PART 1

THE ROLES OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

The first part of this book examines those passages in Paul that have been advanced to support women's subordination in the church. The second part addresses the main passage used to argue for women's subordination in the home.

The first passage we will examine is 1 Corinthians 11:1–16. This passage allows women to minister in the congregation, but calls them to cover their heads lest they detract from God's glory by distracting men from the worship of God. Paul covers all his bases by marshalling several arguments that will appeal to various groups of readers; one of his arguments for women covering their heads is based on the creation order. The cultural issue addressed in this passage is probably that women of higher wealth and status were decking themselves out and distracting men by their artificial beauty. Paul sides with the lower-status, more conservative elements in the congregation for the sake of propriety and church unity.

The second passage we will examine is 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. This passage could be read as enjoining absolute silence on all women in all churches, but this interpretation would contradict the context and the earlier passage in 1 Corinthians 11, where women are praying and prophesying. More likely, this second passage addresses women who are asking misguided questions during the teaching period of the church service, thereby slowing everyone down, and Paul's admonition refers only to this situation. The cultural situation is the inferior training of women, which Paul seeks to correct by urging husbands to take a more active interest in their wives' spiritual and intellectual maturation.

The third passage we will examine is 1 Timothy 2:8–15. This is the *only* passage in the entire Bible explicitly forbidding or limiting women's teaching role. This passage is therefore problematic, since Paul elsewhere commends fellow ministers who were women. Again, the cultural situation is in view; women were in general less trained than men, and Paul does not want people susceptible to false teaching to be in leadership positions when heresy is so rampant in the

church. But here again he proposes a long-range solution for the Christian women in that congregation: they *should* be educated as the men had been.

He bases his argument against allowing these particular women to teach first of all on the creation order, the same basis for the requirement that women in Corinth wear head coverings. The second basis for his argument is the parallel between the deceivable women of Timothy's congregation and deceivable Eve, similar to his earlier parallel between the deceivable Corinthian Christians of both genders and Eve. But, as in 1 Corinthians 11, he ends up qualifying his argument so that no one takes him too far; Eve's curse is removed for those who persevere in Christ.

There is in the entirety of the New Testament no evidence for the subordination of women that is practiced in many of our churches today, and certainly not sufficient evidence for men to rule out the validity of women's calls to minister the word of God. When men claim that God has called them, we do not question their call if their lives and ministry bear witness to that claim; when women claim that God has called them, we ought to evaluate their calls on the same terms. If we judge other people's calls on the basis of a narrow and ill-considered interpretation of several texts, ignoring the clear examples of other texts, we may succeed only in silencing some of God's servants needed for our generation. And if we do that, we invite God to pass judgment on our own call as interpreters of God's word.

1

Head Coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:1–16

One passage generally acknowledged to address a specific cultural situation is 1 Corinthians 11:2–16. Paul presents four basic arguments for why married women should wear head coverings in church worship services: the order of the home, the order of creation, the order of nature itself, and church custom. Although many churches would use arguments like these to demand the subordination of women in all cultures, very few accept Paul's arguments here as valid for covering women's heads in all cultures. "Men preaching and teaching is something for all cultures," they say, "whereas women wearing head coverings was only an issue back then."

This seems to me a curious form of reasoning, however: the same argument Paul uses in one passage for forbidding women to teach he uses in another passage to argue that married women (i.e., nearly all adult women in his day) must cover their heads in church. In the one passage, Paul does not want the women of a certain congregation to teach; in the other passage, he wants the women of a certain congregation to cover their heads. We take the argument as transculturally applicable in one case, but not so in the other. This seems very strange indeed.

Someone who advocates women's subordination may object that Paul would understand that styles of apparel are different in our day than they were in his, so that a modern woman could attend church without a hat, and a man might even venture to wear one. But to this we would reply that Paul would understand that styles of ministry, the educational level of women, and the moral and social significance of women teaching is different from what it was in Paul's day, and that he would therefore approve of women teaching in church.

In this chapter I will address only 1 Corinthians 11, examining the nature of head coverings and each of Paul's arguments for why the Corinthian women ought to wear them. Because some of Paul's arguments in this passage are difficult for modern readers to follow, the discussion will necessarily be involved at times. But the basic points of his argument are not difficult to grasp.

INTERPRETATIONS OF 1 CORINTHIANS 11:2–16

The following survey of views is not exhaustive, but it is representative of the different sorts of positions that other writers have taken concerning this passage.[1]

Some deal with this troublesome passage by excising it entirely, claiming that a later writer inserted it into Paul's letter.[2] In one major academic journal, a scholar argued that this passage was an interpolation (an insertion);[3] another scholar responded, "No, it's not";[4] and still another scholar responded, "Oh yes, it is."[5] Those who feel that the passage is an insertion argue that it is not consistent with the way Paul thinks elsewhere, a thesis that is more than a little questionable. But even if the text stood in tension with what Paul writes elsewhere, we must remember that it was not uncommon for ancient writers to write things that sometimes stood in tension with each other; modern writers do the same thing, especially when they address different issues.[6] And the textual basis for removing this passage is impossibly weak.[7]

Other scholars accept the passage as authentic but ask whether its instruction is specific to that culture or universal in its import. At least one scholar does suggest that Christian women should still cover their heads in church today,[8] and I admire his consistency on the matter, even though I disagree with him. Less consistent, though surely more popular, is the view that a head covering was simply the ancient cultural manifestation of a wife's subjection to her husband; the head coverings are no longer necessary, but the subjection is.[9] My objection to this approach is: how do we know that the subjection was not also cultural?

Those who view Paul as reflecting the standards of his culture vary in the extent to which they accept his teaching here as valid for all cultures. Ramsay suggests that Paul was merely a child of his age on the matter of head coverings, but that his eternally valid view is presented in Galatians 3:28, "in Christ there is . . . neither male nor female."[10] Perhaps more sympathetic to the Paul of 1 Corinthians 11 is the related view of Morna Hooker:

> Because it seemed to Paul (conditioned as he was by his Jewish upbringing) that the only way of avoiding scandal in the particular social conditions of first-century Corinth was for women to wear something on their heads in public, women continued to be expected to wear hats in church for almost 1900 years thereafter. Could there have been a greater distortion of the spirit of Paul, who insisted that religion was not a matter of law, than to turn him into a great lawgiver?[11]

One increasingly common view is that Paul is refuting a *Corinthian* view that women in the congregation should cover their heads, and is arguing that the women should resist this requirement.[12] But this view strains our sense that Paul could write clearly; although Paul sometimes cites Corinthian views before qualifying and correcting them, the whole tenor of this passage is that he does indeed want the Corinthian women to cover their heads.

A related and more likely position is that while Paul acknowledges these women's authority over their own heads (11:10), he calls on them to submit to the head coverings so as not to cause offense.[13] This position has in its favor the entire preceding context of surrendering one's own "rights" (the same term Paul uses in 11:10 for "authority") to avoid causing others to lose faith in Christ.[14] Since 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 address various issues raised by the practice of food offered to idols, with Paul using himself as an example of sacrificing one's own rights in chapter 9, this makes the most sense of the passage in the context. In the rest of the chapter Paul returns to a discussion of eating, although there he states his case far more forcefully than he does regarding head coverings, because the next issue is less morally ambiguous (contrast 11:2, 17).[15]

What then do we make of Paul's arguments in 11:2–16? I will argue later in this chapter that Paul's arguments here (as often elsewhere) are meant to persuade his readers in terms of the logic of their own culture. Paul was a masterful missionary, and he was skilled enough in debate to understand the Corinthians' own views, and to probe the Corinthians for consistency until he could persuade them to change their positions. This does not mean that his logic is the same sort of logic a Christian philosopher would use today. Had any one of his arguments here been an absolute, unambiguous, universal proof, Paul could have settled for one argument instead of four.[16] As Gordon Fee notes, Paul here appeals to "shame, propriety, and custom" rather than to outright declarations or commands; this is a cultural issue, not a "life-and-death matter" like the abuse of the Lord's Supper.[17]

WOMEN'S HEAD COVERINGS IN ANTIQUITY

When we speak of head coverings, we are normally speaking of a shawl that covered a woman's hair instead of a face-veil. Although some of our evidence, especially from the eastern Mediterranean, may suggest the use of face-veils such as now are in vogue in traditional Middle Eastern societies, most of our evidence points to a covering that concealed only the hair from view.[18] Since veils were

one *kind* of head covering, we subsume evidence for them under our discussion below on head coverings in general.

Some scholars have argued that neither a veil nor a shawl was in view in this passage, but rather hair put up high on one's head instead of being let down. For example, James Hurley suggests that the accepted custom of wearing one's hair up in church was being violated by controversial women who were letting their hair down.[19] He cites 1 Timothy 2:9 (which addresses wealthier women who are showing off their faddish hairstyles in church) to show that women in Pauline congregations did not wear veils.[20] But we might cite the same passage to show why Paul *wanted* them to cover their heads—to avoid showing off their fashionable hairstyles in church! Hurley's position is problematic, as Fee points out; if an "uncovered" head simply means "having her hair down," how is "the man's not covering his head in v. 7 . . . the opposite of this?"[21] It is thus clear that head coverings, not merely long hair, are in view.

In this first section of our discussion of the custom of head coverings in antiquity, we start with the possibly related question of the seclusion of women in some aspects of Greek culture.

Seclusion of Women in Classical Antiquity

The practice of women covering their heads in public may be related to the old Greek tradition that restricted women in many ways to the domestic sphere.[22] In theory, at least,[23] women in fourth century BCE Athens could not go to the market and were not to be seen by men who were not their relatives.[24] The orators especially attest the separation of male and female spheres of life in classical Athens,[25] and "one speaker in court seeks to impress the jury with the respectability of his family by saying that his sister and nieces are 'so well brought up that they are embarrassed in the presence even of a man who is a member of the family.' "[26] Under classical Athenian law, a wife who needlessly entered the public sphere placed her honor as a faithful wife in grave danger.[27]

This ideal seems to have continued to some degree in conservative parts of the Greek-speaking Mediterranean world, through the period directly before the spread of Christianity. Thus marriage contracts from first or second century BCE Egypt could include the demand that the wife not leave the home without her husband's permission.[28] Even in a later period, it could be thought scandalous to force a man to bring his wife before the public contrary to his wishes, especially if he wished to keep others from gazing on her beauty.[29]

Thus in ancient romances, a beautiful virgin might never have appeared in public before meeting her lover, so that her lover was the first to behold her.[30] A wisdom work, probably Jewish, advises its readers: "Guard a virgin in firmly locked rooms, and do not let her be seen before the house until her wedding day."[31]

Roman women were, however, much less secluded, although some moralists ideally wished them to be more secluded than they were. It was reported that in an earlier period a husband might have divorced his wife for going into public unveiled, or disciplined his wife or daughter for conversing publicly with another man.[32] Writing in Greek in the Roman period, Plutarch extols the modesty of the virtuous woman who, when a man praised the beauty of her suddenly exposed arm, retorted that its beauty was not meant for the public. Plutarch goes on to explain that a woman's talk should also be kept private within the home.[33] For him, "keeping at home and keeping silence" are joint aspects of a wife's virtue; she "ought to do her talking either to her husband or through her husband."[34] He further recommends that "a virtuous woman ought to be most visible in her husband's company, and to stay in the house and hide herself when he is away."[35]

But while writers upheld this traditional seclusion of wives as an ideal,[36] it had never been more than an ideal.[37] We cannot suppose that all levels of society hearkened to the moralists (the moralists themselves were well aware that this was the case), and other writers like the satirists (who instead exaggerate public immorality) certainly suggest that reality was far from the moralists' ideal in their own time.

Jewish women in Palestine were expected to go to the marketplace,[38] but in towns of the Greek east they followed the Greek customs of relative seclusion.[39] Philo, a prominent Jewish thinker in first-century Egypt, declares that it is best for women to stay indoors, to avoid matters apart from their household concerns, and to remain secluded.[40] In 4 Maccabees, a document written outside Palestine, the righteous mother of martyrs reminds her children that she had been a pure virgin who had not gone outside her father's house.[41] Even in Jewish Palestine, however, great modesty was expected in public; according to laws later set down by Jewish legal scholars, "a husband was compelled to divorce his wife if she appeared in public in torn clothing or bathed together with men, as was the Roman custom."[42]

Throughout most of the first-century empire, women generally were not required to remain at home, but it does appear that they were more restricted in

their public activities than their husbands were, and that this was often due to the fear that they would prove too attractive to other men. Some ancient writers, especially Jewish teachers, used the same rationale to get women to cover their heads, as we shall see shortly. First, however, we must investigate several other suggestions about ancient practices that might have led Paul to suggest that women in Corinth cover their heads.

Prostitutes or Pagan Prophetesses?

Why would the Corinthian Christian women's uncovered heads have caused offense? One recurrent suggestion is that an uncovered head was the traditional garb of prostitutes.[43]

Dress could indeed sometimes indicate that a woman was a prostitute, and some morally disreputable members of high society purportedly liked this kind of apparel: "typically, bright colours, a tunic showing part of their legs, diaphonous fabrics and a toga instead of the customary cloak. Elaborate hairdressing and makeup were part of the self-presentation for the better-class whores."[44]

But the evidence for *head coverings* distinguishing wives from prostitutes is slender; very few traditions from the Near East attest it. Ancient Assyrian women were not to go out with their heads uncovered, but if a prostitute were caught with a veil on she would be flogged with staves fifty times and have pitch poured over her head. Female slaves, who, as in other cultures, often served as prostitutes for their masters, were likewise forbidden to veil themselves.[45] If a man veiled a woman, he thereby made her his wife.[46] But these rules are from far to the east of Paul's cultural world, and from well over a thousand years before him (i.e., the twelfth century BCE).

The idea of prostitutes going unveiled may have continued in the eastern Mediterranean, since the practice is assumed by an anonymous third-century rabbi,[47] who argues that Judah had trouble believing that Tamar was a harlot because her face was covered.[48] But, as we shall note below, head coverings typified married women in general in Jewish Palestine, so that an uncovered head could indicate a virgin seeking a husband as easily as it could connote a prostitute. The rabbi no doubt thought Tamar's head covering problematic only because it would have normally identified her as a married woman in his culture.[49]

Others, noting that the issue in the context is how women pray and prophesy, have suggested instead that Paul may have been thinking of the "uncovered and dishevelled heads" of pagan prophetesses.[50] As we shall see below, in most Greek religious activities women uncovered their heads, and this may be significant. But it is doubtful that Paul or the Corinthians would have thought specifically about pagan prophetesses' hairstyles; such prophetesses, like the Pythoness, mantic priestess of Apollo, were generally secluded from public view.[51] Even if one were to compare the Christian prophetesses to their pagan counterparts (Paul was not necessarily above this; cf. 1 Cor. 12:3), it is unlikely that hairstyle would have been one of the first comparisons to have come to mind.

Disheveled hair may have also characterized female demons in popular Jewish conceptions,[52] but again our evidence is too slight and too late to draw any conclusions about what might have been the standard view among Corinthian Christians on this matter.

Mourning or Shame?

Covering one's head was sometimes associated with mourning;[53] the practice was a standard sign of grief, for both men and women.[54] Plutarch says that it is a Roman custom for mourning women to dress in white robes and white head coverings.[55] Elsewhere, a woman weeping at her plight is said to cover her head.[56] Palestinian Jewish texts also speak of covering one's head for mourning[57] and compare a woman's head covering to that of a mourner.[58] The evidence for this mourning custom is not altogether unambiguous, however; during the funeral procession itself, Roman sons would cover their heads, while daughters would "go with uncovered heads and hair unbound."[59]

The ambiguity of the practice is not the strongest argument against seeing it as background for our passage. Since this custom normally applied to both genders, it must not be in view in 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul gives different instructions to the men and the women. He cannot be implying that he wishes men to pray and prophesy without mourning, but wishes women to mourn when they do it!

