

Study 4 Paul

Possibly no one has had more bad press than St Paul when it comes to women. He is often accused of being a misogynist. Did he not tell women to cover their heads and keep silent in church and submit to their husbands, and suggest that women are more prone to sin than men? If this is what he said, from a twenty-first century perspective, most would say ‘guilty as charged’. The problem is that Paul was a first-century man and the evidence brought forward is very one-sided. He also said things about women no one except Jesus had ever said. In many ways, as far as women are concerned, he was revolutionary in his teaching and practice.

The fallen reality and the new creation ideal.

Paul was never in doubt that he lived in a fallen world. Life was hard and brutal for most people. Life expectancy was short and any injury or illness could spell death. About a third of the population in the Roman Empire were slaves. When the Roman legions went to war, those captured were made slaves, sold like cattle, and were forced to work by the whip. Life for women was particularly challenging. They were subject to a man all of their life: father, husband, guardian, or eldest son, when widowed. They were as a general rule not educated, except in domestic duties. Their husband was chosen for them and they had to obey him. In public, they were expected to keep silent when men were present.

It was in this world that Paul lived and ministered; yet after his encounter with Jesus Christ on the Damascus road, he knew that God was at work to change this world for the better. In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and giving of the Holy Spirit a new world had dawned, or as he called it, “a new creation” that awaited a final consummation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). In all of Paul’s writings and theology, we find a tension between the now and the not yet. His is a theology of the “in-between times”. In this present time, the believer and the

church know in part the blessings of the new creation; but they also know the struggles and frustrations of living in this fallen creation. As a consequence, for Paul and us, living as Christians involves a somewhat elusive quest to be new creation people in this crossover of the ages. In this chapter, I discuss two examples where Paul seeks to implement a new creation view of women, first in gender relations and second in ministry. In the next chapter I discuss a third example, Paul's attempt to transform marriage into an equal partnership. What is said in this chapter and the next will show that Paul was in no way a misogynist.

Paul's understanding of leadership in the church.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 12 to 14, Romans 12:3–8, and Ephesians 4:11-12 Paul spells out his theology of ministry.¹ Peter is of much the same opinion (1 Peter 4:11-12). Paul is emphatic: all ministry flows from the empowering and enabling of the Holy Spirit. He says to “each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7), indicating a ministry given by the Spirit to every believer for the building up of the church. It is impossible to read into these words any social, racial or gender distinctions. For Paul, the Spirit is non-discriminatory in bestowing the spiritual or grace gifts (*charismata*) that make ministry in the church possible. In each of the passages listed above, Paul likens the church to a human body where each part has a contribution to make of equal value. One is like a foot, another hand another an eye – and one cannot do without the other. It is impossible to read racial, social or gender distinctions into this teaching.² The Spirit is an equal opportunity employer!

He names about 30 ministries but no one thinks his list is exhaustive. Any ministry that builds up the church he would be glad to call a *charisma* – a gift of grace. Helping, encouraging, giving generosity are gifts and so too are teaching, prophecy and apostleship (1 Cor 12:27–28). His theology of ministry does not envisage one person out the front as “the minister” who does all the more important ministry. This is a much later development with no

¹ See my 250 page book, *Patterns of Ministry*, for more on church and ministry in the apostolic age.

² In more detail see Giles, *Patterns*, 33–41.

biblical support.

Paul avoids giving people lofty titles, so common in the Greco–Roman world and in the Judaism he knew. A leader is for him is a servant— *diakonos*. This word immediately catches our attention. In the footsteps of his master, defines all leadership in the Christian community in terms of *diakonia*/service. He uses the *diakon* ... words about 40 times. A number of these references link the *diakon* ... words with preaching, and so table waiting is not in mind, but in all of them the cost of ministry is in the foreground.³ Paul’s acceptance of his lowly status as a servant of Christ is shown in his willingness to speak of himself as a slave (*doulos*) (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Phil 1:1; Col 1:7; 4:7; Tit 1:1). In the Greco–Roman world slaves were right at the bottom of the social order.

We can only understand Paul’s theology of ministry when we understand that in the first and second centuries virtually all Christian gatherings were in a home and the very largest home would have held at the maximum forty people. Probably most house–churches would have had about a dozen in attendance or a few more.⁴ When Paul writes to the church (*ekklesia*) in Corinth, Thessalonica, or wherever he is addressing all the Christians in that city who met in little house churches.⁵ The house church setting determined to a large degree what took place when the church assembled. It encouraged wide participation and informality. In this setting the gifts of ministry he lists were exercised, especially that of prophecy and the testing of prophecy by those who heard the prophecy (1 Cor 11:4–5, 14:1–39; 1 Thess 5:19–20). This context explains why Paul so often speaks of people ministering one another.⁶ In the house

³ Collins, *Diakonia*, argues that *diak...* word group does not have as its primary meaning, “waiting on tables”, and thus humble service, but he concedes that on the lips of Jesus and Paul it does speak about lowly service. See further Giles, *Patterns*, 80–81.

⁴ On house churches see, Giles, “House Churches,” *Priscilla Papers*, 2010, 24.1, 6–8. Gehring, *House Church and Mission*; Simson, *Houses that Change the World*; Banks, *Going to Church in the First Century*; Banks and Banks, *The Church Comes Home*; Osiek and McDonald, *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*; Campbell, *Elders*, 117–18, 151–52; Osiek and Balch, *Families in the New Testament World*; Verner, *The Household of God*; Adam, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Place*

⁵ For more on this see, See Giles, *What on Earth is the Church?*

⁶ Paul, or one of the other apostolic writers, tell the recipients of their epistles to minister to one another (Gal 5:13, cf. 1 Peter 4:10); to build up/encourage one another (Rom 14:19; 1 Thess 4:18, 5:11; cf. Heb 10:25); to

churches, the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the context of a shared meal (1 Cor 11:17–22). This made church a bit like a dinner party. No one person was the counterpart of the pastor of today. Pastors and teachers (in the plural) are one of the Spirit–given ministries (Eph 4:11). Declarative, half hour long sermons by a trained pastor do not fit this scene. If someone came with teaching (1 Cor 14:26) it would have been discussed and questions asked (1 Cor 14:35).

[A]Paul's practice of ministry.

Paul's *practice* of ministry reflects closely his *theology* of ministry. The number of women in leadership in the early Pauline churches, given the cultural context, is breathtaking. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the sixteenth chapter of his epistle to the Romans. In this final chapter, he mentions ten women; he names eight of them, and commends the ministry and leadership of seven. Most of them we almost certainly women of some social standing.⁷ If we consider all the early Paulines at more than one-quarter of the leaders Paul mentions by name are women, twelve in number.⁸

[B]Phoebe. Romans 16:1–2.

