognize the context indicates the speech referred to in v. 34 relates to the prophetic process but mistakenly believe 11:2-16 authorizes women prophesying in the assembly, these scholars are forced into the odd claim that Paul allows women to *prophesy* in the assembly but forbids them from *weighing* the prophecies of others. In other words, they assert that prophesying is a lesser exercise of authority than the weighing of prophecies delivered by others and thus is not contrary to the divinely ordered submission, whereas weighing prophecies (and teaching – 1 Tim. 2:11-14) is!<sup>44</sup>

To support this, they must claim that prophesying is somehow a less authoritative activity than weighing the prophecies of others, which leads them to claim that New Testament prophesying

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<sup>42</sup> E.g., James B. Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women?," *Westminster Theological Journal* 35 (1973), 217-18; Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 220-224; Witherington, 101-102; Carson, 129-131; Thiselton, 1158; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, BTCF (Nashville: Holman, 2017), 116; Paul Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 637.

<sup>43</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, 721. They do not subscribe to the view that Paul is here prohibiting women from weighing prophecies.

<sup>44</sup> James Greenbury states in "1 Corinthians 14:34-35: Evaluation of Prophecy Revisited," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51 (Dec. 2008), 726:

One of the tenets of the interpretation we are considering is that women may not evaluate prophecy or teach but may prophesy. However, as Chrysostom observes, because prophecy was entirely from the Spirit, and teaching only partly so, prophecy was invested with a greater authority than teaching. For the same reason prophecy possesses superior authority to evaluation. Therefore it is unlikely that Paul would allow women to voice prophecies in church but forbid them from evaluating prophecy or teaching when the former is a more authoritative ministry.

differs from Old Testament prophesying in that the former is fallible whereas the latter was not. (This fallible/infallible distinction is also used by those who claim the gift of prophecy has continued; it allows them not to take alleged prophecies as authoritative.) With numerous scholars, I do not believe that distinction is valid.

Schreiner states, "To sum up, there is no compelling evidence that New Testament prophets spoke both truth and error. Like the Old Testament prophets, they spoke the word of the Lord accurately."<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Paul says in Eph. 2:20 that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, which suggests that the attempt to distinguish apostles from prophets in terms of infallibility is off base.

Some modern scholars dismiss 14:33b-36 with the claim it was not originally written by Paul but was inserted into the text at a later date. They base this on the fact some later manuscripts have the verses after verse 40 instead of after v. 33a. Yet, all manuscripts have the verses in one location or the other. So it makes more sense to think they were original and then relocated after v. 40 by a later scribe who mistakenly thought they did not fit after v. 33a. If the original letter did not have the text, one certainly would expect some manuscript evidence of that fact (compare, for example, the manuscripts evidence regarding Jn. 7:53-8:11).<sup>46</sup>

It seems the dismissal of this text is driven in significant part by our culture's distaste for Paul's words and by supposed difficulty in fitting it with 11:2-16. Carson comments:

I confess I am always surprised by the amount of energy and ingenuity expended to rescue Paul from himself and conform him to our image. In any case, from a purely text-critical point of view, the evidence that these verses are original, and in their original location (and not, as in some manuscripts, with verses 34-35 placed after 14:40), is substantial.<sup>47</sup>

Verse 36 is a rebuke. The word of God did not go out from them, meaning they are in no position to act as though they have some special or inside knowledge of God's will. Neither were they the only ones to whom the word of God came, meaning the uniform practice of the other churches testifies against whatever irregularities they are entertaining.

### Conclusion

Women are prohibited in Scripture from delivering in the assembly God's authoritative message to men, either directly by prophesying (a gift I do not believe continues) or teaching or indirectly by challenging the prophecies or teaching of others. So women cannot preach or teach in the assembly. Prayer, on the other hand, is a nondidactic expression of devotion to God and

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Paul Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 363. For a fuller discussion, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are and Why They Matter* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2018), 101-122.

<sup>46</sup> See Curt Niccum, "The Voice of the Manuscripts on the Silence of Women: The External Evidence for 1 Cor 14.34-5," *New Testament Studies* 43 (April 1997), 242-255; Thomas R. Schreiner, "Philip Payne on Familiar Ground," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 15 (Spring 2010), 38-40.

<sup>47</sup> Carson, 124.

therefore is not inconsistent with the submission a woman is required to manifest in the assembly.<sup>48</sup> This understanding is supported by church history. As noted previously, the *Apostolic Constitutions* declares, "We do not permit 'our women to teach in the church,' but only to pray and hear those that teach." Ferguson concludes regarding the understanding of the early post-apostolic church:

From the standpoint of history, the evidence of Christian writings of the second to fourth centuries is in continuity with the New Testament. . . . Women were not appointed as elders, nor did they take public speaking roles in the assembly as prophets, teachers, or leaders in the assembly. Where women did take these roles in heretical and schismatic groups, the practice was a basis for objection to these groups.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> "Leading" prayer, on the other hand, may well be contrary to the biblical principle of male leadership of the church.

<sup>49</sup> Ferguson, 54.