Then again, the related senses of shame and dishonor could be in view. Walking about bareheaded seems to be a sign of social respectability for a man,[60] and he might "cover himself"—hide his face—if moved to shame.[61] It seems that either covering[62] or uncovering[63] one's head could be used as a

sign of reverence or humbled awe. In 2 Maccabees 4:12 head coverings may symbolize humiliation; when the king subjugated the Jews, he made them cover their heads. But this passage may simply mean that he forced them to adopt certain Greek manners of dress.

Some Jewish teachers explained Palestinian Jewish women's head coverings in this manner:

> Why does woman cover her head and man not cover his head? A parable. To what may this be compared? To a woman who disgraced herself and because she disgraced herself, she is ashamed in the presence of people. In the same way Eve disgraced herself and caused her daughters to cover their heads.[64]

It is unlikely that most Palestinian Jews viewed the head covering as a symbol of women's *humiliation*, but at the least a head covering was a necessary sign of public *modesty* for all Palestinian Jewish women who could afford it. One story tells of a woman so destitute that she could not afford a head covering, so she had to cover her head with her hair before going to speak with Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai.[65] A Jewish teacher in the late first century heavily fined a man for uncovering a woman's head in the marketplace. When she later uncovered her own head, Rabbi Akiba said that she had compromised her own self-respect, but noted that this was her choice; the man's penalty nevertheless stood.[66]

We need not suppose that all Palestinian Jewish women cared to be modest by these Pharisaic standards, but it is unlikely that the Pharisees invented the custom themselves. Modesty was no doubt a major purpose of the head covering in Palestinian Judaism and in all the cultures we shall consider below. Those who wished to save their beauty for their husbands probably viewed this modesty as a form of chastity.

Veiling Customs and Geography

Veiling customs varied geographically.[67] Veiling seems to have prevailed in parts of the eastern Mediterranean, in places like Syria, Arabia, and southern Asia Minor (modern Turkey), including Paul's home city of Tarsus.[68] There is much more evidence for the veiling of women in these regions than many scholars have traditionally recognized.[69]

Evidence for this custom in Greek life, however, is sparse; the standard citation from Aristophanes is half a millennium earlier, with little later evidence to support it.[70] The issue of head coverings, especially veils, could thus have

divided Corinthian Christians between native Greeks and eastern immigrants to Corinth; the problem with this solution is that it assumes a much larger eastern immigrant population in the church than we would expect from the demography of Corinth. (The solution becomes less problematic if many of the immigrants to Corinth were Palestinian Jews, or, as is also possible, a substantial number of the Corinthian Christians were drawn from the ranks of the non-Greeks from the east who had settled there.)

The Palestinian Jewish custom is much easier to document than the Greek custom. Male head covering customs like the yarmulke are far too late to be of relevance here,[71] but the covering of women seems to have been standard, long before Jewish teachers had to find biblical proof to make it a requirement.[72]

It is possible that this Jewish custom of veiling married women was also followed in some Jewish communities outside Palestine: one Jewish text from Egypt mourns women who were "carried away unveiled."[73] But the meaning of this text is not entirely clear, and though it is likely that Egyptian Jews were familiar with the custom of veils or other kinds of head coverings (see p. 29 below on Philo, and Joseph and Asenath), we cannot assume it certain that most Jewish women would have necessarily worn head coverings as far away as Corinth.

We therefore have a variety of evidence for women wearing head coverings in antiquity, but so far little that sheds light on the nature of the conflict about head coverings in the Corinthian church. Since Paul addresses the issue only in the context of church worship (nothing in 1 Cor. 11 suggests a practice that requires women's heads to be covered all day long), it may be helpful to examine the use of head coverings in ancient religious contexts.[74]

Head Coverings in Religious Contexts

In general, Greek women were expected to participate in worship with their heads uncovered. Their relative seclusion to the domestic sphere did not include their seclusion from public religious life. Of course, Greek men were also to worship bareheaded. An early inscription provides rules for those about to be initiated into a Greek mystery cult: "Women are not to have their hair bound up, and men must enter with bared heads."[75]

In contrast, Roman women had to cover their heads when offering sacrifices.

[76] The custom was old enough by Plutarch's time to have elicited a variety of contradictory explanations,[77] and the several exceptions[78] merely serve to prove the rule that Roman women worshiped with heads covered. This does not apply to all Roman religious functions,[79] but it does contrast significantly with the usual Greek practice. But again, Roman men would also pull the toga over their head at sacrifices.

Corinth was a Roman "colony" in Greece during this period. Its citizens conducted business in both Greek and Latin. Social differences between traditional Roman and traditional Greek elements may have caused tensions in the worship in the house churches. It is unlikely, however, that this is the main reason for conflict over women wearing head coverings in worship, because the same conflict should have arisen over the *men* wearing head coverings. This explanation would provide no reason for why Paul would give certain instructions to the men but entirely different instructions to the women.

Hair, Beauty, and Lust

Jesus did not accept the traditional male excuse that a man's lust was a woman's fault (Matt. 5:28), but many other people in his day did; that excuse was used even more commonly in antiquity than it is today. Indeed, in our culture, saturated with the commercializing of the human body, we might have little sympathy for our ancient counterparts, who could be moved to lust at the sight of bare arms.[80]

What was true of uncovered parts of the body in general was especially true of the hair. Thus cutting off a woman's hair would spoil all her beauty, even if she were Venus herself,[81] and a young man given to lust might go down the street staring at women's head and hair, rehearsing the images in his mind when he got home.[82] It was, one such man thought, the beauty of the head that mattered most, and after noting this he went on to praise a woman's hair.[83]

Loosening a woman's hair could reveal her beauty and subject her to male lust in both Greek[84] and Jewish tradition.[85] Early Roman women were divorced for not wearing veils precisely because their action laid them open to the suspicion that they were looking for another man.

A Jewish woman who ventured into public with her hair down and exposed to view, or who otherwise could be accused of flirtatious behavior, could be divorced with no financial support from her marriage contract.[86] A woman

uncovering her head could be described as nearing the final stage in seducing a man.[87] Jewish teachers permitted loosing a woman's hair only in the case of an adulterous woman, who was publicly shamed by exposure to the sight of men;[88] but even in this case they warned that it should not be done with women whose hair was extremely beautiful, lest the young priests be moved to lust.[89]

The most noble and desirable woman to an Egyptian Jewish man seems to have been one whose very appearance was virgin and unstained by the eyes of other men; in an Egyptian Jewish romance novel, the ideal virgin Asenath seems to have worn a veil as a virgin to keep men from gazing on her.[90] She even wore a bride's veil when she went before Joseph, perhaps as a sign of newfound modesty.[91] Probably a more reliable index of Egyptian Jewish sentiment is the writing of Philo, the well-to-do Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, who "says that if a woman keeps even her hair uncovered, it is a sign that she is not modest."[92]

It is not hard to understand how the practice of veiling and not veiling related to expectations concerning certain male reactions. In older Greek society, the Spartans were said to have veiled only their married women, for an important reason: "When someone inquired why they took their girls into public places unveiled, but their married women veiled, he said, 'Because the girls have to find husbands, and the married women have to keep those who have them!' "[93] Although this example is from long before our period, it seems to provide the simplest rationale for why married women would have covered their heads, whereas single women did not need to do so. Men were interested in protecting their solitary rights to the beauty of their wives, and married women who went into public with their heads uncovered could be considered immodest or seductive.

It is probable that some well-to-do women thought such restrictions on their public apparel ridiculous, especially if they were from parts of the Mediterranean world where head coverings were not considered necessary. But to other observers, these women's uncovered heads connoted an invitation to lust. The issue in the Corinthian church may thus have been a clash of cultural values concerning modesty, and Paul wants the more liberated elements within the church to care enough about their more conservative colleagues not to offend them in this dramatic way.

Class Conflict in Corinth?

Today many churches avoid social conflicts by keeping people from different backgrounds in different churches. Whatever we may think of that practice today, churches in Paul's day did not have that option. Believers had to meet in homes large enough to accommodate them, and that meant meeting in the homes of well-to-do members. Since most members in the Corinthian church were not well-to-do,[94] people from very different social classes would be brought together. Many of the other issues in 1 Corinthians revolve around this clash between the socially powerful ("the strong") and the socially weak members of the church,[95] and the issue of head coverings may be one further example of this problem.

Most women in Greco-Roman statues and other artwork from this period have uncovered heads, because most of the families who could afford to commission such works were well-to-do[96] and presumably more concerned with current fashion than with lower-class women's interpretation of modesty. As historian Ramsay MacMullen points out,

> women who imitated the changes in style that went on at the imperial court, changes depicted in the provinces by portraits of the ladies of the imperial house, were the richer ones, the more open to the new ways, and the more likely to belong to families on the rise. Women of humbler class went veiled.[97]

When we discuss 1 Timothy 2:9–10 in chapter 3, we shall examine the desire of upper-class women to show off their fashionable hairstyles as well as other impressive array. Moralists saw such ostentation as a problem in high society, and Paul viewed its cheaper imitation as a problem in the church. For Paul, church was not meant to be a fashion show for women or for men, especially when some of those styles could strike "less fashionable" members of the congregation as willfully seductive.[98] But Paul does not regulate anyone's garb outside the church, leaving that to the discretion of the person and the meaning their clothing styles will bear among the company they keep.[99]

This background for 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 makes good sense, but it still remains for us to examine how Paul develops his argument to persuade women members of the congregation to cover up. In ancient debate, one might give arguments for a position that were different from the reasons one held to the position oneself. Paul has to address the issue of women's head coverings in Corinth with the arguments that would most readily persuade his ancient readers.

PAUL'S ARGUMENTS: FAMILY, CREATION, NATURE, AND CUSTOM

In 11:3–16 Paul sets forth four main arguments. In this context, he could have simply said, "Do not cause your brother or sister to stumble," but as in the case of food offered to idols, he instead presents a variety of supporting arguments to make a convincing case for all his readers.

Not all of Paul's arguments make sense to us today on a first reading, but that is because Paul is trying to persuade the Corinthian women to wear head coverings, not women today. Had he been writing a letter to *us* he would have dealt with entirely different issues and reasoned a different way. It is easy for modern Western readers to assume that cultures elsewhere think as we do; we are impatient with other cultures' logic. Paul, a pastor and a missionary, is concerned about getting his point across to his people, not with impressing modern Western readers with arguments that would work transculturally. Paul employs a transcultural argument only when he is making a transcultural point, and the wearing of head coverings, as we have suggested above, is not one of those points.

The Husband as the Head: 1 Corinthians 11:3–6

Paul's argument here involves two analogies: an analogy between a wife's literal head (part of her body) and her figurative head (her husband), and an analogy between her artificial head covering (a veil) and her natural head covering (her hair).

Before we can grasp Paul's first argument about head coverings, we must understand his play on the word "head."[100] Although an argument based on a play on words may sound irrational to us today, to many ancient readers it would have made sense.[101] Paul knew his audience, and he knew the most effective ways to convince them to change their behavior. So Paul initiates a play on the word "head": it is both the part of the woman's body whose covering is in dispute, and the woman's husband.

But right at the outset, we are faced with a problem. When Paul calls the husband the "head" of the wife (as Christ is the "head" of the man, and God of Christ),[102] what does he mean? To be the "head" of something today normally means to be in charge, but was this the way the phrase would have normally been taken in Paul's day?

This modern sense of "head" is rare, though not unknown, in ancient Greek.

The oldest Greek lexicons do not attest this meaning,[103] but it is attested in the one document Greek Christians knew best: the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Hebrew word for "head" (*rôš*) usually referred to a part of the body, but when it was used figuratively, it could mean "leader" or "boss." Yet the Septuagint rarely translates *rôš* (in the sense of leader) literally as "head"; most often it uses other Greek words that mean "leader." It retains "head" for leader less than one tenth of the time, despite the Hebrew usage.[104] In other words, "leader" is not a very common meaning for the Greek word for "head."[105]

This is not to say that "head" never means "leader" in Greek: the few uses of the term that did come through the Greek translation naturally influenced Jewish and Christian writers like Philo[106] or the church fathers.[107] The question is whether this figurative use of the term "head" is common enough that we should *automatically* read it into the present passage, and the answer is that it is not. Indeed, as Fee points out, the only "authority" mentioned in the entire passage is the woman's own (11:10), and 11:11–12 "explicitly qualify vv. 8–9 so that they will *not* be understood" hierarchically.[108] The woman is not the man's subordinate in this passage; she is his "glory" (or "reputation," "honor," "splendor"), the one who brings him shame or honor.[109]

Other possible nuances of the term "head" exist, such as "the honored part." "Head" is sometimes contrasted with "tail" in the Old Testament because the head, as the most prominent part of the body (and the part that on men was normally uncovered) was the most honored part.[110] Paul seems to imply in the next chapter that those parts of the body which need to be covered are more honored, the covering representing the special attention and honor given to them (12:22–24), but there is no indication that he has the discussion of 11:2–16 in view as he writes this. More likely, in 11:2–16 he is speaking of the natural honor accruing to the head, and suggesting that the wife by virtue of the creation order owes her husband reverence. Husbands receive glory or shame from their wives, just as Christ receives glory or shame from the behavior of men.[111]

But if Paul means this argument in this way (which he may), he seems to be making an argument that he would not wish to enforce universally. Cannot *women* in the church also bring reproach or honor on the cause of Christ (cf. 1 Tim. 5:13–15)? If Paul is referring to the husband's honor—which in some sense, we shall argue, he is—the nature of his argument cannot extend very far beyond the particular application he wishes to draw from it.

Other scholars have argued that "head" means "source."[112] A number of

scholars have compiled references to this sense of the term "head" in antiquity,[113] a sense which occurs in Paul's own usage elsewhere.[114] This meaning of "head" certainly makes sense in this context, where Paul states that woman was derived from man (11:8).[115] The only objection to interpreting head as "source" here seems to be the statement that God is the source of Christ, but this objection fails if the text refers to Jesus' source as the Father from whom he proceeded at his incarnation as a human being.[116] If the incarnation is in view, then 11:3 is in chronological sequence, as Bilezikian points out: Christ is the source of Adam, Adam of Eve, and God of Christ.[117]

The meaning "source" has been hotly disputed. Evangelical scholar Wayne Grudem argues that this meaning for "head" is not attested, whereas the metaphorical use of "head" usually implies authority.[118] His argument has, however, been seriously challenged by other evangelical scholars.[119] Gordon Fee observes that only forty-nine uses of "head" in ancient Greek literature are metaphorical, and of these:

(1) Twelve appear in the New Testament, which is the subject under consideration and thus must not be included in the count (especially since some of them *do* mean "source").

(2) Eighteen are from the Greek translations of the Old Testament, where they represent a very small percentage of exceptions to the rule that the translators usually bent over backward to *avoid* translating "head" in this way.

(3) In most of the remaining nineteen instances the sense "authority over" that Grudem finds is disputable.

(4) Finally, Philo clearly does use "head" to mean "source" sometimes.

Fee concludes that Grudem has shown that "head" can sometimes mean "leader," although even in these cases it need not mean "authority over." But in Fee's view, Grudem has failed to bring into question the meaning "source" or to show that "head" is normally a term of authority.[120]

That "head" sometimes means "authority," sometimes means "prominence, honor, or respect" in other ways, and probably sometimes means "source" does not tell us which possible meaning is in view in our text. Context is the key to determining how a particular term is being used in a given passage, and the context here indicates nothing about the husband's "authority." But for the sake of argument, let us assume that "head" here means "authority," which I believe Grudem has shown is a possible nuance of the term. If Paul is using "head" here in the sense of "authority," he could simply mean that the husband was the one in the position of authority over the wife in that culture, without demonstrating

that all husbands are to rule over their wives in all cultures (cf. Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:13); he might have expressed himself very differently to an audience in whose culture husbands were not in a position of authority over wives. Thus the debate about the meaning of the term cannot ultimately settle the issue unless Paul plainly argues for the husband's transcultural rule over his wife.