Phoebe is mentioned at the head of the list and singled out for extended commendation (Rom 16:1–2). Paul warmly speaks of her asking that the church in Rome receive her. It is likely he commends her first because she is to carry his epistle from Corinth to the Rome.⁹ Letters in the Roman Empire were generally personally delivered. There was no public mail system. The two titles Paul gives to Phoebe indicate that she was not just an ordinary female member of the church at Cenchrea, the eastern port city of Corinth. Paul calls her a *diakonos* and a *prostatis*. The first term is correctly translated “deacon” (the feminine form deaconess does not appear in the New Testament). What this title implies at this point of time is disputed but

instruct/teach one another (Rom 15:14; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16); to speak the truth to one another (Eph 4:25; Col 3:1); to bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2); to care for one another (1 Cor 12:25); etc.

⁷ So the Köstenbergers on Lydia, 138–139, and Phoebe, 150.

⁸ Gehring, *House Church*, 211.

⁹ Moo, *Romans*, 913; Köstenbergers, *God's Design*, 150.

we need to note that Paul is happy to call himself and Apollos *diakonoi* (1 Cor 3:5).¹⁰ I would argue it would be best to translate this word as we would if a man was so designated. She was “a minister”: *a minister* in the church at Cenchrea. I am not suggesting she was *the pastor* of the church in Cenchrea; churches led by one person of any name were unknown in the first century. What I am arguing is that this title marks her out as church leader.

Second, Phoebe is designated a *prostatis*. This is the only time this noun is used in the New Testament. Literally the word means “to stand before”. It speaks of someone in a leadership position. Verbal forms of this word are frequently used by Paul to designate church leaders.¹¹ Shortly before in Romans 12:28, he speaks of “those in leadership (*ho proistamenous*). The noun in extra biblical literature is often used of presidents of associations.¹² The word in this context, may, however, mean “patron”. A patron was someone of some social standing who aided others by providing such things as housing, financial support and by representing their interests before local authorities. Patrons were prominent and well to do citizens, and they could be women. Many synagogues had patrons, a few women. The best conjecture is that Phoebe was a house church leader and as such was seen as the patron of the Christians that met in her home.

[B]Prisca. Romans 16:3–5.

The next woman mentioned in Romans chapter 16 is Prisca (or Priscilla) along with her husband Aquila. In four of the six references to this couple, Prisca's name comes first (Acts 18:18, 26; Rom 16:3; 2 Tim 4:19). This unusual detail must mean that she had some pre-eminence in the marriage. This may have arisen because she came from a noble family, or because she was the stronger Christian leader in this couple relationship, or both. Her giftedness in ministry certainly seems to have been a factor. In the four places she is

¹⁰ I discuss this term more fully in the chapter 5 following on deacons.

¹¹ Rom 12:8; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 3:4, 5, 12, 5:17.

¹² See Payne, *One in Christ*, 63.

mentioned first, the ministry of the couple is in focus. This suggests that she took the lead in instructing Apollos because she is named first in this story (Acts 18:18, 26). The In Romans 16:5 Paul speaks of the church in “their” house, using the plural form of the possessive pronoun (c.f. I Cor 16:19). Prisca and her husband Aquila were the co-leaders of their house church.

Paul calls this couple “*sunergoi*” (fellow-workers or co-workers), saying “they risked their necks for my life.” Rom 16:4. Paul uses the same noun, *sunergoi*, of outstanding male leaders: Timothy (Rom 16:21), Apollos (1 Cor 3:9), Titus (2 Cor 8:23), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), Clement and others (Phil 4:3) and Urbanus (Rom 16:9). For this woman to be called “fellow-workers” with Paul and other notable Christian leaders is a great honor. This designation is closely associated with the term *diakonos*. In 1 Corinthians 3:5 Paul first speaks of himself and Apollos as *diakonoi* and then in 3:9 as *diakonoi* and *sunergoi* (c.f. 2 Cor 6:1, 4). This suggests that the two words are virtual synonyms in Paul's epistles. These *sunergoi* were recognized leaders and Paul demands that Christians be subject “to every fellow worker” (1 Cor 16:16).

Aquila and Priscilla. The fact that apostolic church gatherings were virtually all in homes they miss. Later they give everything away by acknowledging that this couple were in fact house church leaders, and that they “taught: in this context.”¹³

[B]Junia. Romans 16:7.

Another woman in this list is Junia, almost certainly a woman apostle,¹⁴ not one of the twelve apostles, but rather an apostle like Barnabas, Apollos, James and Timothy.¹⁵ Because the existence of a woman apostle would completely undermine the argument that women cannot be priests in the Catholic tradition, or church leaders and teachers in the evangelical tradition,

¹³ Ibid., 148

¹⁴ See on what follows Epp, *Junia, The First Woman Apostle*.

¹⁵ On the two kinds of apostles see Giles, *Patterns*, 127–148.

male commentators have tried valiantly to find reasons to reject what the text says. They have argued that:

1. Paul here speaks of a male apostle called Junias.
2. Paul is only saying Andronicus and Junia were esteemed by those who were apostles.
3. Andronicus and Junia were not apostles like Barnabas, Apollos, James and Timothy.

[NL 1-3]

1. The first objection to Junia being a woman apostle is the argument that name *Iounian* given in the Greek text of Romans 16:7 refers to a man. Grammatically it is possible that this Greek transliteration of the Latin name *Junianus* could be a contracted form of the name of a man called *Junias*. However, despite a huge amount of effort not one example of the contracted male name, Junias, has been found. There is no such name. On the basis of this evidence virtually all recent commentators have conceded that here Paul speaks of a woman, almost certainly the wife of Andronicus. Even Professor Douglas Moo, who is totally opposed to the leadership of women in the church, agrees that the name *Iounian* must indicate a woman.¹⁶
2. The second objection to Junia being a female apostle is that the Greek translated as “Of note among the apostles” (*episēmoi en tois apostolois*) can mean one of two things: either that Junia was highly esteemed *as an* apostle, or that she was held in high esteem *by* the apostles. Again virtually all modern commentators agree that in this context the Greek most naturally means that Junia and Andronicus are commended by Paul as esteemed apostles. Their faith and work as apostles was noteworthy. Since Paul adds that they were, “in Christ before I was”, it seems likely they were Jewish believers, and it is possible that they were eye witnesses of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:7). In support of this understanding of Paul’s warm

¹⁶ *The Epistle to the Romans*, 923.

commendation of Junia, we may add that many of the Greek speaking fathers took the Greek to mean that Junia was an esteemed apostle. She was highly respected for her ministry as an apostle. I will say more on this below.

3. The third objection to Junia being a female apostle in the same sense as Barnabas, Apollos, James and Timothy is a doctrinaire one. Women cannot be church leaders; therefore Junia cannot be an apostle like Barnabas, Apollos and so on. Moo who has to admit that the name Junia is a female name, as noted above, takes this route. He arbitrarily concludes that here Paul uses the title “apostle” in a “loser” sense, definitely not of an “authoritative leadership position”.¹⁷ The Greek word *apostolos*, means “a sent one” To send in Latin is *missio* and via this root we get the English word missionary. A missionary is a sent one. Like the other first century post-Easter apostles who were evangelists and church planters. In reply to complementarians who seek in various ways to discount Paul’s affirmation of Junia as an outstanding apostle, we must ask, why would Paul speak in such glowing terms of this couple if they were not notable leaders and missionaries?