Whatever particular nuances Paul may have wished to call to his readers' minds, he uses a wordplay to facilitate his point: the woman who brings dishonor on her head is bringing dishonor upon her husband, and thus upon the Christian family. That is Paul's point in this context, not that her display of independence in removing the culturally significant head covering would bring reproach on any husband in any culture.

In 11:5 Paul indicates how seriously a woman dishonors her "head" by worshiping with it uncovered. He makes an analogy between her praying without a head covering and her praying with her head shaved; whether she is without her specific cultural covering or her natural, God-given covering, humiliation is involved. Paul is using here the ancient debating principle of reductio ad absurdum: reducing the position of his opponents to the absurd. If they want to bare their heads so badly, why don't they bare them altogether by removing their hair, thus exposing themselves to public shame?

Unlike the act of *uncovering* his head, a Greek man's *shaving* his head could represent mourning,[121] a response to great catastrophe like shipwreck, or it could be associated with illness or recovery from it.[122] Priests of Isis were said to shave off all their hair, so this act could imply the shame that certain pagan cultic associations bore in Greco-Roman antiquity.[123]

Shaving the head could also imply the disgrace of the loss of womanly attractiveness; by ancient standards, it would deprive women of beauty and make them look like boys.[124] A Roman satirist complains that a Roman matron overly concerned with her hair ought to have it shaved off with a razor.[125] The ultimate example of the shame involved in shaving one's head is that it is the final stage of desperation to which Satan reduces Job's wife in a Jewish story about Job's trials.[126]

Some have suggested that Paul's argument at this point appeals to something more than the general shame of a shaven head. Perhaps, as some scholars have argued, Paul opposes the removal of symbolic gender distinctions;[127] an uncovered head and short hair have precisely this point in common: both reflect a disregard for customary marks of gender identification.[128] As Wayne Meeks puts it, Paul stresses equivalent rights and duties for both parties in marriage (1

Cor. 7:2–4), but "objects to *symbolic* disregard for sexual differences in the dress of male and female prophets."[129] This may have been in intentional opposition to certain pagan cults that encouraged sex role reversal,[130] but it would make enough sense simply on its own terms here: gender interchange was regarded by Paul as "against nature" (Rom. 1:26–27; cf. Deut. 22:5).[131]

Whether or not Paul is addressing gender reversal here, another more central issue seems to be at work. The woman's uncovering or shaving her head brought disgrace not only on her own physical head, but also on her husband. The idea that a wife could shame her husband by her behavior[132] or by revealing his secrets[133] was common in the ancient world. Even though Plutarch advises that the husband has to set the example if he expects his wife to live honorably,[134] he was no doubt conscious of the idea that one person's dishonorable behavior could bring reproach on the whole family.[135] The common view is reflected by an accuser of Stilpo, who noted that Stilpo's married daughter was profligate and charged "that she was a disgrace to him."[136] Thus some marriage contracts include the stipulation that the wife avoid shaming her husband.[137] Moralists could insist that wives please only their own husbands;[138] if wives were not "socially retiring . . . and submissive to their husbands," they would "bring dishonor to the household."[139]

The point of Paul's opening arguments about the head therefore calls us as believers to give up personal rights for the sake of honoring our families. Although his specific addressees in Corinth were women, the principle he articulates could be applied to any of us. If our dressing a certain way in public will cause discomfort to our spouse, we ought not to do it. Paul is clearly less concerned with the particular apparel worn in a given culture than he is with its effects.

Creation Order: 1 Corinthians 11:7–12

Paul's second argument is based on the creation of Eve from Adam in Genesis 2. This argument is really part of his first one, for it carries on the idea of headship and the wife's relationship to her husband.

> For a man is obligated not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God [his ultimate head and source, 11:3]; but the woman is the glory of man [her direct head and source, 11:3]. For the man did not come from the woman, but the woman from the man; for the man was not created through the woman, but rather the woman through the man. Therefore the woman is obligated to have authority over her head on

> account of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord, neither is the woman apart from the man, or the man apart from the woman; for just as the woman was taken out of the man, man comes into the world through woman; but all things are [really ultimately] from God (11:7–12).

In short, Paul says, because woman was taken from man, she reflects man's image, and therefore she ought to cover that image in worship lest it distract observers from attention to God's image.[140] It is not that Paul is unaware that woman and man together make up God's image. It is impossible that he had not read the explicit statement to that effect in Genesis 1:27,[141] and he speaks elsewhere of all believers being conformed to that image in Christ (1 Cor. 15:49; Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). It seems rather to be another reminder that the way the wife dresses will in that culture affect whether honor or shame comes to her husband. It is far more gracious to say that than to state, "Women are too beautiful and will distract the eyes of undisciplined men during the worship services," although that may have been part of the problem in Corinth.

How could women as "men's glory" (or "honor," "splendor") distract men from the worship of God during church services? Although the following analogy is probably a little more extreme than the Corinthian problem, it may convey the general point. We might imagine a laid-back church today where the women entered wearing bathing suits, prepared for the baptismal service in the ocean after morning worship. If the men lusted, the women would be right to say that the men should take responsibility for their own actions; but out of concern for their brothers in Christ, the women could avoid the problem by simply wearing something less revealing than bathing suits to church. The same principle would apply, of course, for men who wished to assert their proper right to wear bathing suits to church; a bathing suit may not be intrinsically sinful, but one should do everything possible to avoid causing one's fellow Christian to stumble from the way of Christ. Many ancient men had a lower tolerance level for exposed skin than we do today because they saw much less of it. Apparently just seeing a woman's hair was enough to disturb them.

Despite the potential seriousness of this problem, however, Paul is not ordering these well-to-do women to change their church wardrobe; he is trying to persuade them to choose to do so. Paul emphasizes that it is the woman's right to choose what she will wear (v. 10); yet he is asking her to use her right to dress how she wills to honor rather than shame her husband, just as he called on others, including himself, to give up their own rights for the sake of others (chs. 8–10).[142]

Not everyone sees Paul as affirming a woman's authority to choose what to wear on her head in 11:10. Some translations and commentators interpret the text as if it spoke of the woman's being *under* someone's authority,[143] or as if the head covering merely symbolized her dignity;[144] but these are not natural ways to read the Greek text here.[145] Others think that an Aramaic term for head covering is here mistranslated "authority,"[146] but not only would the Corinthians not have known Aramaic,[147] the supposed play on words does not actually *work* in Aramaic.[148] The only normal way to read the Greek phrase is to read it that the woman has "authority over her own head."[149] It is not even optional for her to recognize this authority; she "ought" to demonstrate it.[150]

Paul not only affirms that the woman has authority over her own head, but he even qualifies his argument concerning man being woman's source. Paul explicitly says that woman being derived from man is not the whole story; even though it was the only part of the story he needed to state to make his point, he did not want the Corinthian Christians to misunderstand him.[151] Paul affirms that woman and man are mutually dependent in the Lord,[152] using the same language that other early Jewish writers had used to make the same point.[153] Women and men are each derived from the other in some sense, and the ultimate source or head of both is God.

Paul's clarification of his point about man being woman's source (taken from Gen. 2) may reflect the creation story in Genesis 1. Woman and man are together said to represent God's image (1:27). There is some evidence that the Corinthian Christians may have separated the two accounts of human creation in Genesis 1 and 2,[154] as did some other Jewish thinkers of the period.[155] Paul apparently appeals to their understanding of Genesis 2, but then qualifies their view of that passage by reading it in the light of Genesis 1.

The idea of women as men's glory would not have been too difficult for Paul's readers to have grasped; in some Jewish traditions, a wife's domestic expertise brought public "glory" to her husband.[156] His readers would have especially followed his case if they knew the Scriptures well enough to recognize how he was applying them. He uses "glory" here to mean virtually the same thing as "image" (1 Cor. 15:43, 49), adapting the phrase "image and likeness" of Genesis 1:26 to read "image and glory" (1 Cor. 11:7).[157]

Here again, Paul relates to some of the ideas of his culture. Although some ancient Jewish traditions repeat the biblical view that both men and women are created in God's image,[158] others could declare that while man was made in God's likeness, woman was made in man's image.[159] The Greek writer

Plutarch similarly compares a wife to a mirror: a good wife will reflect her husband's likeness well, but a bad wife will reflect it poorly.[160]

When Paul later notes (11:15) that a woman's long hair is a "glory" to her, his point would also make sense to his readers; a woman in antiquity could prize her long and beautiful hair.[161] In contrast, an adulteress, who had ignored God's honor or glory by her unfaithfulness to her husband, herself received dishonor when the priests disheveled her hair.[162] Much of Paul's argument here revolves around wordplays about "glory" and "image."

This much is not hard to grasp; what is more problematic is Paul's statement that the woman has authority on her head "on account of the angels." What could this obscure phrase mean?

Because of the Angels: 1 Corinthians 11:10

Several explanations have been proposed for the obscure phrase "because of the angels." We shall examine the most commonly proposed explanations of the phrase.[163] One is that the angels of holiness are present for the worship of the community, as in some other early Jewish texts;[164] on this interpretation, the problem is that the worshiping angels will be offended by the breach of propriety involved in a woman's uncovering her head.[165] Since it was only a breach of propriety in that culture, Paul need not be implying that these angels are culture-bound or squeamish; this view could mean that they are simply offended by the symbolic disrespect shown to the women's husbands.

Then again, if the issue in the congregation is that some men would be tempted to lust after these women who were showing off their fancy hairstyles, another traditional interpretation may be more likely. It had become a very common belief that many angels had fallen into sin long ago by lusting after beautiful women. On this view, Paul would be saying: "By leaving your hair open to public view, you are inciting not only men, but also angels, to lust."[166]

Before some readers dismiss this view as ludicrous from our modern perspective, we ought to examine how such an argument would have appeared to Paul's original readers in Corinth.[167] Ancient mythology in many cultures is replete with stories of gods and goddesses chasing mortal consorts of the other (or sometimes the same) gender.[168] The "sons of God" having intercourse with the daughters of men in Genesis 6 is likewise interpreted as fallen angels copulating with human women in most[169] early Jewish traditions.[170] This is

probably reflected in 2 Peter 2:4,[171] Jude 6,[172] and 1 Peter 3:19–20[173] as well, so it may be a valid Christian interpretation of Genesis 6.

Thus it is said that these angels, the "Watchers" (as they are called in 1 Enoch) who observed the earth, lost their heavenly abode due to illicit sex.[174] One tradition of uncertain date puts it this way: Women seduced the Watchers by the beauty of their adorned heads and faces, and the Watchers,

> filled with desire for them, perpetrated the act in their minds. Then they were transformed into human males, and while the women were cohabiting with their husbands they appeared to them. Since the women's minds were filled with lust for these apparitions, they gave birth to giants. For the Watchers were disclosed to them as being as high as the heavens.[175]

Jewish people believed that evil spirits still occasionally lusted after women,[176] in the most extreme stories even killing women's suitors to keep the women for themselves.[177] Such ideas may also be reflected in the common view that demons could reproduce.[178]

The main problem with the "lusting angels" view is what it would seem to imply on a wider scale. If angels lusted after women's hair in Corinth, Paul would have had to have supposed that they could lust after women's hair anywhere in the world where it was not covered. Perhaps he thought this was just a stumbling block for angels gathered for worship, but the view that Paul thought angels were always in danger of falling because of uncovered body parts on women would make his argument a little broader than he intends. Paul would surely have made much more of these angels in his writings than a mere phrase, because this would have been a transcultural, enduring argument for all women in all cultures to wear head coverings. This does not seem to fit the way the rest of his argument goes.

Another major possibility remains: Paul speaks of the angels who run the structures of the world system. Although some have objected that Paul nowhere speaks of hostile angels,[179] this objection ignores some of the evidence. Some scholars have pointed out that these may be the angels of the created order we see in 1 Corinthians 6:3,[180] and Romans 8:38 connects hostile angels with the "rulers" in the heavens.

Terms like "rulers and authorities" normally meant simply political powers in the world (e.g., Rom. 13:1).[181] But many groups in the ancient world believed that there were also spiritual powers, such as the gods of various nations, influencing the course of those nations.[182] In Jewish thought, those spiritual

powers[183] were angelic authorities appointed by God;[184] in some Jewish sources, they had become malevolent powers and would be judged at the end of the age.[185] While this way of looking at the world became common only in postbiblical Jewish sources,[186] it was already established as early as the book of Daniel chapter 10,[187] and we may be certain that both Paul and his readers were familiar with the idea.

How would this meaning fit 1 Corinthians 11:10? It would function in a manner quite similar to the statement in 6:3 that Christians will judge angels; if they will judge angels, they should be able to arbitrate disputes among themselves. The argument of 11:10, in the context of the preceding verses, would be that Christ is head of the husbands; husbands are heads of their wives; Christ and his church together are destined to be above the principalities and powers, or angels of the nations, which are over the rest of the world. Paul's rhetorical question, "Do you not know?" (6:3), probably implies that they should indeed have known that the "saints," those set apart for God by faith in Christ, would judge angels; hence they could have grasped his brief clause "because of the angels." If, as we believe, Paul also wrote Colossians, the dual picture of Christ as head, both of the church (Col. 1:18) and of the created order of spiritual powers (2:10; cf. 1:15–17), would indicate that such images are not foreign to his thought.

On this reading of 1 Corinthians 11:10, Paul mentions the angels to show where these women stand. Although they should choose to wear a head covering, submitting to their husbands' honor for the sake of the gospel, yet they have authority over their own heads; so much authority, in fact, that they will judge the angels. Thus Paul is saying, "You will judge angels someday. Surely you can make responsible choices about your head apparel now."

The main weakness of this proposal is that it reads "because of the angels" as "because of what you know about your future relation to those angels." But such a concise and therefore difficult allusion on Paul's part would not be uncharacteristic of him or of ancient Jewish teachers in general, and it may make more sense than supplying "because of the angels present at worship," or "because of lusting angels." While I would not propose that this view is beyond dispute, it seems to fit Paul's usage elsewhere better than either of the other views proposed above.

Whatever conclusion one ultimately reaches about the angels, Paul does not spell out in detail the meaning of the phrase, and it is not his main argument. It is therefore proper for us to move to his next arguments. Paul's arguments to this point have presupposed an interpretation of the Genesis narrative, but his final

arguments express ways of thinking that were standard in Greek culture.

An Appeal to the Natural Order: 1 Corinthians 11:14

> Judge this matter for yourselves: it is fitting for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Doesn't even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it brings him dishonor,[188] whereas if a woman has long hair, it brings her glory?[189] For her long hair is given to her[190] as a natural covering.[191]

Paul's appeal to nature was a standard Greco-Roman argument, used especially by Stoics,[192] but also by Epicureans,[193] other philosophers,[194] and, for that matter, just about everyone else.[195] This sort of reasoning has become more or less discredited today; no one says any longer, "If people were meant to fly, they would have wings." But it was a very common sort of argument in Paul's day. Our question is, What did Paul and other ancient writers mean by their appeal to nature?

Sometimes writers meant by "nature" pretty much what we mean by the term today: the created order.[196] They could speak of nature as the force or order controlling and arranging natural existence in the cosmos.[197] Nature is said to teach us the way things really are,[198] often through our natural endowments[199] or through the nature of the world around us.