[C]The early commentators on Romans 16:7.

Every commentator on Romans 16:7 before the thirteenth century took it that Paul was speaking of a woman apostle. In his commentary on Romans, the erudite Roman Catholic scholar, Joseph Fitzmyer, lists 16 Greek and Latin commentators from the first Christian millennium who all take Paul in Romans 16:7 to be speaking of a woman apostle.¹⁸

I give some examples; Chrysostom, who lived in the fourth century and is ranked among the most learned of the Greek Fathers, unambiguously and profusely says of Junia:

¹⁷ *Romans*, *ibid.*, 923.

¹⁸ *Romans*, 737–38. See also Epp, *Junia*, 32–33.

[EXT]To be apostles is something great. But to be outstanding among the apostles – just think what a wonderful song of praise that is! They [she and Andronicus] were outstanding on the basis of their works and virtuous actions. Indeed, how great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle!¹⁹ [EXT]

In the next century, Theodoret (393-458), bishop of Cyrrhus, speaking explicitly of Andronicus and Junia says,

[EXT]To be called ‘of note’ not only among the disciples but also among the teachers, and not just among the teachers but even among the apostles” is amazing.²⁰ [EXT]

Still later John of Damascus (675-749) says,

[EXT]And to be called ‘apostles’ is a great thing ... but even among these of note, just consider what great encomium this is”.²¹ [EXT]

It was not until the 13th century that Junia was given a “sex change” and from then on commentators began arguing that in Romans 16:7 Paul was commending two male apostles. Interestingly Calvin showed his usual independence of thought in his treatment of this verse. He conceded that here Paul commends a man and a woman, calling them both apostles, in the sense of missionaries and church planters.²²

Lastly, we note that in the second century other women were called apostles. This is attested by the apocryphal, *Acts of St. Paul and St. Thecla*.²³ This work is a popular story that had wide circulation in the post- apostolic period. It is first quoted in the second century AD.

¹⁹ The English translation is taken from Epp, *Junia*, 32.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Commentary on Romans and Thessalonians*, 322.

²³ An English translation of this work is found in Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2, 353–64.

Here we meet Thecla, a woman apostle and companion of Paul who teaches, baptizes and is eventually martyred for her faith in Christ.

This almost certain mention of a woman apostle in Romans 16:7 is of huge significance. All arguments that Paul excluded women from church leadership and teaching on a theological principle are demolished if Junia is an apostle, and the overwhelming evidence indicates just this. Paul says apostles, and he is not speaking only of the twelve are “first in the church” (1 Cor 12:28). Later in writing to the Ephesians he says that along with the prophets, the apostles are “the foundation” on which the church is built (Eph 2:20). They are the ones that begin churches and teach the first converts. Everyone agrees apostles taught. It is not at all surprising to find women apostles in the early church. Jesus appeared first to women and sent them to proclaim that he had risen from the grave (Matt 28:7; John 20:17). And Paul’s theology of the *charismata* (see 1Cor 12:1–31) envisages that every ministry is open to men and women without distinction.

It would almost seem that God in his infinite wisdom put the story of Deborah in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament Paul’s commendation of Junia, to remind us that he can raise up outstanding women leaders and bless their ministry. Both Deborah and Junia unambiguously tell us that the complementarian thesis that leadership pleasing to God is male is false

[B]Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis, women who “labor in the Gospel” Romans 16:6, 12.

Next in Romans chapter 16 Paul singles out for commendation Mary (Rom 16: 6) of whom the apostle says she “has worked hard among you.” The word translated “worked hard” is the Greek verb *kopiaō*. It is also used of “those workers in the Lord Tryphaena and Tryphosa” and “the beloved Persis”, whom he mentions a little later in verse twelve. We can discuss the ministries of these four women together. Paul frequently uses the verb *kopiaō* when speaking

of the ministry of those involved in teaching and preaching. The Reformed New Testament scholar, Herman Ridderbos says, this word “specifically denotes work in the Gospel and in the church.”²⁴ In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul says of his own preaching, “I worked harder (*kopiaō*) than any of them;” in 1 Corinthians 16:16 Paul exhorts the church in Corinth to be “subject” to “every fellow worker and laborer” (*kopiaō*); in 1 Thessalonians 5:12 in a similar vein he says, “respect those who labor (*kopiaō*) among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,” and in I Timothy 5:17 we read of the elders who “labor (*kopiaō*) in preaching and teaching”. Paul's consistent use of the word explains why he commends these four women. Each one of them has served the Lord faithfully in a word-centered ministry. Turning to Paul's letter to the Philippians, we meet Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:3) who, it would appear, were Paul's co-workers in establishing the church in that city, but who are now at loggerheads with each other. The dispute does not concern us, but what Paul says about them is important. He describes them as having “struggled side by side with me in the Gospel together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers.” The Greek verb *synathleō* means “to compete in a contest.” It suggests an athletic event in which the contestants strain every muscle to win. Euodia and Syntyche had been involved in strenuous and ongoing Gospel ministry. Certainly they were evangelists proclaiming the Gospel, but this implies they were also church planters and as such teachers of their converts. Besides these two women, only a few of Paul's most trusted companions are called “co-workers;” Clement who worked with these two women at Philippi; Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25); Timothy (1 Cor 4:12), and Titus (2 Cor 8:23).

[B]Women prophets.

Luke in Acts, quoting the prophet Joel, recognizes that the last days are breaking into history with the outpouring of the Spirit, which results in that men *and* women prophesy. (Acts 2:17–

²⁴ Paul, 461.

21). Later, he says, when Paul arrived in Caesarea he went to the home of Philip the evangelist who had four unmarried daughters who prophesied, in other words who were prophets (Acts 21:8–9).²⁵ In 1 Corinthians 11:4–5 Paul speaks positively of men and women leading in prayer and prophecy in the church so long as the women cover their heads and men do not. We will look at this passage in some detail in a moment. We note here only one thing, this text unambiguously speaks of men and women leading the church in prayer and prophecy and this is acceptable to Paul. For Paul prophecy is the most important ministry in the congregation (1 Cor 14:1–19), “second” in order only to that of the apostle (1 Cor 12:28). In prophesying, Paul believed women exercised the authority (*exousia*) God had given them (1 Cor 11:10).²⁶ Paul only once speaks of women leading in prophecy, but his theology of the *charismata* implies that all gifts were given non-discriminately. The Spirit could inspire both men and women to prophesy or for any other ministry.

In Revelation 2:20 we read of Jezebel “who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants”. In this verse a prophet, albeit a false prophet, is said to teach. This should not surprise us even though Paul twice speaks of teachers as distinct from apostles and prophets (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). No one disputes that apostles taught and no one should dispute that prophets taught. Jezebel is just one indicator of this. In 1 Corinthians Paul says that when prophets prophesy they “build up, encourage and console” the assembled church (1 Cor 14:3) and their hearers “learn” (1 Cor 14:31) – which is what happens when people teach. In his important study on prophecy in the apostolic age, David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy*,²⁷ argues that prophecy is basically Spirit-inspired teaching.