Usually writers used these examples from nature to advocate a specific kind of moral behavior,[200] or simply exhorted living in general in accordance with nature.[201] For instance, the Stoic thinker Epictetus points out that if one has a cold, nature supplied us with hands to wipe our nose rather than just to sniff in the mucous all day.[202] In the same way, Plutarch reasons that nature teaches mothers to nurse their own babies by providing them the ability to produce milk.[203]

Many gender distinctions were also considered part of nature, rather than a matter of mere social convention.[204] Thus, one of Cicero's examples of a natural way to categorize types of humans is male and female.[205] More significantly, Epictetus can speak of hair as a mark of gender distinction: "Can anything be more useless than the hairs on a chin? Well, what then? Has not nature used even these in the most suitable way possible? Has she not by these means distinguished between the male and the female?"[206]

Beards were quite out of fashion in the Roman world of Paul's day, and he was therefore not likely to impose them on his readers as a mark of gender distinction; but perhaps he would have agreed with Epictetus' basic point: "we

ought to preserve the signs which God has given; we ought not to throw them away; we ought not, so far as in us lies, to confuse the sexes which have been distinguished in this fashion."[207] In the same way, some in antiquity saw gender reversal[208] and homosexual behavior[209] as being "against nature" (Rom. 1:26–27).

It was not sexist or sexually exploitive to wish to preserve gender distinctions; they were already matters of natural endowment, and to keep them explicit was entirely in accordance with nature. Thus F. F. Bruce may well be right when he suggests that Paul's appeal to nature here is an appeal to the fact that women's hair *naturally* grows longer than men's.[210]

Other scholars suggest that by "nature" Paul refers to cultural custom.[211] Although "nature" might occasionally mean custom,[212] the term is normally used to mean exactly the opposite of custom: that which is innate in the order of things, which cannot be acquired.[213] But it cannot be denied that the Greco-Roman *custom* at this time was for men to have shorter hair than women.[214] The fact that Paul must have been aware of the exceptions to this custom would indicate that he speaks in a general sense of what was acceptable for usual societal norms in his day.[215] The exceptions were various: Artemidorus lists "a wise man, a priest, a prophet, a king, a ruler and for stage performances."[216]

In a few cases men may have worn long hair as a sign of gender reversal, or to show their disdain for the traditions of gender distinctions.[217] Ancient Spartan men, like the heroes of an earlier period in Greek history and like statues of some Greek gods,[218] wore their hair long;[219] in earlier Sparta, perhaps as an expression of Sparta's duty-centered warrior character, Spartan brides often cropped their hair short and dressed like men.[220] In Paul's day, the ecstatic priests of Cybele were said to have long hair;[221] since they were also emasculated, their long hair may have been a sign of gender reversal.[222] Long hair may also have been associated with luxury or wantonness.[223] Conversely, a woman might cut her hair if she wished to disguise herself as a man.[224] Not everyone took well to unnecessary gender reversals. Thus Epictetus charges,

> Are you a man or a woman?—A man.—Very well then, adorn as a man, not a woman. Woman is born smooth and dainty by nature [*physei*], and if she is very hairy she is a prodigy, and is exhibited at Rome among the prodigies. But for a man *not* to be hairy is the same thing, and if by nature he has no hair he is a prodigy, but if he cuts it out and plucks it out of himself, what shall we make of him? Where shall we exhibit him and what notice shall we post? "I will show you," we say to the audience, "a man who wishes to be a woman rather than a man."[225]

Epictetus' remarks verge on the crude when he suggests that the one who wishes to look like a woman by plucking his hairs ought to "make a clean sweep of the whole matter," chopping off the source of his masculine hairiness, so he may be a full woman and not half and half.[226] That the context of his remarks may suggest that the object of Epictetus' ridicule is from Corinth may be of more than passing interest.[227]

Some philosophers apparently advocated obliterating marks of gender distinctions,[228] but most philosophers who wore their hair long probably did so only as a sign of their simple, extrasocietal lifestyle.[229] Epictetus was not the only philosopher to ridicule an "effeminately attired" man.[230]

The general custom accords also with Diaspora Jewish antipathy toward transvestism in hairstyles: "If a child is a boy do not let locks grow on (his) head. Do not braid (his) crown nor the cross knots at the top of his head. Long hair is not fit for boys, but for voluptuous women."[231] Although certain exceptions were permitted in the Bible for long hair, such as the Nazirites,[232] a later rabbi could argue that the long hair was to set the Nazirite apart from normal society, making him repulsive and uncomfortable.[233]

Whether Paul's argument is that women by virtue of creation have longer hair than men, or that the social norms of his day demand women's hair to be longer under normal circumstances, does not in the end need to be decided. In either case, Paul would seem to be making an argument that addresses symbolic gender distinctions, and requiring men and women to recognize those differences between them.

From natural gender differences, he can easily argue that clothing styles ought to reflect those differences.[234] Women in Corinth should thus cover their heads, and men should not, to identify their differences. This is a case of distinguishing the two, however, not of ranking one over the other.

Paul's Appeal to Custom: 1 Corinthians 11:16

Although Paul's appeal to "nature" in 11:14 may not be an appeal to custom, 11:16 certainly is. It is not an appeal to universal practice, but only an appeal to the practice of those who "count" on the matter of church attire, the churches of God.[235] They are the ones who count, of course, because they are the ones whose behavior best supports Paul's argument to get the well-to-do Corinthian wives to cover their heads in church and avoid division among the Christians in

Corinth.

This was a standard way for an ancient lawyer or speech writer to argue a case; [236] for instance, Isocrates appeals to common knowledge when he writes what "the myths relate and all men believe" about Zeus,[237] even though clearly there were exceptions to "all men" of which even Isocrates must have known in his day. Theon, the writer of an important rhetorical handbook, notes that one can refute an argument if it is contrary to the common account or view; the burden of proof was strongly on anyone opposing established custom or view. [238] This practice is no less common in rabbinic texts, although the standard there was determined specifically by rabbinic tradition.[239]

Some philosophers in the ancient world actually accepted no other argument except one drawn from custom.[240] Although it is unlikely that there were disciples of any of these thinkers, called the Skeptics, in the Corinthian church, their position illustrates the importance attributed to custom in ancient thought. Paul, who often must challenge accepted custom in proclaiming the truth of the gospel, here finds it on his side and is able to appeal to it.

CONCLUSION

The arguments one uses to persuade readers in a given setting may not be the same as one's own reasons for articulating a position. Paul's arguments in 11:2–16 are different from his reasons for writing this passage. Probably he was dealing with social division in the church, as he was in most of the rest of 1 Corinthians. But as elsewhere, he must come up with supporting arguments that would work for his readers. Although we do not believe that he was making a transcultural argument in favor of women wearing head coverings in church, we can notice some transcultural points in his argument: one should not bring reproach upon one's family or upon the Christian gospel; one should not seek to destroy symbolic gender distinctions by pioneering unisex clothing styles; one should respect custom and do one's best to avoid causing someone to stumble. [241]

Why did Paul try to persuade the uncovered women to cover up, rather than trying to persuade the covered women to uncover? One reason may have been that he agreed with some of the moral objections to showing off one's fashions in church. Another reason may be that, in that society, these women's adorned hair would distract men from the worship of God, perhaps in the way that bathing suits would distract many of us in church today. Paul never questioned the well-

to-do women's right to dress as they pleased—indeed, he affirmed it—but he asked them to sacrifice that right for the sake of those in the church who would have a very hard time understanding it.

I hope that this chapter will not be used by anyone to enforce rigid dress codes in churches today. If we really understand the chapter and what it communicates about the right of the women to dress as they please, it seems that it would be better to ask only for modesty. None of us should dress extravagantly and embarrass those who have little, or in a manner that might be interpreted as sexually enticing in our culture. Beyond this, we must keep in mind that Paul's purpose was to make Christianity available to more people, to increase its cultural appeal to the majority of those who would be interested in it. If our churches' dress codes turn people away from the church rather than bring them in, we have failed to catch Paul's motives or his message.

Finally, and most significantly for this book, we should note that *nothing* in this passage suggests wives' subordination. The only indicator that *could* be taken to mean that is the statement that man is woman's "head," but "head" in those days was capable of a variety of meanings, and nothing in this text indicates that it means subordination. As many scholars have been pointing out in the past few years, if we want this passage to teach subordination, we have to read subordination into the passage. The only clear affirmations here, besides that men and women are different and should not conceal that fact, is the equality and mutual dependence of men and women.

2

Questions about Questions—1 Corinthians 14:34–35

> For God is not the source of disturbances, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.[1] Let women remain silent in the churches, for it is not permitted for them to speak; rather let them remain submitted, just as the Law also says. And if they want to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is a shameful[2] matter for a woman to speak in church. Or did the word of God issue from you? Or has it come to you alone? (1 Cor. 14:33–36).

This chapter will be one of the shortest ones in this book, since it deals with the briefest passage we will cover: 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. But due to the overlap of its cultural context with the subject of our next chapter (on 1 Tim. 2:9–15), we will introduce here some of the background that will be important for both chapters.

After we have surveyed several problems for interpretation and some of the most significant interpretations of this passage, we will turn to what seems to be the most likely interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35: Paul was addressing relatively uneducated women who were disrupting the service with irrelevant questions. The immediate remedy for this situation was for them to stop asking such questions; the long-term solution was to educate them.

PROBLEMS FOR INTERPRETATION

Paul's words in this passage have been interpreted and applied in many different ways mainly because his words, taken by themselves, can lend themselves to this bewildering array of interpretations. The following survey of problems is meant to show the need for an objective, contextual interpretation.

At first view, 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 would appear more restrictive toward women than nearly any church is today. Paul's language, if taken to mean all that it can mean, forbids *all* speaking in church and does not explicitly limit this to public exposition of Scripture. It appears that even a woman's leaning over to whisper a question to her husband is considered out of order. This goes even beyond the position required by most of today's strictest interpreters of the

passage,[3] but if we are going to take the text to mean all that it can without regard to its specific situation, this is how we must read it. Is this passage as restrictive as it appears, or does the situation implied in the text narrow down the restriction it actually addresses?

Certain helpful points for answering that question can be noted simply from the context. Paul is carrying on the preceding argument concerning "order" in the use of spiritual gifts in the church service, and he inserts here a brief digression related to order: the women must stop disrupting the service.[4] This digression naturally suggests that women were disrupting the service.

But the probability that women were disrupting the church services in Corinth, and needed to stop, raises another question. Should we view the disruptiveness of women as a problem specific to the Corinthian church, or as a problem universal to all churches? (If the text addresses a specific situation yet is to be applied to all situations, the Corinthian situation must be universal.) And is Paul's solution particular to the church in Corinth, or could he have written it to any church in any period?

If Paul addresses all churches in all societies, not only his assessment of the problem but also his solution grates on modern ears. It would sound insulting enough to women to suggest that they are consistently disruptive in church; but the restrictions that Paul seems to impose in response sound even more offensive. Is Paul actually demanding the silence of all women, across the board, a silence so restrictive that wives could not even ask their husbands what was happening during the church service? Is such silence a necessary way to express their submission (14:34)? And does "submission" relate only to their husbands (cf. 14:35) or is it a general submissiveness to all church leaders (cf. 16:16)?

Compounding this apparent offense, if we ignore the situation and simply read the passage for all it could mean, it could also imply that Paul wants wives to learn only from their husbands at home, rather than being allowed to learn anything in the church services ("if they want to learn *anything*, let them ask their own husbands at home," 14:35). But this proposal, however supportable by the words of the text taken at face value, would unfairly ignore the context. If Paul did not want the women to learn in church, then when he suggests that "all" may "learn" from the prophecies (14:31; cf. v. 6), he means by "all" only the men, without bothering to point this out.

More likely, Paul could be saying, "If you can't learn it in church except *the way you're doing it*, you need to ask your husbands at home." In this case, he is not saying, "Let women learn only from their husbands at home, and not in the

church services"; he is saying, "Don't learn so *loudly* in church!" He uses the same construction in 11:34: "If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment." In 11:34, Paul does not there mean that no one should eat at the Lord's Supper, or that it is wrong to be hungry when one gathers in church; his point is that it is better to eat at home than to disrupt the Christian community by the *way* one eats at church. Since he uses the same construction here, we may guess that his argument is roughly the same: the way women are trying to learn, rather than the learning itself, is problematic.

But how are these women disturbing the Corinthian worship services? The context is the best place to begin looking for clues. Women are not the only ones on whom Paul enjoins silence under certain circumstances. "Silence" is also preferred to using the gifts out of order (1 Cor. 14:28–29); if no interpreter were available, tongues-speakers were to pray in tongues only to themselves,[5] and prophets were to restrict their speech voluntarily if another arose with a message from God. In the context, "silence" thus relates to keeping the church service orderly. The context need not mean that Paul is demanding women's silence only with regard to spiritual gifts; Paul may be commenting on another kind of silence equally necessary to preserve order in the congregation. As we shall see below, it is unlikely that he is restricting women's participation in spiritual gifts at all, given the fact that he permits the activity in 11:4–5.[6] What is clear from the context is just that restricting one's own speech is sometimes necessary to preserve congregational order.

But once we have decided that the women are causing disturbances by their lack of appropriate silence, we still must ask what kind of disruptive speech Paul had in view when he dictated this passage. We shall argue in this chapter, in agreement with some other writers, that Paul does not address the preceding context of spiritual gifts here, but the immediate context of questions (14:35). Paul does not need to state this plainly at the beginning of the passage because both he and the Corinthians are familiar with the situation; we, however, have to infer it from clues in the text. We shall look for these clues and also try to show the specific cultural setting in which women's questions in the church service were likely to have been a problem.

No one takes this passage today to mean all that it could. Everyone allows that the text is somewhat more specific than its general injunction for all women always to be silent in church. Indeed, Paul's earlier permission to women to pray and prophesy publicly in church allows no way around it (11:5). The issue, then, is just what Paul specifically means here. Those who insist that this passage

prohibits women from teaching must appeal to more than his general injunction to silence here; they must show that Paul had teaching specifically in mind. Unfortunately for their position, nothing in the context or situation indicates that the women were teaching.

Since Paul wrote this directive specifically to the Corinthians, we may assume that the problem was specific to Corinth and perhaps a few other cities like it.[7] After all, his other instructions in this chapter address specific abuses of the gifts at Corinth; had they obtained generally, we can be sure that Paul would have already given these regulations during his extended stay with them (Acts 18:11, 18).[8]

Whether the problem was specific to the Corinthian church because only they allowed women to speak at all, or because only they had a problem with women speaking in a certain way, must be decided by careful study of the text.

We shall argue below that Paul's solution, like the Corinthians' problem, is appropriate to a specific cultural context, and that it thus does not apply to every conceivable situation we face today. This is not to question the universal relevance of Paul's teaching; it is to say that we have to catch Paul's *real point* in addressing this situation before we try to apply his point to very different situations.

INTERPRETATIONS

Is 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 Paul's Passage After All?

Since 1 Corinthians 11:4–5 allows women to pray and to prophesy in church as long as their heads are covered, and since 14:34–35 sounds like it "silences" women and digresses briefly from its context, this passage has often been regarded as an addition to chapter 14 by a later editor rather than a teaching by Paul himself.[9]

A number of scholars hold this view, including Wayne Meeks,[10] Hans Conzelmann,[11] Robin Scroggs,[12] F. F. Bruce,[13] and the expert evangelical text critic Gordon Fee.[14] Although several of these scholars are among the world's best text critics, it seems to me that the textual evidence for this position is very weak.

A few manuscripts, mainly later Western texts with a narrow geographical distribution, admittedly relocate these verses, probably because they do not seem to fit their immediate context very well.[15] But there is no real evidence for

omitting them entirely; those who hold them to be later additions must argue that they occurred too early in the text's history to leave evidence,[16] i.e., before subsequent manuscripts were copied from the original.

This idea of an early accidental addition of several verses is not easy to defend. It is not certain that Paul intended his letters to the Corinthians to be published and circulated,[17] but since Clement of Rome is familiar with 1 Corinthians in the 90s,[18] it is likely that 1 and 2 Corinthians had been in circulation for some years by his time. Unless only the wrongly edited text happened to survive the process of circulation, then a scribe added several verses to this Pauline letter, purporting to be instructions to the Corinthian church, when this document was still being read in its original form in Corinth. This proposal does not suggest a mere scribal mistake, but a deliberate change of the sort that ought to have been extremely rare in the earliest stage of the manuscript tradition.[19]

The main evidence adduced to prove that this is a later addition is not so much textual as contextual—the awkward way it fits its context. But such evidence is not very convincing; Paul frequently digressed, and digressions were a normal part of ancient writing.[20] Nor need we read this passage as a direct contradiction to 11:4–5; it is actually addressing a more specific issue than 11:4–5, as we shall observe below. To regard this as an addition on such slender evidence would lead us back to the scissors-and-paste approach so common in source criticism early in this century. Digressions and parenthetical notes can too easily become "interpolations" by "later editors." (I am grateful that my own works are not read so carefully, or I might not be thought the author of everything in my own books!)

Although I think that this passage is Pauline, I concede that some text critics far more capable than myself believe that it is a non-Pauline addition. I can only say that, if they are right, we may conclude quickly that Paul does not oppose women speaking in church. Because if Paul did not write it, this text clearly supplies no evidence for his position. I continue with this chapter, however, in the event that many of my readers, like myself, believe that these words are part of Paul's original letter to the Corinthians and must be understood in that context.

A Refuted Quotation?

Because Paul seems to cite and then to qualify or refute Corinthian positions

earlier in his letter (e.g., 6:12–14; 7:1–5),[21] it has naturally been proposed that he is following the same procedure here. In other words, on this view Paul is citing the Corinthian position in 14:34–35 and then refuting it in v. 36.[22] This would mean that Paul actually disagrees with the apparently chauvinistic view reported in 14:34–35.

Paul's use of the Greek particle ἤ (*ē*) in verse 36 has led some scholars to see a disjunction in thought in verse 36; they point to the fact that Paul elsewhere begins with this particle when he wishes to challenge the Corinthian Christians' behavior. In 11:20–21, for instance, he states the situation in Corinth and then goes on to challenge their behavior in 11:22.[23] Some have further appealed to the masculine form of "alone" in verse 36 to suggest that Paul is reproving men in the congregation for trying to keep the place of power for themselves.[24] But Liefeld is right when he responds: "What Paul negates by his use of the adversative Greek particle ἤ is not the command in verses 34–35 but the assumed disobedience of it, just as in the structurally similar passage 6:18–19."[25] Nor does the masculine form help the case; masculine forms are used in Greek whenever a group includes even one male, so Paul's use of the masculine form of "alone" may refer as easily to the whole congregation as to the men in particular.[26]

What ultimately leaves this explanation most unconvincing is that Paul's citations of the Corinthian positions elsewhere are at least partly affirmed, though seriously qualified.[27] Ancient literature includes many cases of a writer or speaker correcting an imaginary interlocutor, but where Paul is completely correcting such a statement, as in Romans, he introduces the objection with a rhetorical question or another kind of rhetorical device (e.g., Rom. 2:3–4, 21–23; 3:1)[28] and often answers with "May it never be!" (e.g., Rom. 3:4).[29] The evidence that Paul is here correcting a Corinthian position seems strongly outweighed by the evidence that he is not. The burden of proof remains on those who argue that 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 do not reflect Paul's own position.

Segregated Church Services?

Some readers have thought that Paul did not want women asking questions because they would have noisily disrupted the service even to question their husbands. These readers propose that husbands and wives met in separate parts of ancient synagogues,[30] and that the Corinthian church had carried this

practice of gender segregation over into its own worship services. Although these scholars concede that the church normally met in homes, they suggest that the practice could have carried over from the Corinthian Christians' earliest meetings in the synagogue (Acts 18:4–8).

But the evidence for this practice is problematic at best. Although the temple in Paul's day did not allow women into the court of Israel,[31] there is no clear architectural segregation in the average local *synagogue*.[32] The custom of gender segregation in the synagogue seems to have first arisen in the Middle Ages, and earlier rabbinic literature presupposes that men and women met together there.[33] Most ancient sites provide no clear indication of galleries, and if they did it would still not be clear that these were reserved for women.[34] Still more problematic is the absence of architectural evidence that would allow any gender segregation in the homes; very unnatural dividers would have had to have been constructed.

We may therefore safely dismiss this suggestion, unless new evidence on behalf of the segregation of women in Diaspora synagogues (and architectural features that would permit it in Corinthian house churches!) is forthcoming.

Abuse of Gifts of the Spirit?

As noted in our introduction to the various interpretations of 14:34–35, some writers have argued that Paul is disturbed by how some women were using certain spiritual gifts. His call for silence could thus be a prohibition of women's participation in prophecy or tongues or both. This suggestion has the merit of dealing with the context of the whole chapter, which *does* deal with abuses of gifts of the Spirit.

The main weakness of this argument, however, is that Paul permits women to pray and prophesy publicly in chapter 11, and in this context appropriate public prayer would include praying in tongues if it is accompanied by an interpretation. The context of spiritual gifts in chapter 14 does not require us to suppose that Paul's words to women address their use of such gifts; the specific context of church order is sufficient reason for Paul to digress.

Then again, it is possible that the women could be using spiritual gifts improperly, and that Paul seeks merely to *regulate*, not terminate, their speech. A number of scholars have pointed out that women in the Dionysus cult were given to frenzied shouting and have suggested that this sort of raving may have

carried over into the worship of Corinthian Christian women.[35]

This view cannot be rejected as impossible, but it has several weaknesses. The most obvious is that Paul enjoins silence and does not specify to what *extent* he might be regulating women's participation in the gifts. Another obvious objection is that Paul does not avail himself of the opportunity to condemn any associations with pagan cultic behavior their activity might have displayed (contrast 12:2). But other objections may also be raised against reading this passage in light of women's activity in the Dionysus cult.

It is true that women found cultic liberation[36] in the worship of Dionysus[37] and several other patron deities,[38] and that upper-class Roman men found such activities offensive.[39] It is not true that most of these cults were in actual practice limited to—or even predominantly composed of—women.[40] In the cult of Isis, a special protectress of women,[41] less than half the participants at Rome and Athens were women, and considerably smaller percentages obtained elsewhere.[42] Nor would ecstatic raving have characterized only women.[43] In the cult of Dionysus, which was no longer as prominent as it had been in an earlier period,[44] frenzied women called Maenads featured prominently;[45] but in the cult of the Asian mother-goddess Cybele, the main ecstatics were her castrated male priests called Galli.[46]

This is not to say that men did not think women were less emotionally stable than men; they usually did.[47] Nor is it to suggest that *outsiders* might not have been suspicious of frenzied women.[48] It is instead to question whether the cultural context of early Christianity really demands that we suppose that its women would have *actually* been more frenzied in their behavior than its men. Paul is not at this point addressing outside rumors about the Corinthian church; he is addressing the real behavior of women in the congregation. Typical ancient views on women's frenzy do not tell us how women acted; and texts on how women acted suggest that too many men acted in similar ways for us to apply this background only to female members of the Corinthian church.

In fact, 1 Corinthians 12:2–3 suggests that many of the Corinthians from pagan backgrounds had learned inappropriate forms of worship, forms which had carried over into their excesses in chapter 14. Paul in no way limits this background or its present consequences to the women, but assumes that this has affected many of his readers' ecstatic activity, whether they were women or men.

Those who believe that Paul here addresses an abuse of spiritual gifts like tongues or prophecy appeal to Paul's particular word for "speak" at this point, *laleō*. One writer points out that elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 14 this term usually

refers to speaking in tongues.[49] But the meaning of *laleō* cannot be so limited; it sometimes refers to teaching or to preaching the gospel elsewhere in the same letter (2:6–7, 13; 3:1; 9:8), to prophecy (12:3; 14:3, 29),[50] to revelations (prophecies? interpretations? 14:6), to tongues (12:30; 13:1; 14:2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 13, 18, 21, 23, 27, 28, 39), to anything except tongues (14:19), and to normal speech (13:11). The term "speak" does occur with tongues more frequently than with prophecy in this chapter, but for the simple reason that, in contrast to "prophesying," Paul had no single verb to express "speaking in tongues" without the word "speak."

We should note that Paul *nowhere* uses "speak" to mean "speak in tongues" without making it clear that he means "speak in tongues"—which he does not do in 14:34–35. Nor can the older, classical meaning of the verb "speak" here be used to support the theory that Paul is addressing ecstatic or babbling speech; by this period, it was an ordinary word for speaking and so occurs for ordinary speech throughout the New Testament.[51]

Judging Prophecies?

In another effort to grapple with the context, some have related this passage about women to their right to "judge" prophecies in the assembly (14:29), since this would include an authoritative teaching as well as a prophetic function. Thus, though the context does not mention teaching, on this view Paul prohibits the women from doing anything authoritative *like* teaching.[52]

But "judging" prophecy is probably the spiritual gift earlier called "discernment of spirits" (12:10, cognate term),[53] and nothing in chapter 12 indicates that only men exercised this particular spiritual gift. Judging prophecy is no more authoritative than the prophetic gift itself, which is ranked second only to apostleship in 12:28, immediately above the gift of teaching. Why should women be permitted to prophesy but not to exercise a related spiritual gift to discern whether someone else was speaking by the same Spirit? Were not all those who prophesied to exercise this gift (14:29)?

Further, there is little reason to associate "asking questions" here with challenging prophecies. In Old Testament schools of the prophets, a presiding prophet may have sometimes "supervised" the prophetic activity of the other prophets, guiding them toward charismatic maturity (1 Sam. 19:20).[54] Paul seems to have envisioned a charismatic worship in his own day where all the

prophets in a given church exercised the gift of discernment, testing prophecies and keeping young prophets in line (1 Cor. 14:29).[55] The New Testament offers no clear evidence that prophecies were tested with questions, nor any reason why a woman who wanted to challenge prophecies would profit by challenging them for her husband only after they returned home.

Thus it seems unlikely that judging prophecies is in view in this text.

Teaching?

Although Paul may not be addressing women's abuse of prophecy or tongues, at least the suggestion that he is doing so could derive some support from the context. The same might be said for judging prophecies, unlikely as this proposal is on other grounds. But one view that has *no* support in the context is that Paul's requirement that women be silent just means that they are not allowed to *teach*. Nevertheless, some writers propound this view.

For instance, Knight interprets 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 in light of 1 Timothy 2:11–14 and says that the former passage therefore forbids women to teach men. Although he seems to think that this prohibition of women's teaching is universal, he believes that the prohibition of women asking questions in the service (1 Cor. 14:35) is directed only to the situation in Corinth.[56] Why he regards as universal a prohibition that is not even explicitly mentioned in the text, as against one that is, is not quite clear.

Since no contextual evidence favors this position, there is little more to say about it. But Paul here actually opposes something more basic than women teaching in public: he opposes them learning in public. Or put more accurately, he opposes them *learning* too loudly in public. This was, as we argue below, an issue related to ancient culture that no longer relates to women as a group.

ASKING QUESTIONS IN CHURCH

It is true that Paul's language ("women may not speak in church") sounds more general than the specific example he goes on to give of women not being allowed to speak. But if Paul had in mind a specific situation that the Corinthians were experiencing, he could have stated it generally without having to explain it to his readers in Corinth. We might have to infer that situation from what he says, but the Corinthian Christians already knew it, so his argument would not suffer from any lack of clarity for them.

We can thus deduce only from clues in the text whether he is addressing a specific situation or all situations in general. On the one hand, Paul could be addressing a specific situation by applying a general principle, which would mean that he is saying: "Your women should stop asking questions, because women should always be silent." This universal silence cannot be what he means since, as we argued above, Paul did allow women in Corinth to pray and to prophesy. On the other hand, he could be making a general statement applicable only to certain types of conditions, for instance: "Your women should be silent because they are making too much noise."

We argue here that Paul's statement is meant to apply only to certain types of conditions. He does, of course, have a general principle in mind, and this principle has to do with church order: people should not disrupt worship services anywhere. But this does not mean that all women should always be silent in all churches; Paul tells these Corinthian women to be silent in church because he does not want them to interrupt the Scripture exposition with irrelevant questions anymore. Like the issue of head coverings, this activity could not have failed to create severe social tensions in the church.

It is doubtful that this particular problem obtained in most other churches in the Mediterranean world. Indeed, if this is the point on which Paul appeals to the custom of the other churches (14:33, contrary to our translation above), he may do so because women were not interrupting other churches' services.

The only kind of speaking *specifically* addressed in 14:34–35 is that the wife should ask her husband questions at home, rather than continuing what she is doing. Unless Paul changes the subject from women's silent submission (v. 34) to their asking questions (v. 35a) and then back again (v. 35b), this must be the issue he is addressing. (That Paul switches back and forth from one subject to another is made unlikely by the fact that he predicates v. 35a on v. 35b, "*for* it is inappropriate.") What she is doing, then, presumably, is speaking up, asking questions to learn what was going on during the prophecies or the Scripture exposition in church.[57]

If it is the *prophecies* that she is interrupting, her purpose is not to judge the prophecies (as some have suggested above), but to "learn" (14:35). This could mean that she wants to inquire of the word of the Lord through the prophets (cf. 14:31). The problem with this suggestion is that it would fail to explain Paul's alternative: she can get the same information from her husband at home. Will her husband necessarily be as prophetically endowed as the prophets at church, and will she necessarily be unendowed (cf. 11:4–5)?

What is almost certainly in view is that the women are interrupting the *Scripture exposition* with questions. This would have caused an affront to more conservative men or visitors to the church, and it would have also caused a disturbance to the service due to the nature of the questions. What is the cultural situation in which asking questions during an exposition would most naturally be a problem?

Why Were the Women Questioning?

The women are asking questions to probe what the speaker is saying during the church service. Although questions could be used to teach as well as to learn, [58] the issue here is learning, because this is what these women can get as easily from their husbands at home (14:35). (Nearly all Greek women in Paul's day were married.) Questions were widely used in learning. They needed to be asked in an orderly way, as a Jewish source (probably second century) indicates:

> A sage who enters—they do not ask his opinion immediately, [but wait] until he has settled down. And so too a disciple who came in—he has not got the right to ask a question until he has settled down. [If] he came in and found them engaged in discussion of a law, he should not jump into their discussion until he has settled down and knows what they are talking about.[59]

Perhaps more relevant to the context of the Corinthian church is the way public lectures were conducted by teachers in the broader Greco-Roman world. Plutarch says that it is important to ask lecturers questions only in their field of expertise; to ask them questions irrelevant to their discipline is rude.[60] Worse yet are those who challenge the speaker without yet understanding his point:

> But those who instandy interrupt with contradictions, neither hearing nor being heard, but talking while others talk, behave in an unseemly manner; whereas the man who has the habit of listening with restraint and respect, takes in and masters a useful discourse, and more readily sees through and detects a useless or a false one, showing himself thus to be a lover of truth and not a lover of disputation, nor froward and contentious.[61]

This principle is particularly applicable to uneducated questioners who waste everyone's time with their questions they have not bothered to first research for themselves:

> For when they are by themselves they are not willing to give themselves any trouble, but they give trouble to the speaker by repeatedly asking questions about the same

> things, like unfledged nestlings always agape toward the mouth of another, and desirous of receiving everything ready prepared and predigested.[62]

So also those who nitpick too much, questioning extraneous points not relevant to the argument.[63] It was rude even to whisper to one another during a lecture, so asking questions of one another would also have been considered out of place and disrespectful to the speaker.[64]

Why would the women in the congregation have been more likely to have asked irrelevant questions than the men? Because, in general, they were less likely to be educated than men. Most Jewish women knew less of the law than most Jewish men, and most Greek women were less accustomed to public lectures than were their husbands.[65]

Of course, some Greek and Roman women studied philosophy,[66] but their numbers, in comparison with the men, seem to have been very small.[67] Further, few of the women in the Corinthian congregation would have belonged to the aristocratic class; and among the working classes, husbands might have generally been more likely to hear public philosophical lectures in the agora than their wives. Girls as well as boys were educated during this period,[68] but, among those who could afford it, older students who went on to study philosophy or rhetoric were normally men.