[B] Women house-church leaders.

²⁵ Luke’s use of the present tense of the participle indicates they prophesied on a regular basis. It was a gift and a ministry. On what follows see Giles, “Prophecy, Prophets and False Prophets”, 970–77.

²⁶ Payne, *Man and Woman*, 182–184. The Köstenbergers, *God’s Design*, 176–177 mistakenly think this verse speaks of the woman under the authority of the man. It does not. Contrary to the Greek

²⁷ 1979.

The first Christians met in homes.²⁸ This gathering was for them what we would call today a coming together of the local church, the congregation. These house congregations were the primary unit of the church in the apostolic and post-apostolic age. It seems that Paul invited those of some social standing who had been converted to host these little churches, because they had larger homes and because they could act as a quasi-patron to their church community. When the church met in a home, the owner would have presided much like the ruler of the synagogue did in house synagogues. In Acts it would seem that Lydia the seller of purple was a host to a house church in Philippi (Acts 17.11–15). Later, in writing to the Colossians, Paul commends another women house church leader named Nympha (Col 4.15). Very likely, Chloe is another example (1 Cor 1:11). Prisca and Aquila are examples of a couple conjointly leading a house church (Rom 16:5).

The home in the ancient world.

In the ancient world a sharp distinction was made between the public sphere (*polis*), which was the domain of men, and the home (*oikos*), which was the domain of women. The male head of the family was the *paterfamilias* and his wife the *materfamilias*. The *materfamilias* had the responsibility of managing the home, educating the children, directing and disciplining slaves and paying the bills, etc. Philo the first century Alexandrian Jew describes the situation:

[EXT]For the nature of communities is twofold, the greater and the smaller: the greater we call cities and the smaller households. As to management of both forms, men have obtained that of the greater, which bears the name of statesmanship, whereas women have obtained the smaller, which goes under the name of household management.²⁹ [EXT]

Later we find the Christian, John Chrysostom, expressing much the same ideas:

²⁸ See further Giles, “House Churches; “Church Order, Government”, 219–26.

²⁹ Philo, *The Special Laws*, 3.170, 280.

[EXT]Our life is customarily organized into two spheres; public and private ... To women is assigned the presidency of the household; to man, all the business of the state, the marketplace, the administration of justice, government, the military and all other enterprises [A woman] cannot express her opinion in the legislative assembly, but she can express it at home.³⁰ [EXT]

Against this backdrop, Paul's advice to young widows to marry and *manage or rule* their households well (1 Tim 5:14) makes sense. The Greek verb translated by the NRSV as "manage" is *oikodespotein*, literally meaning "house despot."

Once we realize this is how public and private life was understood and contrasted in Greco-Roman society, we can see that dogmatic assertions that women could not have had leadership positions in the early house-churches is not convincing. Not only were some wealthy women, usually widows, "heads" of extended families, but also in the home setting married women had an authority denied to them in public life. What this means is that we should expect that women participated fully in the house church setting, and see the complete exclusion of women as a consequence of the church becoming a public institution when church buildings began to appear.

The contested texts.

Galatians 3:28

Paul writes, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ." I agree with the Köstenbergers that here Paul is primarily speaking about equality in salvation. These words come at the end of his argument that Jew and Gentile alike are saved by faith in Christ and thus are Abraham's [spiritual] offspring.

³⁰Chrysostom, "The kind of women who ought be taken as wives," 36.

I also agree with them that Paul is definitely *not denying racial, social or sexual differentiation*.³¹ In becoming a Christian, someone does not cease to be Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. What Paul is denying is that these differences are of any consequence in the new creation realized “in Christ”. We are one in Christ, even if in (fallen) Adam we are divided in innumerable ways.

True, Paul uses the Greek word *hen* (one) and not *isos* (equal) but surely if we are one we are equal in some profound way. In Galatians Paul clearly shows this oneness in Christ is not exclusively soteriological or spiritual.. Paul clearly saw, as he makes plain in his epistle to the Galatians, that he firmly believed that oneness in Christ had concrete, this–worldly consequences for the Jew-Gentile relationship. Thus he opposed Peter when he abstained from eating with Gentiles as if they were not true Christians (Gal 2:11-16). Paul thought this was an awful failure on Peter’s part. If Gentiles were fellow Christians without any caveats, then he should eat with them without reservation. Because Jews are saved on the same basis as Gentiles, then *in the church* they stand on equal footing. Spiritual equality results in social equality.

With the master–slave division, virtually all Christians now agree that Paul also recognized that oneness in Christ had a social dimension. He did not openly attack slavery in his day, but what he said to masters and slaves eventually so undermined the institution, that when the time was right, Christians concluded that slavery was neither pleasing to God, nor a reflection of the creation ideal where each person is of equal status and worth, because of the image and likeness of God they share. Paul exhorted both the master and the slave to give to each other their due (Eph 6:5–9, Col 3:22–24), and asked Philemon to consider Onesimus his slave a “brother” (16).

³¹ Or in the Köstenberger’s complementarian speak, “the obliteration of all gender roles in the home, the church and society.” *God’s Design*, 162.

With women, Paul's linking of spiritual and social oneness takes yet another turn. Because men and women are one in salvation they are one in receiving the Holy Spirit. And if they have the Spirit, then they have a ministry/*diakonia* and gift of grace/*charisma* (1 Cor 12:7). In the fallen world, women were to keep silent in public and were excluded from leadership; but in the church, women could lead in prophecy and prayer (1 Cor 11:5), be house church leaders and co-workers with other apostles.³² Paul's acceptance of the leadership of women in the church must be seen as a social implementation of what it means to be "one in Christ" in the new creation, spoken of in Galatians 3:28.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

Paul's arguments for why women should cover their heads and men not, when *leading* the church in prophecy and prayer are tortuous. At least twice Paul seems to correct himself (1 Cor 11:8-12). It is almost as if Paul is in dialogue with the Corinthians and himself, trying one argument after another to make his case on head coverings.³³ This means that taking any one verse or comment in this passage in isolation may well lead to a wrong conclusion.

What Paul says in this passage reflects debate in the church at Corinth over what men and women should have or not have on their head *when they lead in prayer and prophecy in church*. Note, one thing is crystal clear; in Corinth men *and* women were leading in prayer and prophecy, the most important ministries in the early church – and Paul approves of this.

In his opening comment, Paul begins by using the word *kephale*/head in a metaphorical sense before going on to speak of what should or should not be worn on the literal head of those leading worship (1 Cor 11:3). This verse is accurately translated, "The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God". The most

³² In a moment we will document these assertions.