The contrast between men's and women's education is more dramatic, where we can examine it, in ancient Judaism. The case should not, of course, be exaggerated. Women must have heard some Torah teaching regularly in the synagogues (Acts 17:4; 18:26),[69] probably often learned some Bible teaching from their parents,[70] and were presumably sometimes expected to join the father in teaching the children, especially when they were young.[71] It was not unnatural for a wife or daughter of a rabbi to be able to cite Scripture accurately and effectively.[72]

But the rabbis did not normally feel that women needed Torah as much as men did. An early second-century rabbi wanted women to learn enough Torah at least to understand the procedure to be followed if they were suspected of adultery;[73] knowing this passage could serve as a good deterrent from giving your husband any reason to suspect you! One of his colleagues, however, taught, "Whoever teaches Torah to his daughter, it is as if he teaches her sexual satisfaction."[74] A later comment on this second rabbi's view charges that it is better for the words of Torah to be burned[75] than for them to be given to a woman.[76] This became the prevailing view among the later rabbis, and all our

Jewish sources point in the direction that girls, unlike boys, did not receive much Torah training.[77]

Like minors and slaves, women were excluded from some obligations of the law,[78] such as the obligation to wear tefdlin (phylacteries)[79] or to dwell in *sukkoth* ("booths" or "tents") during the Feast of Tabernacles.[80] They were exempt from study of the Torah,[81] perhaps, as Wegner suggests, because the rabbis feared that too much education would liberate their women.[82]

Although occasionally a woman mastered the Scriptures (e.g., Beruriah, wife of R. Meir),[83] women who sought to expound Torah as authorities on it were usually not received by their male colleagues. The sages ruled that women were not to be appointed as officials,[84] and we never read of rabbis ordaining women disciples to be rabbis. We know of one rabbi who followed a different practice: Jesus had women among his disciples (Luke 10:39; cf. 8:1–3; Mark 15:41) and chose them as witnesses of his resurrection (Matt. 28:1–10; Luke 24:1–11; John 20:10–18). But we may suspect that most first-century Jewish men in Palestine agreed with what became the rabbinic consensus: as one first-century Jewish writer, Josephus, puts it, even the testimony of a woman is unacceptable, "because of the levity and temerity of their sex."[85]

We do not have to assume that Jewish women were equally repressed in all parts of the Mediterranean world, but Philo and Josephus, both Jewish authors writing in Greek, do not substantially improve our picture of the educational status of Jewish women.[86] Perhaps in traditional hellenistic areas like Egypt women would have been less educated, whereas more well-to-do Jewish women in places like Sardis would have been more educated. But our point is that we have good reason to believe that women were usually considerably less trained in the Scriptures than their husbands, and hence more prone to err or to ask irrelevant questions.

What then do Paul's directives mean in such a context? His instruction that they stop asking such questions would solve the immediate problem. But if a woman (or someone else) was less educated and could not ask proper questions, was she then to refrain from asking questions altogether? Assuming that the husbands generally had a better knowledge of what was going on because their background was normally better, Paul expected them to help their wives.

When Paul suggests that husbands should teach their wives at home, his point is not to belittle women's ability to learn. To the contrary, Paul is advocating the most progressive view of his day: despite the possibility that she is less educated than himself, the husband should recognize his wife's intellectual capability and

therefore make himself responsible for her education, so they can discuss intellectual issues together. We find this perspective in Plutarch. In writing to Pollianus, he suggests that Pollianus learn philosophy well: "And for your wife you must collect from every source what is useful, as do the bees, and carrying it within your own self impart it to her, and then discuss it with her, and make the best of these doctrines her favourite and familiar themes."[87] Knowing philosophy, he contended, would make a woman virtuous.[88]

Of course, Plutarch's view is not entirely complimentary toward women; he believes that of themselves they produce base passions and folly, and need a man's input to straighten them out.[89] Here the comparison between Paul and Plutarch ends, since there is no indication that Paul regards women as more inherently incomplete than men are—indeed, earlier passages in his letter would suggest that he certainly believes otherwise (1 Cor. 7:32–35; 11:11). But Paul would surely agree with Plutarch that a woman can and should learn, and that her husband should take an active interest in her development as a mature person. Paul proposes teaching one's wife at home as a long range solution to the lack of biblical education that characterized the inappropriate questioning.

What Kind of Silence?

As noted above, a prohibition of literally all speech by women here would keep us from being able to take the "all" of other verses in the context literally (e.g., 14:31), and would contradict 11:4–5. More reasonably, as we have argued above, Paul's words merely *limit* speech in public settings; Paul is opposing only the irrelevant questions some women have been asking during the teaching part of the church service.

Yet Paul's injunction to even a qualified silence for women might have appealed to his culture; a quiet demeanor was considered a necessary characteristic of a submissive wife in many ancient circles.[90] But if Paul recommends a quiet demeanor for women at Corinth, would he recommend it for all cultures? And does a quiet demeanor signify the same attitude in all cultures? Many men today would rather know what their wives are really thinking than be forced to speculate about it. Is quietness equivalent to submission if her husband prefers her to be more vocal in expressing her views?

The women's silence (14:34) does not mean that they could not be prophetically inspired in their speech (cf. 14:28). The point is rather that

preserving church order (14:40) means preserving the common good by not scandalizing the culture. It was "shameful" or "disgraceful" for a woman to interrupt the service with her questions (14:35) the same way that it was "shameful" or "disgraceful" for a woman to have her head uncovered or hair cropped short (11:6): it offended the cultural sensitivities of those whom the church wanted to reach with the gospel.[91]

Silence, like asking questions, could be compatible with the attitude of a learner, if the learner was not yet in a place to ask questions. Silence was sometimes used as a moral discipline or a form of submissive demeanor for a student.[92] We will examine this issue in slightly more detail when we address 1 Timothy 2:11–12 in the following chapter.

"As Even the Law Says"

Much discussion has focused on Paul's appeal to the law to substantiate his claim that wives should be submissive to their husbands and so be silent in church. Although very few people use Paul's biblical argument from creation in 1 Corinthians 11 to argue that all women should cover their heads today, many view the allusion to the law in 14:34 as transculturally binding.

Before we turn to the question of whether Paul would apply this allusion to all cultures, we should ask what text or texts he has in mind when he says "the law." Some writers feel that he is using rabbinic law, rather than biblical law, since no Old Testament passage says quite what Paul says here.[93] This interpretation might work if Paul is citing someone else's saying and then refuting it,[94] but we have discounted that idea above. Since Paul nowhere else refers to rabbinic law as "the law," and since it is unlikely that his readers would have assumed that he meant something different than what he usually meant by the phrase, this suggestion is improbable.[95]

The ambiguity of this possible reference to the law has been cited by those who feel that this text is an interpolation added by a later writer. Fee points out that Paul nowhere else appeals to the law absolutely, and that when Paul refers to the law, he always cites the text; therefore, this passage is not from Paul.[96]

But Paul sometimes does refer to the whole law as teaching something in a general way.[97] The term "law," or the combination "Law and Prophets," could be used rather loosely to refer to the Old Testament writings as a whole (e.g., 14:21, a quote from Isaiah).[98] In this case, Paul might refer to the *general*

subordination of women in the Old Testament period, which is probably how Josephus (another first-century Jewish writer) uses the term when he says that "the law" enjoins the wife's submission.[99] Earlier Paul said that he became "under the law" to those who were "under the law," to win everyone, to relate to everyone, and to avoid causing anyone to stumble (1 Cor. 9:20). It is not unreasonable to suppose that Paul's motives are the same here: even though he does not require believers to keep all the stipulations of the law, he expects them to respect standard customs that could derive support from the law.

If a specific text is in view, it is more likely that Paul is arguing again from the creation order (Gen. 1) than that he is arguing from the results of the Fall (Gen. 3:16), which he would not regard as the ideal of God's kingdom.[100] In this case, we would need to regard his argument the same way we understand the creation order argument for head coverings (as in our preceding chapter).

But whether Paul means the law in general, or the creation order in particular, he is probably calling upon the law to support the wife's submission rather than her silence. As we shall note in chapter 5 (on Eph. 5), the Christian ideal does not remove the common ancient ideal of the wife's submissiveness; it merely adds the requirement that the husband join her in it. In this case, the wives are to submit themselves by following the propriety required of them to maintain church order.

This Is How It Is Done

Paul's final appeal (1 Cor. 14:36–38) is similar to his closing appeal in 11:16: This is just how it is done. To those who think the Spirit inspires them to challenge this injunction on church order, Paul points out that there are also people endowed with the prophetic gift on the other side of the question, including Paul himself. Indeed, Paul, the apostolic founder of their church, is certainly well endowed with the Spirit of prophecy, and his advice should thus be heeded (14:36–37; cf. 7:40).[101] The one who did not listen to Paul's injunctions would be in trouble not merely with Paul but with God (14:38).[102]

But as clearly as Paul's wisdom was God's wisdom for the situation in Corinth, applying it to situations for which it was not intended would be a misapplication of God's wisdom. Those who thought that they were spiritual enough to decide the case against Paul had to reckon with his spirituality. But the fact that Paul addresses his argument in this particular letter to the specific situation in

Corinth, and that his injunction to silence cannot contextually mean more than that the women should not ask ill-conceived questions during public lectures, mean that the inspired principle he articulates calls us to order in worship, not to the silence of women. It also has certain other obvious applications—for instance, seminary students who did not do their homework should not ask silly questions in class—but it certainly does not apply today to women on the basis of their gender.

CONCLUSION

Paul's point is that those who do not know the Bible very well should not set the pace for learning in the Christian congregation; they should instead receive private attention to catch them up to the basics of Christian instruction that the rest of the congregation already knows. In Corinth, the issue had come to a head with uneducated women interrupting the Scripture exposition with questions. Paul suggested a short-range and a long-range solution to the problem in his instructions on how to bring order back to the Corinthians' church services. The short-range solution was that the women were to stop interrupting the service; the long-range solution was that they were to learn the knowledge they had been lacking.[103]

3

Learning in Silence—1 Timothy 2:9–15

We now come to the only explicit prohibition in the entire Bible against women teaching, and one of only two texts that seem to appeal to the creation order to subordinate women in some manner (the other enjoins only that women cover their heads).[1] It would be surprising if an issue that would exclude at least half the body of Christ from a ministry of teaching would be addressed in only one text, unless that text really addressed only a specific historical situation rather than setting forth a universal prohibition. Since this passage seems to conflict with other passages where Paul commends the ministries of women, we will examine the cultural situation that may be addressed here.[2]

It should be noted in passing that the authorship of 1 Timothy is frequently debated in scholarly circles, and even more frequently simply assumed not to be Pauline. It is nearly impossible to be trained in biblical scholarship these days and not be forced to deal with this position, and my own training is no exception, although I stand among the minority of scholars who claim that 1 Timothy is Pauline.[3]

For the purposes of this book, however, the issue of authorship is not ultimately critical; although I will argue on the premise that 1 Timothy is written by Paul, those who hold that it was not written by him usually grant this letter less authority in church practice. Further, if it is not written by Paul, many of this book's arguments about historical situations would still hold true. Finally, the view that 1 Timothy was not written by Paul is rarely held by those who argue women's subordination from this passage anyway,[4] and it is the arguments of those subordinationists that this book is meant to address. The same may be said for Ephesians (see the following three chapters), whose authorship is challenged often but less frequently than that of 1 Timothy.

THE CONTEXT: PUBLIC PRAYER

This passage, like 1 Corinthians 11, seems to assume women's right to pray in public. That Paul's instructions about women's apparel and teaching deal with women's role in public prayer is suggested by his admonitions to men about prayer in the preceding context.

The passage begins by exhorting public prayer for rulers and all who are in authority (1 Tim. 2:1–2).[5] This continued a standard Jewish custom practiced in the temple and synagogues. Throughout the Roman Empire people showed their loyalty to the emperor by offering sacrifices and prayers to him or on his behalf. To be sure, Rome exempted the Jewish people from having to pray *to* the emperor, but it nevertheless required that they pray *for* him.[6] Sacrifices and prayers for his health were offered in the temple until 66 CE,[7] and their cessation in that year signalled nothing short of revolt against Roman rule.[8] Naturally, Christians, eager to show that they were not anti-Roman,[9] would be inclined to demonstrate their loyalty by offering public prayer for Roman officials.[10] By doing this they hoped for the gospel to spread more freely (2:3–7);[11] proper behavior toward the state could function as part of one's witness (Titus 2:10–14; 3:1–8).

In this context of public prayer, Paul specifically calls on the men to pray in a certain way—forsaking anger and conflict. This could reflect conflict among the men in the church (1 Tim. 3:3; 6:4–5),[12] or a more widespread association of anger with the male gender.[13] The image of pure hands is common in Greek[14] and Jewish[15] texts, and hands were lifted for supplication and praise according to both Jewish[16] and Greco-Roman[17] texts and art. Paul requires that men "everywhere" pray with uplifted, pure hands. ("Everywhere" means either that this requirement is universally applicable,[18] or that he is addressing the rule to a number of different house churches in Ephesus.)[19]

Although the grammar is not clear on this point, the "likewise" of 2:9 probably suggests that Paul, who has just instructed the men how to pray, now turns to instructing the women in the same way.[20] As in 1 Corinthians 11, women are not silenced in church; they are permitted to pray. Since most synagogue prayers were offered by men,[21] this freedom is significant. But the fact that Paul's exhortations to them are more detailed than those given to men indicates that there are some special problems relating to the women in the Ephesian congregation, and these problems break down naturally into two categories of exhortation, one concerning dress codes, and the other concerning teaching. The women seem to be erring on these two points; the first error is inappropriate in the context of public worship,[22] and judging from Paul's language, the

second error is worse than inappropriate.

WOMEN'S DRESS CODE

Paul here seems to regulate women's dress, and multitudes of preachers have exploited this passage for a variety of fashion purposes (from requiring clothing in general, which is probably helpful, to requiring specific styles of clothes, often as antiquated as possible). But Paul is less concerned with prohibitions like our modern ones (such as no blue jeans in church) than he is with people adorning themselves to attract glances from congregants of the opposite gender or to show off their wealth or new fashions in church. While various churches have different cultural traditions of appropriate church clothing, the issues of intentionally suggestive attire and (particularly) of extravagantly expensive attire unfortunately receive considerably less attention in churches these days, and this is what Paul is addressing.

Ancient Views on Adornments

Special adornments were not only permitted but blessed by Jewish teachers of the second century and later.[23] Rabbi Akiba, who permitted a husband to divorce his wife if he found someone more beautiful, said that wives could wear makeup and deck themselves out for their husbands.[24] Some later teachers said that God plaited Eve's hair before bringing her to Adam.[25] These teachers claimed that woman, being Adam's flesh, goes bad without adornment just as meat goes bad without spices.[26] Of course, it was recognized that the adornment was only for her husband (or perhaps for a marital prospect),[27] not for others. But, as we shall point out below, many earlier Jewish teachers looked on such adornment less favorably,[28] reflecting a tendency against excessive adornment found elsewhere in ancient Jewish and other Greco-Roman literature.