³³ H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975, 182 boldly states Paul himself is "somewhat confused" in his arguing.

contested issue in this whole chapter is the meaning of the Greek noun, *kephalē*, translated into English as “head”. Early in this debate, complementarians claimed this Greek noun when used metaphorically always carries the sense “head–over” or “authority–over”, never “source.”³⁴ They quite explicitly say whenever *kephalē* is used “with reference to human relationships” it carries the “primary” “sense of authority”.³⁵ I will not go over the evidence yet again but it is beyond dispute that *kephalē* can carry the meaning of “source”, and in every day Greek in the first century it was *not* normally used to mean “head–over, authority–over”.³⁶

In seeking the meaning and force of the metaphorical meaning of any word, the literary context is always what is most important. To argue that *kephalē* means head/authority over in 1 Corinthians 11:3 is implausible. Paul immediately goes on to say that as long as a woman has her head covered she can *lead* the church in prayer and prophecy. Why subordinate woman to man and then immediately say they can lead in church? The meaning “source”, in the sense of “source of life”, makes the most sense of Paul’s introductory comment. Paul is saying Christ is the *kephalē* of all humankind – as the co-creator; man (adam) is the *kephalē* of the woman (Eve) in her creation, a point Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 11:8 and 12, and God [the Father], is the *kephalē* of Christ [the Son], in his eternal generation or incarnation. This interpretation of verse 3 also avoids reading it to be teaching the error of subordinationism, the hierarchical ordering of the divine persons, After they wrote this book many of their complementarian friends came to agree with me that to interpret 1 Corinthians 11:3 to be eternally subordinating the Son to the Father in authority is a “heresy”.³⁷ Here it should be carefully noted that in this text Paul does not speak of a fourfold hierarchy, Father–

³⁴ And they footnote Grudem’s 1985 notorious article, “Does *Kephale* (Head) Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’”. *God’s Design*, 170, note 15.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

³⁶ See Payne, *Man and Woman in Christ*, 117-139 and subsequently, “What Does Paul Mean by ‘A husband is head of his wife?’” See also, Westfall, *Paul and Gender*, 38–40, 80-89.

³⁷ Giles, *The Rise and Fall*, 35–43.

Son—man—woman, but of three paired relationships in which in each instance one party is the *kephalē*. Christ is mentioned first and last.

That *kephale* does not mean “head—over/authority over” in verse 3 is confirmed by what Paul says in verse 10. It does not. In the New Testament the Greek word *exousia* (authority) is used 103 times, and nine times in 1 Corinthians. In every instance it alludes to the authority one possess.³⁸ This text speaks of the God—given authority the women possess in the new creation. It is rightly translated, “The women ought to have authority over (her) own head.” Why Paul asks women to cover their heads and men not to, when leading in worship (1 Cor 11:4–5), has evoked a lot of debate but no consensus. In no other epistle does Paul mention this matter. Cynthia Long Westfall who masterfully documents her argument notes that slaves, prostitutes and freedom women were forbidden in the Greco—Roman world from veiling.³⁹ Married women covered their heads as symbol of their married status, modesty and chastity.⁴⁰ Their head covering spoke of their honored status. What Paul wants is *all* women (v 5) when they lead the church in prophecy and prayer to cover their heads to symbolize that they are *all* honored alike in the church, even the women who are denied honor outside the church.⁴¹

Paul wants *all* women to cover their heads when they *lead the church in prayer and prophecy*.

For Paul prophecy is of “second” importance in the life of the church (1 Cor 12:28) and to be highly prized because it edifies the church (1 Cor 15:1–5).⁴² Charles Hodge commenting on what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:4–5 says, prayer and prophesy were “the two principal exercises in the public life of the early Christians,”⁴³ Paul twice Paul speaks of teachers as

³⁸ See in more detail, Payne, *Man and Woman*, 182-83.

³⁹ *Paul and Gender*, 25.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 27.

⁴¹ For the whole argument read *ibid.*, pages 24–36

⁴² I have a full chapter on prophets and prophesy in the Bible in my book, *Patterns of Ministry*, 149-173.

⁴³ *First Corinthians*, 208

distinct from apostles and prophets (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11) but in his writings and in the rest of the Bible, the ministries of the prophet and the teacher overlap. In 1 Corinthians Paul says that when prophets prophesy they “build up, encourage and console” the assembled church (1 Cor 14:3) and their hearers “learn” (1 Cor 14:31) – which is what happens when people teach. In Acts 13:1 we read of one ministry, the prophet and teacher. In Revelation 2:20 we read of Jezebel “who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants”. In this verse a prophet, albeit a false prophet, is said to teach. In his important study on prophecy in the apostolic age, David Hill,⁴⁴ argues that prophecy is basically Spirit-inspired teaching. All this is very difficult information for the Köstenbergers who want to discount the significance of prophecy to further their own agenda. What they want their readers to believe is that the central message of this passage is “the abiding principle of woman’s submission to male authority.”⁴⁵

Over a hundred and fifty years ago, Catherine Booth, the wife of William, the founder of the Salvation Army, came to a very different conclusion. In her wonderful little 1859 booklet, *Female Ministry: Or the Right of Women to Preach the Gospel*, she argues that 1 Corinthians 11:5 is “the most prominent and explicit passage in support of women preaching,” with Acts 2:17–21 in confirmation.⁴⁶ She defines prophecy as St Paul does, as “the edification, exhortation and comfort of believers” (1 Cor 14:3) and thus equates it with preaching. Verses 5 to 16 are very difficult for modern people to understand. They reflect an honor-shame culture that we do not understand, and Paul’s arguments on why women should cover their heads are very tortuous. Some verses read in isolation can be taken to infer the subordination of women, others to be denying this. So complementarians love to quote verse

⁴⁴ *New Testament Prophecy*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 176

⁴⁶ Booth, *Female Ministry*, 4.

10 and 12a, man came from woman, without noting that Paul goes onto say that “now man comes through woman” (v 12b), and to quote Paul’s words, woman was created for the sake of man (v 9b) without noting that Paul then says, “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, or man independent of woman” (v 12).

1. 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36.

Complementarians next turn to 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36 where they find Paul saying, “women should keep silent in the in the churches”. This they read as restricting in some way what women can do in church because they are subordinated to men. I can see no merit in this opinion what so ever. It is just a guess. The text itself says, if the women have anything to ask, “let them ask their husbands at home” (1 Cor 14:35). The explanation that Paul is forbidding women from asking disruptive questions in the little house churches is exegetically far more plausible.

But there is a bigger issue; it is highly likely that Paul did not write these words; they were added by a later scribe. This has long been argued as a possibility and in recent years Philip Payne has put forward compelling evidence for their omission of these verses in the earliest written manuscripts.⁴⁷

1 Timothy 2:8–15.

Complementarians and egalitarians are agreed, the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12, is absolutely crucial to their case. Their position stands or falls on whether or not this text speaks of a transcultural and universal prohibition on women teaching/preaching and exercising authority in church.

Because of the huge importance of this passage for both sides in this debate it has been the most disputed text among evangelicals for the last forty years. Whole books and innumerable

⁴⁷ See Payne, *Man and Woman*, 217-270, and more recently with added evidence, Payne, “Vaticanus Distigme-Obelos Symbols”, *New Testament Studies*, 63.4, 2017, 604-625.

articles have been written on this passage and still there is no consensus.