Physical beauty was emphasized and packaged in antiquity, just as it is today. It was treated as a "virtue" of the body.[29] Particular features sometimes associated with it in Greek literature are tallness,[30] thick, dark eyebrows,[31] and golden hair with pale skin,[32] though some writers who commented on the matter pointed out that standards of beauty varied from culture to culture.[33] But while a woman's beauty was a good thing in itself, a "virtue," it is often portrayed as a dangerous temptation to men.[34] In Greek romances, it induces love even

involuntarily.[35]

Women who wanted to attract men would not settle for their natural beauty; those who could afford it would adorn themselves beyond their natural endowments with gold and other decorations,[36] especially adorning their hair.[37] Jewish traditions viewed these as tools of enticement to sexual sin.[38] According to one of these texts (of uncertain date), women used this evil ploy as the only way they could gain power over men.[39]

This was not, however, the only purpose of adornments, especially adornments of the hair. Well-to-do women in this period wore elaborate hairstyles, following the constantly changing, newest fashions.[40] This practice drew considerable criticism from the moralizing editorialists of the day.

Ostentation of wealth in general was commonly mocked by philosophers. For instance, Diogenes was said to have been invited to the house of a rich young man that was so richly adorned that the philosopher had nowhere to spit—except on his host.[41] Socrates was similarly said to have complained that he felt comfortable wearing the same cloak year-round, but that some changed garments more than once a day.[42] Plutarch said that it was not good for youths to wear gold,[43] and that men should set the example for their wives by avoiding all extravagance.[44] The Stoic Musonius Rufus declared that the wise man would live simply, seeking clothing that is useful rather than that which attracts attention.[45]

But the ostentatious extravagances of well-to-do women were especially criticized.[46] The satirists, who were an ancient combination of talk-show gossips and slanderous tabloids, portrayed such women as beating innocent slaves for making a mistake with their hair,[47] as spending themselves into poverty for luxuries,[48] and, worst of all, as decking themselves out splendidly only to keep their adulterous paramours happy.[49]

Some writers may have voiced other criticisms. One could have been that such glamorous dress would induce jealousy among other women, and since an honorable woman did not wish to be envied by other women,[50] this was dishonorable behavior. Excess clothing was part of well-to-do women's desire to flaunt their wealth. Plutarch modestly concludes that if women were not allowed to dress up so much they would stay at home as they ought to![51]

Paul's language here resembles that of other ancient writers on the subject, and Paul presumably means the same thing they did. (Otherwise his ancient readers would have had a hard time catching his point.) His problem with excessive adornment is that it is ostentatious and calls attention to its wearer. As

David Scholer notes,

> there is no question that in the cultural context of the early church the rejection of external adornment was part and parcel of a woman's submission to her husband and a recognition of her place among men in general. External adornment was clearly seen as indicative of two most undesirable characteristics: (1) sexual infidelity; and (2) materialistic extravagance.[52]

The artificial augmentations of beauty Paul addresses here were the sort that only the wealthy could afford, and that turned men's heads as symbols of status inseparable from the cultural expressions of beauty they signified. In our day, contrary to what many might think, Paul's rebuke probably would have much more to do with church members' driving to church in BMWs or wearing the most expensive clothes than with their wearing blue jeans.

The True Adornment

The warning in 1 Timothy 2:9–10 is undoubtedly against *excessive* adornment. The similar admonition in 1 Peter 3:3 advises against depending on external adornments like ornate hair designs, gold, and clothing, but it clearly does not prohibit the wearing of clothing or arranging of hair altogether. Braiding hair was not unusual,[53] so the reference in 1 Timothy may be to plaiting the hair with gold rather than to plaiting it and also wearing gold.[54] But that these women could be wearing gold at all suggests that they were well-to-do compared to most of the urban free.[55] This may even mean that they belonged to the class that ran the city or, more likely, that they were trying to pretend that they belonged in that social class.[56] This created the same sort of tension earlier initiated by uncovered aristocratic women in Corinth.

Paul's argument appeals to a common theme in ancient moralists: real beauty is that of one's character. This was true of men,[57] but even more so of women, who were expected to be "modest" in demeanor and dress.[58] A famous Spartan ruler was said to have "banished from the State all artificial enhancement of beauty" so that wives would be chosen only on the basis of true virtue.[59] One philosopher says that young women should realize that they are really honored for appearing "modest and self-respecting," not for their attempts to beautify themselves.[60] Other philosophical treatises exhorted women to dress in the simplest possible clothes.[61]

> The temperate, freeborn woman must live with her legal husband adorned with modesty, clad in neat, simple, white dress without extravagance or excess. She must

> avoid clothing that is either entirely purple or is streaked with purple and gold, for that kind of dress is worn by hetaerae when they stalk the masses of men. But the adornment of a woman who wishes to please only one man, her own husband, is her character and not her clothing. For the freeborn woman must be beautiful to her own husband, not to the men in the neighborhood.[62]

Modesty was often regarded as the true adornment.[63] Isocrates had long before exhorted:

> Consider that no adornment so becomes you as modesty, justice, and self-control; for these are the virtues by which, as all men are agreed, the character of the young is held in restraint.[64]

A later exhortation pretending to be from one woman to another advised:

> You should have a blush on your cheeks as a sign of modesty instead of rouge, and should wear nobility, decorum and temperance instead of gold and emeralds. For the woman who strives for virtue must not have her heart set on expensive clothing but on the management of her household.[65]

Diaspora (non-Palestinian) Jewish texts also came to reflect this ideal.[66]

It is thus relatively certain that the hearers in Timothy's congregation would have grasped Paul's point, had Timothy read the letter to them: dress and live simply and unenticingly, but be lavish in your spirit; decorate your heart with purity and humility. This may have irritated ostentatious members of the congregation then, just as it would irritate ostentatious members of our churches today if they understood it.

Some women today may feel that it was unfair for Paul to pick on extravagantly dressed, well-to-do women but not on men; but Paul no doubt did so because they were the ones normally addressed by this particular issue in this congregation and more generally in antiquity. This does not mean, however, that Paul would not have addressed the same counsel to the men had they been creating a similar disturbance (difficult as this would have been in that culture). Paul would certainly not want men to dress in a manner that caused women to stumble, either. After all, 1 Timothy 2:8 tells only men to avoid wrath and disputing when they pray, but Paul hardly wanted women to pray in wrath and disputing!

WOMEN TEACHERS?

Paul gives several injunctions that could be taken to mean that he opposes

women teaching. He calls on them to learn "quietly," and forbids them to teach in such a manner as to "take authority" over a man. But each of these statements must be understood in its own cultural context to be read the way Paul wanted his first readers to understand it.

Silence

It is possible that Paul here imposes the same sort of silence on women that they faced in many other religious contexts of the day, including most synagogues for which we have evidence.[67] This would imply that he changed his mind after he wrote 1 Cor. 11:4–5. But it is also possible that he imposes on new learners the same spirit of quiet submission that was normally appropriate for novices in his day. He could even mean what he meant about learning quietly in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35: learn the basics before you try to challenge your teacher.

Silence was an appropriate way to learn except when one had a thorough knowledge of the subject.[68] Some teachers purportedly even required long periods of silence from their pupils, probably as a form of moral discipline.[69] When Paul admonished the women to be silent in 1 Corinthians 14:34, he used a stronger term than he uses here, but the same principle may apply to both: they were to learn, but not by disrupting the whole assembly with unlearned questions. An admonition to learn in silence could also be an admonition to stop talking and pay attention to what was being said (cf. Acts 15:12; 21:40; 22:2), and need not mean that the person was forever to remain quiet (1 Cor. 14:28; cf. 14:30). This presumably relates to the specific situation in Ephesus suggested in 1 Timothy 5:13—many younger women were making the rounds with foolish talk, trying to teach but not knowing what they were talking about.[70]

The word used here for "silence" normally refers to respectful attention or a quiet demeanor.[71] The *whole* church is exhorted to this kind of quiet lifestyle with the same word in this very context (2:2), demonstrating that Paul refers to a certain attitude, not to complete muzzling. (Like the men's prayer without wrath or disputing in 2:8, this could have been applied equally strongly to either gender causing the problem.) Paul's reason for specifically addressing this admonition to the women is probably the same as his reason in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35: they were not yet taught.

Usurping Authority?

Paul warns against women "teaching in such a way as to take authority," but it is not exactly clear what the Greek term here translated "take authority" means. Does he mean "accept a position of authority"? Or does he mean "seize authority in an overbearing way"? Or could he mean even "to proclaim oneself originator"? Scholars are divided on the issue.

Kroeger finds evidence that the term can mean "to proclaim oneself the author or originator of something," and suggests that Paul here combats the Gnostic-type myth that woman is man's source.[72] While this does make excellent sense of the following context, most of her lexical evidence is from the patristic period (when it could also mean "have authority"; see below), as is the relevant myth. Her case works well if 1 Timothy is written by someone much later than Paul, but in Paul's period it is unlikely that his readers would have automatically understood the term so narrowly.

In contrast to the claims of some other writers,[73] Scholer observes that this term usually does carry a negative sense of "domineer" or "usurp authority."[74] We could thus read Paul's phrase as, "I am not allowing a woman to teach in such a way as to domineer over men." On this reading, Paul, who wants women to "learn quietly," does not want them to teach disruptively—something he also would have forbidden men to do.[75] This is not a new suggestion; it was proposed by evangelical supporters of the women's movement in the 1800s.[76]

Moo suggests that the term may mean either "have authority" or "usurp authority," but he contends that the idea of usurpation should only be read in it if it is suggested by the context.[77] It is difficult to evaluate what nuance readers would have attached to the term because the meaning of the term gradually changed, from associations with murder in classical usage to "domineer" and, by the patristic period, to "exercise authority."[78] If 1 Timothy was written by a second-century writer in Paul's name, the term *probably* just means "exercise authority" (or perhaps "proclaim oneself originator"). If the letter reflects the language of Paul or his amanuensis, it could well mean "domineer," since it is different from and probably stronger than the term he usually uses.

If we assume Pauline authorship, then, Paul may merely prohibit teaching done in a domineering way. But assuming that Moo is correct that only the context will really determine what nuance Paul intends, we may ask what sense the context suggests. That Paul wants women to learn submissively and shortly thereafter invokes the Genesis language about Eve probably indicates that these women are not submitting to their husbands but rather are seeking to lord it over them (cf. Gen. 3:16).[79]

The evidence is not entirely clear, as Scholer observes, but Scholer is right that this is not Paul's usual term for exercising authority.[80] The context, which helps us reconstruct the situation, suggests that Paul may here be warning against a domineering use of authority, rather than merely any use of authority.

Specific Situation or General Rule?

First Timothy 2:11–12 clearly forbids women to teach in some sense, although most scholars, including those who think the passage disallows women elders, agree that it forbids them only to teach in such a way as to hold authority in some form.[81] Probably it only forbids them to teach in a way that usurps authority, and so seeks to domineer, although this is not absolutely clear. But even assuming that Paul's words actually prohibited women from teaching altogether, would he have applied this only to the women directly addressed by his letter (who were untaught),[82] or was he depending on a general principle applicable to all women in all times?[83]

Several arguments have been suggested to prove that Paul's instructions in this passage apply to all women in all cultures. Some of these arguments have nothing to do with the text of Scripture, for instance, the argument that the maleness of Christ is better represented through a male agent.[84] This argument reads like something out of Philo, who saw men as feminine before God, just as women were feminine before men, masculinity being the ideal spiritual state. But if Jesus' incarnation as a male means that ministers should be male, then it also means that they should be single, Jewish, give their teachings in Greek and/or Aramaic, and hang out with Galilean fishermen. I have never heard a persuasive argument for why Jesus' maleness must be represented by male ministers, but his singleness or Jewishness need not be.

Piper and Grudem argue that the well-educated Priscilla was in Ephesus when Paul wrote these words (2 Tim. 4:19),[85] so Paul forbade even well-educated women to teach authoritatively.[86] This point would certainly remove the force of our argument that Paul's injunction related only to the majority of uneducated women in Ephesus. It is not entirely clear, however, that Priscilla was already in Ephesus when Paul wrote 1 Timothy, since enough time had transpired between 1 and 2 Timothy for Paul to have been imprisoned in the interim.

But assuming that she was there, it is still hardly necessary to take Paul's general prohibition as applying to all cases. Paul no doubt means this as a general

statement that might admit certain obvious exceptions. If that answer sounds too simplistic it should be remembered that most writers stated principles this way. Paul's requirement that an overseer be "husband of one wife" (1 Tim. 3:2) is a case in point: the statement could not apply to Paul and probably could not apply to Timothy, either.[87] Does his general prohibition nullify his own teaching and that of Timothy, whom no one was to despise (4:12)?

A more persuasive argument for the universal import of this passage is that it is stated in a universalistic manner. George Knight III says that 1 Timothy 2:11–12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34 "are clearly the didactic passages on the subject," so other passages should be interpreted in the light of them.[88] But to this we would respond that other passages which show the practice of early Christians sanctioned by Paul (Appendix A) must qualify our understanding of anything else Paul says on the subject, since his "didactic" passages address specific churches and must be analyzed in the light of his whole teaching and practice.

Further, I believe that Knight is wrong in the way that he takes certain passages as didactic and other passages as not.[89] The author of 1 Timothy writes in another letter that *all* biblical texts are profitable for teaching (2 Tim. 3:16).[90] If Knight would object that some passages merely teach through concrete historical examples addressing specific situations (see 1 Cor. 10:11),[91] we reply that this is also how Paul's letters are to be read, for this is how they present themselves (e.g., Gal. 1:1–6; 1 Thess. 1:1–3). If "didactic" means that we can extract the passage from the situation it addresses, then *no* texts are didactic (including proverbs, which presuppose certain ancient Near Eastern customs and topics). If didactic means that the passage teaches us God's ways by illustrating how God has acted in concrete situations of the past, then all passages are didactic. Narrative, epistle, proverb, ethical admonition, prophecy, and apocalyptic are all genres with some degree of overlap, but "didactic" is not such a useful category, especially in the case to which Knight applies it, where one of his "didactic" passages and one of his nondidactic passages are from the same epistle.[92]

Against Knight and others who read this text as transcultural, arguments can be marshalled to demonstrate that this passage addresses a specific situation in the church at Ephesus. Several different reasons may be suggested for why women in this congregation must not teach. One is that church leaders in God's household exercised authority over different social groups in the household differently, as a householder would to members of his house (1 Tim. 5:1–2).[93] It would be much harder for a woman to fulfill this function in that society.

Given the pressures the church was facing at this point, women who tried to hold a teaching office could thus contribute to outsiders' gaining a negative impression of Christianity, which is a major issue in 1 Timothy and the other letters ("Pastoral Epistles") written about this time. This is not to say that Paul would have therefore excluded women from this office, but to suggest that fewer women would have sought it and that Paul might have been more careful what kind of teaching role they would have been given.

A more important reason Paul may not have wanted these women to teach is that much of the false teaching in Ephesus was being spread through women in the congregation. This is not to say that women are more prone to lead others astray than men— the false teachers themselves seem to have been men. But in that culture the uneducated women seem to have provided the network the false teachers could use to spread their falsehoods through the congregations (1 Tim. 5:13; 2 Tim. 3:6–7). This is probably because the women were not as well learned in the Scriptures as men were, as we pointed out in the preceding chapter.