1 Timothy 2:8-15.

In studying this contentious text we must find an agreed approach. I suggest the following.

First, the historical context: in exegesis, the goal is to determine the historical meaning of what is said. The historical context in which this epistle stands in brief is as follows. This epistle was written sometime in the later part of the first century, when Christians were meeting in small house churches and leadership in the Christian community was fluid and all believers were thought to have a ministry. In this epistle and in 2 Timothy and Titus, which were written roughly at the same time, Paul charges Timothy and Titus with the work of opposing the false teachers who were tearing the church apart. (1 Tim 1:3-7, 19-20, 4:1-2, 16, 6:3-5, 2 Tim 2:14-19, 3:10-16, Tit 1:10-16, 2:1-2, 3:8-10). Writing to Titus in Crete where the false teachers are active, Paul tells his young deputy to “silence” the *men* who are “upsetting whole families” by teaching “what is not right to teach” (Tit 1:10-11). Writing to Timothy in Ephesus, Paul makes plain, the false male teachers had had a field day among the women. They had forbidden them to marry (1 Tim 4:3), led some to “follow Satan” and some women were “going about from house to house” [house–church to house–church] ... “saying what they ought not say” (1 Tim 5:13–15).

The second context of huge importance is the literary context. The immediate literary context of Timothy 2:12 are verses 8 to 15. What we discover here is that something abnormal is present. Almost everything said in verses 8–15 have no parallels in the rest of the New Testament – in the canon. Nowhere else do we read of men being forbidden to pray “without anger or argument”; of how women should dress *when they pray* in church;⁴⁸ a command that

⁴⁸ The Greek *hōsautōs* at the beginning of verse 9 suggests the word “prayer” is implied: men are to pray ..., likewise women are to pray in church. In 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul accepts that women led in prayer in church. True, 1 Peter 3:3-5 also asks women to dress modestly, but this is not specifically related to church assemblies as it is in 1 Timothy. This is the least significant exceptional fact.

women *only* be taught; of women prohibited from teaching; find the word *authentain*; significance given to the fact that Adam was created first; that Eve was deceived by the Devil in the Garden not Adam, and a promise that women “will be saved by bearing children.” This brings us to the third context, “the canonical context,”– the “whole scope of scripture.” The Reformers made the same point when they insisted that “scripture must be interpreted by scripture.”⁴⁹ Evangelical exegetes should always keep this rule in mind but it is mainly the responsibility of systematic theologians who have to find in the varied comments in scripture, some seemingly contradictory to what is said elsewhere, a unified answer to the theological question before them.

Affirming and practicing this rule in the case of 1 Timothy 2:8-15, which gives exceptional teaching in almost every verse is of vital importance. We evangelicals must find a way to interpret this verse so that it does not deny what is so clearly taught elsewhere in scripture. We must find an interpretation that has Genesis chapters 1 and 2 teaching in harmony the substantial or essential equality of the two differentiated sexes; acknowledging that Genesis makes the rule of the man over the women a consequence of the fall; allows that Deborah is a ruler over Israel; the prophets, men and women, spoke for God in the power of the Spirit; accepts that Jesus said not one word on male “headship” and much to the contrary; all ministry is given by the Spirt and is not allocated on the basis of gender, and that Paul affirmed women in leadership, even a woman apostle.

The most likely interpretation of 1 Tim 2:12.

What we are seeking is an interpretation of this text that does not set it in contradiction to what is clearly and repeatedly said elsewhere in scripture. First, I consider the linguistic issues that have been fiercely debated

⁴⁹ *God's Design*, 330. The Köstenbergers also mention this canonical rule.

The most contested issue is the meaning of the word *authenthein*, found just in this one verse in the New Testament. The question is, does this word speak of the ordinary authority a male pastor exercises that is excluded to women, or of a kind of authority that is not right for a man or women to exercise in the church? For the complementarian case, it is absolutely essential that it means the former; it speaks of authority that God gives to male pastors. The verdict is now in.⁵⁰ In the first century; this word spoke of something unacceptable. It meant to dominate or usurp authority. This is the way the verb has been translated traditionally and it should be translated today. In the Authorized Version of 1611 the Greek is rendered into English as “to usurp authority”, and in the exact, Revised Version of 1885, we find “to have dominion over”. Complementarian linguistic scholars have not been able to find one example where *authenthein* around about the time of Paul or earlier simply meant authority in a positive sense. This means Paul is not forbidding women from exercising authority as a male pastor may do but from exercising authority of a kind not to be allowed in the church.

Whether Paul forbids one thing, teaching in an *authenthein* way, or two things, teaching and acting in an *authenthein* way, is also hotly contested. It is obvious that the two prohibitions are very closely related but the question just stated remains. Again for complementarians it is essential for their case that Paul is prohibiting women from two things, teaching *and* exercising authority in church. Both things must be denied to women to uphold the principle of “male headship.

This debate raises complex grammatical issues that would lose most of my readers if I reiterated them. Put simply, the two questions are, first, does the conjunction *oude* that links the verbs to teach and the verb *authenthein*, indicate two separate prohibitions or one prohibition expressed in two ways? And second, does this conjunction correlate synonyms

⁵⁰ This evidence is set out with some variation in argument by Payne, *Man and Woman*, 361–397; Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping authority”, 204–223; Westfall, *Paul and Gender*, 73–74, 290–294.

not antonyms. After reading most of what has been written on the first question, I am not sure this debate can be finally settled. Both Philip Payne and Linda Belleville, also very competent linguistics, have come forward with numerous examples where *oude* connects antonyms.⁵¹ But this is not the only problem for Andreas. The logic of his argument is flawed. He argues that the verb to teach is always is a positive word and therefore the conjunction *oude* demands that the verb *authenthein* must be taken also as a positive word. The problem with this argument is that if you begin with the verb *authenthein*, which lexical studies indicate is a negative word, you get another answer. The prohibited teaching is a teaching that is not acceptable; it is erroneous teaching.

Now to a detail in 1 Timothy 2:12 that is not usually discussed. Paul's prohibition is in the singular, "I permit no *woman* ... to have *authenthein* over *a man*". A house-church setting explains the singular. Paul is addressing the specific problem he mentions in chapter 5 verses 13 to 15 of women giving false teaching in a house churches. The house church setting is presupposed throughout the New Testament and in the Pastorals.⁵² In the house churches of the first century ministry was freely exercised; there were no pastors set over every church who gave most if not all the teaching, like there are today. There was no pulpit and declarative preaching as we know it was not a characteristic part of house church meetings.⁵³ In 1 Corinthians 14:26 Paul describes what took place when Christians met in a home context. "When you come together, *each one* has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation." Innumerable times Paul speaks of the one another ministry that took place in these house churches.⁵⁴ Several times he tells believers in their house churches to teach one

⁵¹ Payne, *Ibid*, 337–359; Belleville, 217-219.

⁵² On this see Giles, "House churches", 6-8 and my earlier discussion in this chapter on house churches in the first century.

⁵³ *Patterns*, 190–192

⁵⁴ Giles, *Patterns*, 39. See also *Patterns*, 190–192 where I discuss the dialogical nature of teaching in the house churches

another (Rom 15:4, Eph 5:19, Col 3:16) and to speak the truth to one another (Eph 4:35, Col 3:1). Women cannot be excluded from this one another ministry; Paul's theology of ministry excludes the idea that the gifts of ministry are allocated on the basis of gender or anything else; undeniably women lead in prayer (1 Tim 2:9; 1 Cor 11:5) and prophesied (1 Cor 11:5). By the time the Pastorals were written, the title bishop (1 Tim 3:1) seems to have become the title given to the host of the house church and the title deacon to one or more assistant leaders. The bishop as the respected host of the house church often would have given teaching, and if one or more of the elders from the city-wide (Tit 1:5) "council of elders" (1 Tim 4:14) was part of the church they too would have been active in teaching. Nowhere in all of Paul's epistles is it ever suggested that teaching was the preserved domain of certain people. The Pastorals make this truth emphatic; there were many people teaching in Ephesus and Crete, some giving false teaching. In the Ephesus, women coming to house churches and giving false teaching was a big problem (1 Tim 5:13–15).

One of the most common errors that contemporary Christians make is that when they find the word church/*ekklesia* in the New Testament, is that they give content to this word in terms of their modern experience of church. The Köstenbergers do this consistently. The truth is church in the New Testament is more to be contrasted than compared with church in the modern world. I say again, a church gathering in the apostolic age was a home gathering where informality and mutual ministry prevailed. This is the historic phenomenon 1 Timothy chapter 2 envisages.

In 1 Timothy 2:12 Paul is not forbidding women to preach/teach in a church like we know. He is forbidding individual women from teaching in an informal way in a little house churches because women giving false teaching was huge problem in Ephesus in the first century. How to apply today Paul's prohibition on women teaching men on a one to one basis

in a house church setting, whether or not this teaching was heretical, I am sure you can see is by no means clear.

The reasons for this command.

Complementarians who insist that only men should preach and lead in church argue that in verses 13 and 14 Paul grounds his prohibition addressed to women in the created order before the fall. So, his words, “For Adam was formed first ... the woman was deceived” (1 Tim 2:13-14), indicate that Paul believed Adam was created “first” and should always be “first” (the leader), and that women should not teach because they are more prone to deception.

Complementarians are agreed these two texts ground women’s subordination in creation before the fall. This conclusion is special pleading, not exegesis. Genesis 2 does not teach that women are second in rank or subordinated because Adam was created “first” and Eve second; or that women are more prone to sin and error because Eve was deceived by the Devil, not Adam. Genesis chapters 1 to 3 are emphatic: man and woman are both created by God with the same honor and status; they were both deceived by the Serpent and both were held responsible by God for their sin. The rule of the man over the woman is entirely a consequence of their fall as Genesis 3:16 makes explicit. In 1 Timothy 2:13–14, Paul is not giving his interpretation of Genesis chapters 1–3, nor quoting any words given in these chapters, but simply making an analogy or seeing a parallel. He is saying no more than that what has taken place in Ephesus is an illustration of what took place in the Garden of Eden. In Ephesus, some women have put themselves “first”, having been “deceived” by the false teachers.

Given this interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:13-14, Paul speaks not of a past *hierarchical social order* given in creation before the fall that subordinates all women to all men for all time, but rather of the *heresy-created disorder* in the church at Ephesus. If this is the case, then Paul’s

prohibition on women teaching and leading in church is not universally binding. It is an exceptional ruling, addressing a specific problem in a church of the first century.

Conclusion.

I conclude; the evidence is compelling, in principle and in practice Paul affirmed the equality of the sexes as far as he was able in his first century cultural context. He was definitely not a misogynist in any way. Interpreting 1 Timothy 2:12–14 as a universal prohibition of women teaching/preaching and of them exercising authority/leadership in church is simply not an option for an evangelical who wants to uphold the ultimate unity of scripture on important matters. In the next chapter we will consider what Paul said on the marriage relationship and we will again discover that he does not support the complementarian understanding of “male headship”.

Questions for discussion.

1. Complementarians make 1 Timothy 2:12–14 the primary basis for their position. Discuss Professor Oscar Cullmann’s conclusion, “The fountainhead of all false biblical interpretation and all heresy is invariably the isolation and absolutising of one single passage.”
2. Because the early churches were located in homes, the numbers were small and formality at a minimum. In this context, the Lord’s Supper was celebrated as part of an ordinary meal (1 Cor 11:17-22). How does this information help us understand what Paul says about ministry/leadership in the church? How might it suggest some difficulty in applying what Paul says about church in the first century to the twenty first century?
3. In the New Testament we find no example of where one man or one woman is the sole pastor/minister. What are some disadvantages of solo leadership in today’s church? How/why might women be disadvantaged by it?
4. What does Paul’s affirmation that we are all “one in Christ” mean for you?

5. What do you understand by the expression, “servant-leadership”?

Addendum.

A perennial error: absolutizing one text.

Virtually all evangelicals who argue that women should not teach/preach or lead in the church argue that 1 Timothy 2:11-14 is conclusive. We need look no further than this one text to discover what the Bible says on the man-woman relationship. We are told that this one text is “decisive”,⁵⁵ “fundamental”,⁵⁶ the “primary”⁵⁷ or “the most important text to consider”⁵⁸ in any examination of what the New Testament teaches on the man-woman relationship.

Outlining the two sides in this debate, James Beck and Craig Blomberg, the editors of the book, *Two Views on Women*,⁵⁹ say the interpretation and application of 1 Timothy 2:11-14 is “the most determinative” issue in this debate.⁶⁰ In other words, who wins this debate depends more than anything else on how this one passage is understood. To place all the weight on the *interpretation* of this one text in determining whether or not half the human race is subordinated to the other half, and excluded from teaching/preaching and leading in church seems precarious, especially since competent evangelical New Testament scholars are not agreed on its interpretation. Egalitarian evangelicals with the highest view of scripture argue that this text speaks to a specific situation and place and does not exclude all women for all time from teaching and leading in church.

What few Christians are aware of is that majoring on one text that seems to contradict much else in scripture has been toxic to the life of the church from earliest times. It is a perennial

⁵⁵ M. Jensen, *Sydney Anglicanism: An Apology*, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2012, 128.

⁵⁶ Thomas Schreiner in, *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001, 218.

⁵⁷ Robert Saucy and Judith TenElshof, *Women and Men in Ministry: A Complementarian Perspective*, Chicago: Moody, 2001, 291. So also John Piper on the back cover of the book, *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, eds, A. Kostenberger, T. Schreiner, and H. S. Baldwin, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995.

⁵⁸ Stephen Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ*, Ann Arbor: Servant, 1980, 192.

⁵⁹ *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 17.

⁶⁰ *Two Views*, 307.

mistake that has always led to error and division. The best theologians have consistently rejected such “proof-texting”. They are agreed that the primary rule in appealing to scripture to establish doctrinal norms is that the mind of God is revealed in the whole of scripture. Texts that seem to contradict the whole must be interpreted so that this is not the case. “Scripture must interpret scripture.”

Here are just a few examples where majoring on one text has led the church into error: In the fourth century, Arius argued that God the Father is uniquely God and that the Son, while above all others, was created in time. He quoted Proverbs 8:22: “The Lord created (*ktizō*) me at the beginning of his works,” as proof. He said no text could be plainer or more explicit. Athanasius could not accept Arius’ teaching on the Son, nor his interpretation of Proverbs 8:22. For him, the Scriptures were clear, that Jesus the Son of God is God in all might, majesty and power, and as such is not a creature. In his famous, *Discourses Against the Arians*,⁶¹ Athanasius gives far more space to seeking an alternative interpretation of Arius’ proof-text than he does to any other specific issue.⁶² His most profound and primary reply is that an interpretation of one text that contradicts what “the whole scope of scripture” teaches, cannot be accepted.⁶³ For Athanasius, no matter how cogent a text seems, it can never negate what is primary and fundamental to all of scripture, namely, that Jesus Christ is God in all might, majesty and power, *one in being* with the Father. After a long and bitter debate, the church agreed with Athanasius. The Nicene Creed says the Son “is not created,” but eternally begotten of the Father.

In the sixteenth century, Luther addressed another problem. His Roman Catholic opponents insisted that salvation is based on works, quoting James 2:24: “a person is justified by works and not by faith alone”. They said this text is clear and unambiguous and they pointed to a

⁶¹ *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, eds, P. Schaff and H. Wace, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971.

⁶² Some thirty six pages in *NPNF*.

⁶³ *NPNF*, “Discourses Against the Arians”, 3.29 (p. 409).

few others they thought taught the same truth (Matt 25:31-46; John 5:29; 2 Cor 5:10). Luther made a radical reply. He concluded that what James taught on salvation was “in direct opposition to St Paul and all the rest of the Bible”, and “I therefore refuse him a place among the writers of the true canon of the Bible”.⁶⁴ Luther took this radical stance because he could not allow that one verse in the epistle of James could be permitted to contradict what he believed was primary and foundational to all the epistles of Saint Paul, namely that we are justified by faith in Christ alone by grace alone. Modern evangelical commentators have found a less drastic solution. They conclude James is not rejecting Paul’s teaching on justification by faith, but a false understanding of Paul’s doctrine. We should note the logic of this argument: what James says on face value does contradict Paul, therefore we must find a way to interpret James so that he doesn’t.

A twentieth century example of the error of majoring on one text is found in Professor Oscar Cullman’s book, *The State in the New Testament*.⁶⁵ After the Second World War, the question before the church was, why did so many German Christians support Hitler? Cullman’s answer was that the Germans in the post-First World War period longed for a strong state that would bring back honor to the German people and establish political stability. When Hitler achieved this, they found in one text, Romans 13:1, a biblical basis for obeying Hitler, no matter what he did. In this text Paul writes, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God”. Hitler’s supporters said nothing could be plainer: rulers are appointed by God, Hitler is our ruler, therefore we should be subject to him. Cullman’s reply to this argument is that if Romans 13:1 is read definitively to sum up all that the Bible teaches on the state, then this one verse stands in “flagrant contradiction to the teaching of Jesus. It would also contradict the other New Testament authors as well, chiefly the author of

⁶⁴ John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: selections from his writings*, 36.

⁶⁵ London: SCM, revised edition, 1963.

the Johannine apocalypse. Above all, moreover, Paul would contradict himself”.⁶⁶ Jesus limits the rule of the state to its own domain (Mark 12:17), and Revelation 13 teaches that the state can become an instrument of the Devil. Cullmann concludes that only by adopting a holistic hermeneutic that makes the whole of Scripture primary, can a truly biblical understanding of the state be established. When this approach is not adopted, and all attention is given to one verse, then the Bible is made the servant of our preconceived commitments. Its voice is silenced and human presuppositions prevail. Indeed, Cullmann, as I noted earlier, goes so far as to argue that “the fountainhead of all false biblical interpretation and all heresy is invariably the isolation and absolutising of one single passage.”⁶⁷

When I was writing this chapter I thought this post-Second War example was a bit dated. Before sending of the manuscript of this book to the publisher I was invited at short notice to teach a week-long post graduate course in the Philippines. The academic who I was working with said at our first meeting, “Do you know what the most quoted verse in the Philippines today is?” I shook my head. She said, “Romans 13:1. The majority of Christians in the Philippines quote this text in support of President Rodrigo Duterte who has authorized the police to shoot drug dealers.”

I now give two examples where the absolutising one verse or passage has caused a sharp division among evangelicals. Seventh Day Adventists believe Christians should worship on the seventh day of the week. They say this is the explicit teaching of the Ten Commandments and the Sabbath commandment is grounded in the creation order revealed in Genesis 1. Most Christians reject this reasoning. They say Jesus did not teach this and Paul says that one day is as good as another (Rom 14:5). The first day of the week is to be preferred because this is the day Jesus rose from the grave. We should note again the logic of this argument. Yes, the fourth commandment clearly teaches the seventh day is holy, but on the basis of much else in

⁶⁶ Ibid, 46.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 47.

scripture, most Christians believe a change to the first day is acceptable to God. They argue that one text, even if it is in the Ten Commandments and is predicated on creation, does not settle the issue.

When I was a young Christian in the 1960s, the Pentecostal movement was in its heyday. Pentecostals were teaching that every believer needed to be “baptized in the Spirit,” and speaking in tongues was the evidence for this “second blessing.” In every conversation I had with my Pentecostal friends, I was taken to Acts 8:4-24 where we read of how the Samaritans first believed in Christ, but when Peter and John arrived and laid hands on them they received the Holy Spirit. Nothing could be plainer; the Samaritans believed and then later were baptized in the Holy Spirit. This is what this text says. When I asked my wise pastor what I should think, he said to me, “Kevin, what we have to decide is whether what took place in Acts 8 is normative and prescriptive or something exceptional? Opening his Bible he pointed out to me that in Acts 2, Luke, quoting Peter’s Pentecost sermon, makes believing, receiving the Spirit and water baptism what is involved in becoming a Christian (Acts 2:2:38). A second or subsequent gift of the Spirit is not envisaged and speaking in tongues is not demanded. Then turning to Paul’s epistles, he pointed me to texts where Paul is emphatic that being in Christ and having the Spirit are two sides of one coin (Rom 8:9-17; 1 Cor 12:12; Gal 3:2-3). I thus concluded, long before I had begun to think about 1 Timothy 2:12-14, that no one text taken in isolation – however clear it seemed – could settle any question. My guide to Christian living should be, as I later learnt from Athanasius, “the whole scope of scripture”.