Presumably, Paul wants them to learn so that they could *teach*.[94] If he prohibits women from teaching because they are unlearned, his demand that they learn constitutes a long-range solution to the problem. Women unlearned in the Bible could not be trusted to pass on its teachings accurately, but once they had learned, this would not be an issue, and they could join the ranks of women colleagues in ministry whom Paul elsewhere commends.[95]

Some readers believe that Paul's wording also shows that this passage was meant only for the specific situation in Ephesus. The present indicative verb in the clause "I *am not allowing* a woman to teach" is contrasted with the more forceful command that follows, "let her learn." These readers take the first clause, forbidding a woman to teach, as situationally conditioned in contrast to the second clause, ordering her to learn, which they read as a universal command.[96]

What is most significant about the wording of the passage, however, is that Paul does not assume that Timothy already knows this rule. Had this rule been established and universal, is it possible that Timothy, who had worked many years with Paul, would not have known it already? Paul often reminds readers of traditions they should know by saying, "You know," or "Do you not know?" or "According to the traditions which I delivered to you." In his letters to Timothy Paul appeals to "we know" (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:8), "faithful sayings" (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:15), and cites Timothy's knowledge of Paul's own life (2 Tim. 3:10–11). He does give general moral counsel relating to Timothy's situation at Ephesus, but quite

clearly not all his admonitions to Timothy are directly applicable universally (1 Tim. 5:11–14a, 23; 2 Tim. 4:13).

Since this passage is related so closely to the situation Timothy was confronting in Ephesus, we should not use it in the absence of other texts to prove that Paul meant it universally. In other words, we should not agree with Packer who suggests that, since there is doubt how Paul would apply this text in our culture, we should give him "the benefit of that doubt and retain his restriction on women exercising authority on Christ's behalf over men in the church."[97]

There are major problems with this writer's logic. First, if the matter is really in doubt, we should not be using it to pass judgment on other people's calls. A "fence around the law" interpretation was fine for the Pharisees, but Jesus' method of extrapolating from Scripture was to appeal to its intention and motive, not to let it mean all that it might legally mean for fear of contradicting it.

Second, this writer assumes that he is really giving the benefit of the doubt to *Paul,* an assumption that would need to be proved, and that is probably wrong. What if he is in fact contradicting what Paul believed by prohibiting women from authoritative positions of ministry? We cannot presuppose what Paul meant and then "give the benefit of the doubt" to this presupposed position.

Third, our evidence from elsewhere in Paul suggests that the matter is *not* in doubt; women are allowed to teach if they are adequately trained. Scandal would have arisen had Paul included women among his traveling companions, but once this fact is taken into consideration, the percentage of women colleagues Paul acknowledges is amazing by any ancient standards. (Because this evidence from elsewhere in Paul is important to our discussion, we provide a brief treatment of it in Appendix A.)

Perhaps if we do not know for certain whether we are right or wrong, we ought to give the "benefit of the doubt" to those who claim that God called them and who evidence the fruits of that call in their lives, rather than passing judgment on them.

DAUGHTERS OF EVE: 1 TIMOTHY 2:13–15

It is easy to argue that Paul's injunctions against women teaching in this passage are directed to a specific situation, not to all situations. It is, in my opinion, impossible to take them any *other* way once one has examined those

passages in Paul where women share in the ministry of God's word (see appendix A on that point).

But the nature of Paul's argument here complicates matters. As when he defends the use of head coverings for women, so here Paul bases his case on an interpretation of Scripture. That Paul bases his argument on the Old Testament creation narrative suggests that he is appealing to God's ideal plan, which ought to be followed by God's people throughout this age. This is not, however, the only way to read this passage, especially given his treatment of the same text in some of his other writings, particularly when he argues in favor of head coverings. "The woman's subordination from creation" is at any rate not the most obvious point of the text to which he alludes; it is in fact simply not what Genesis chapters 1–3 taken on their own terms teach, although this book is not meant to address those passages. Paul often makes his case by analogy, and when he cites Scripture does not always appeal to a universal principle to make his point, as we argued in chapter 1.

Eve in Jewish Tradition

The rabbis clearly had it in for Eve.[98] Her sinful act was often rehearsed in rabbinic literature: women march ahead of the bier because Eve brought death to the world;[99] they menstruate because Eve shed Adam's blood;[100] they kindle the Sabbath lights because Eve extinguished Adam's soul.[101] A later rabbi even claimed that Eve was created so that Adam would sin.[102] Occasionally the resultant curse of Genesis 3, rather than her sin itself, was used as grounds for her subordination.[103] Nor were the rabbis the only Jewish male commentators on the subject, as a Diaspora Jewish text indicates: "But the woman first became a betrayer to him. She gave, and persuaded him to sin in his ignorance. He was persuaded by the woman's words, forgot about his immortal creator, and neglected clear commands."[104] Interestingly, this writer excuses Adam, not Eve, by the claim of ignorance, whereas 1 Timothy 2:14 takes the reverse approach.

Eve's deception was a special matter of comment in Jewish texts. In the related works, Life of Adam and Eve and Apocalypse of Moses (Heb. ca. first century CE), Eve appears as a well-meaning fool who is repeatedly deceived and keeps getting the wiser Adam in trouble with God. In this story, God, Adam, Eve, and the serpent all recognize that humanity's fall is Eve's fault.[105]

One tradition said that Satan disguised himself to mislead Eve sexually or in

some other way besides the encounter described in Genesis 3.[106] As the story often goes, Satan or the serpent became jealous of Adam,[107] and so wished to kill him and take his wife.[108] Thus he entered Eden and corrupted Eve behind Adam's back.[109] But we cannot be sure how widespread this story was in Paul's day, and both Paul and his readers would have more likely thought of the account they knew from the Bible, namely, Eve's deception by the serpent at the tree. These other traditions merely reinforce the picture of Eve's gullibility and sinfulness.

Some of the rabbis did, however, explain Eve's sin at the tree as partly the fault of Adam. He had added to God's words when he relayed God's commandment to Eve; this was why she told the serpent that God had forbidden her not only to eat of the tree, but also to *touch* it.[110] In other words, the woman was deceived in part because she had not received the commandment directly from God, and the one who had passed it on to her had misrepresented it. This point may be significant to our discussion below.

Not only Eve but women in general were seen as more inclined to deception; it was usually assumed to be part of their weaker nature, according to general Greco-Roman[111] and Jewish[112] teaching. Of course, if one withholds education from a specific class of people on the assumption that they cannot learn, their subsequent lack of knowledge will be unjustly used to reinforce the conviction that they are not adept at learning; history is replete with examples of this practice. But 1 Timothy 2:14 bases the analogy on Eve's deception, not on the culture's low opinion of women's discernment; the context clearly shows that "the woman" in this passage refers to Eve, not to "woman" in a generic sense.[113]

How to Interpret This Passage

Paul does not say, "Women in Ephesus, learn quietly and don't teach (in some sense) because of the situation in Ephesus." Paul says instead, "Women in Ephesus, learn quietly and don't teach (in some sense), for Eve was created after Adam and was deceived, and you could become like her." It is easy to see why many readers take this passage as forbidding all women to teach.

The matter is not necessarily this simple, however. The "for" ("for Eve was created") can be understood either as the reason for the impropriety of Ephesian women's teachings or as an explanation of it. If we read the clause as an explanation rather than a cause of the impropriety of their teaching, Paul could

simply be drawing an analogy rather than making a universal argument.[114]

But if Paul is making arguments for why these women should not teach, it appears at first sight that he provides us with two of them here, rather than just one. The first is from the creation order: Eve was created second. The second is that Eve was deceived when she transgressed.

The creation order argument is the more problematic and difficult to fathom of the two, because it is hard to square with Genesis. The Genesis account, taken on it own terms, does not subordinate Eve because she was created second; it makes her an equal part of Adam—her creation was necessary for him to be complete. The Hebrew phrase "helper suitable for him," as is well known, denotes a role of strength ("helper" usually refers to God in the Hebrew Bible), and "suitable" may mean "corresponding to" or "equal to" (so that the woman is not viewed as a superior helper like God, nor as an unmatched creation like the animals).[115]

What then might Paul mean? There are at least three possibilities. The first is that Paul is exploiting the biblical account and twisting its meaning by ignoring its context. This suggestion would not appeal to most of us who think that Paul was writing under the Spirit's inspiration and those who hold this view would not accept Paul's case as a valid transcultural argument anyway. The second is that Paul is using the text in an ad hoc way to make a point but that, had he had more space, he would have qualified his point as he did in 1 Corinthians 11: woman was created second but she is really man's equal and interdependent partner.[116] Again, those who do not believe Paul's point to have been ad hoc in that passage must enforce women's wearing of head coverings in churches today (and perhaps explain why Paul does not explicitly appeal to "universal" head coverings to address the ornate hair of well-to-do women in 1 Tim. 2:9–10). The third possibility is that Paul intends to connect Eve's later creation to why she was deceived: she was not present when God gave the commandment, and thus was dependent on Adam for the teaching.[117] In other words, she was inadequately educated—like the women in the Ephesian church.

If we read Paul's injunction here as applying to all women in all cultures, then this passage must be understood to mean, "Eve was deceived, so all women are more easily deceived than all men." Otherwise he would not automatically exclude *all* women from teaching on this principle. On this reading of the text, Paul's argument is that any good man's teaching is better than any woman's (no matter how trained or devout), and that all women's teaching is necessarily invalid. But since Paul presupposes both male heretics and nonheretical women

in the congregation, it is unlikely that he means this.

A better way to read this text is as an analogy, the kind Paul draws from Scripture throughout his letters. He often applies biblical examples just to analogous groups within particular local congregations in his own day (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:1–12). In this case, Paul is drawing an analogy between the easily deceived Eve and the easily deceived women in Ephesus. Since Paul elsewhere uses Eve as an analogy for the gullibility of the whole Corinthian church (2 Cor. 11:3)[118]—the men no less than the women—it is clear that he does not simply regard Eve as a standard symbol for women, any more than the consequences of Adam's fall apply only to men in other Pauline passages (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:45–49).

At this point, we may complain that Paul should have qualified his case here, as he did in 1 Corinthians 11:11–12, if he wished us to understand that he was simply applying this illustration to the matter at hand. But Paul's illustration here covers the space of only two verses, and it may be too much to ask that such a brief illustration be qualified. If Paul was addressing only the issue in Ephesus, he was also writing the letter only to Timothy and the believers in Ephesus, and he would not have felt the need to explain to future generations that he was doing so. After all, if someone else later read the letter, Paul would assume that they would be smart enough to recognize that he was addressing his letter to a situation in Ephesus, as the letter as a whole claims to do. When we read Paul's message to our spiritual ancestors for its relevance to us, we ought to do so within the canon of his whole teaching and practice.

But, having said this, we should note that Paul may have qualified his point in this text after all. The only passage in his Bible that really spoke of women's subordination as a transcultural norm is the passage about Eve's judgment at the Fall. Eve's deception led to her subordination under man (Gen. 3:16). This is presented as part of the curse, and, like other aspects of the curse (labor pains, toil in the fields, sin, and death), does not need to be praised and enforced by church rules. But Paul may be saying in 1 Timothy 2:15, "Eve sinned and is a warning about what these women in Ephesus can do; but I must qualify my point: the curse that followed her sin is reversed for true followers of Jesus Christ."

1 Timothy 2:15: Saved through Childbearing

This passage is the climax of Paul's argument in 2:9–15,[119] and it must be related in some sense to what precedes it. The loose connective with the preceding verse may suggest that the image of Eve remains in 2:15.

There are at least three major ways to interpret this verse. The first is that women are saved because women are part of the plan of salvation, as evidenced in the great childbearing of Mary. Mary's childbearing reversed the effects of Eve's introduction of sin into the world.[120] The problem with this interpretation is that nothing in the context limits the childbearing to Mary's or suggests that Mary is in view.

The second is that despite Eve's sin, a woman can be saved if she lives righteously before God.[121] This verse can then mean either that she is saved through submitting to the curse of Genesis 3:16,[122] or that she is saved through fulfilling the roles necessary to be an appropriate witness in her culture. Given the specific language of this text (especially "propriety"), the latter view is more likely: they are saved "through the maternal and domestic roles that were clearly understood to constitute propriety (*sōphrosynē*) for women in the Greco-Roman culture of Paul's day."[123] This view makes good sense of the text and its context, and may be correct. I originally held this view, but reading ancient prayers for safety in childbirth eventually led me to concur with those who hold the third view.

The third position is that this verse refers to women being "brought safely through" childbirth. "Saved" means "delivered" or "brought safely through" more often in ancient literature than it means "saved from sin."[124] It is true that Paul nowhere else uses "saved" to mean "saved in childbirth," but it should be kept in mind that Paul nowhere else *speaks* of coming safely through childbirth. The most natural way for an ancient reader to have understood "salvation" in the context of childbirth would have been a safe delivery, for women regularly called upon patron deities (such as Artemis[125] or Isis[126]) in childbirth.[127]

Eve's sin was directly connected with the curse of a difficult childbirth in Genesis 3:16,[128] and in Jewish tradition this was developed to include death in childbirth.[129]

> Adam was the blood of the world. Because woman brought death upon him, she was put under obligation (to observe the law) of the blood of menstrual purity. Man was the dough offering of the world. Because she made him unclean, she was put under obligation (to observe the law) of the dough offering. Man was the light of the world. Because she caused him to be extinguished, she was put under obligation (to observe

> the lighting) of the (Sabbath) lamp. From this the Sages, blessed be their memory, said: For three offenses women die when they are giving birth: For carelessness in regard to menstrual purity, the dough offering and lighting the Sabbath lamp.[130]

Nor is this a strictly rabbinic reading of Eve's judgment; the very nonrabbinic Jewish work, Apocalypse of Moses, also indicates the view that she would "come near to lose [her] life from [her] great anguish and pains" at birth.[131] In the related Life of Adam and Eve, Eve's prayers in childbirth were not heard because of her sin, though Adam's prayers for her were heard.[132]

But as impiety delivered one over to the effects of the curse, so also piety could deliver one from certain effects of the curse.[133] The power to open barren wombs by prayer was sometimes attributed to pious men,[134] and priests were said to have fasted to prevent pregnant women from miscarrying.[135] An early Christian hymn even claims that Mary bore Jesus without any pain.[136]

It may thus be that Paul's promise that the women will be brought safely through childbirth is seen as a relief from part of the curse, from which believers will not be completely free until they share fully in the resurrection life of the second Adam, Christ (1 Cor. 15:45–49).[137] This would then qualify a connection between Eve's deception and the curse that might lead some of Paul's readers to assume that women must accept a subordinate role in the situation they faced in the Ephesian church because of Eve's sin.

At this point, someone could counter that Paul need not be qualifying the whole curse; Paul, after all, could still see the husband's rule over her (Gen. 3:16) as a valid part of God's plan until the curse is fully done away at the second coming of Christ. Paul's argument does not depend on this curse even to begin with, however, because the curse would have made a point much stronger than the one Paul wanted. Genesis 3:16 laments the effects of human sin as God's curse, but does not prescribe them as a normative rule we ought to follow, any more than the Fall's introduction of sin and death into the world is reason for us to promote sin and death. Paul does not appeal to the curse, but to Eve's sin; and here he merely makes plainer that the curse itself was never part of God's ideal plan for his people and that his appeal to the example of Eve's sin does *not* support the continuance of the curse.

Before the Fall, Adam and Eve together were to rule all things (Gen. 1:27–28). But after the Fall, Adam would rule his wife because, being stronger, he could force her to obey. She would desire to overcome him but be unable, and he would instead overcome and rule her. This is the best way to take the Hebrew of Genesis 3:16, given the parallel constructions in Genesis 4:7: sin's desire was

toward Cain, but God told him to rule it, i.e., overcome it. This is a picture of marital strife, and Paul appeals instead to the creation order to establish his point: mutual harmony, which in this case mandates the woman's silence and submission. Creation order mandates harmony, but Paul wants no one to misunderstand his appeal to Genesis: the curse has been affected by Christ's triumph, and elements of it are passing away.

CONCLUSION

There is a universal principle in this text, but it is broader than that unlearned women should not teach. If Paul does not want the women to teach in some sense, it is not because they are women, but because they are unlearned. His principle here is that those who do not understand the Scriptures and are not able to teach them accurately should not be permitted to teach others.[138] This text is unfortunately quite applicable today; there are all too many people teaching unhealthy interpretations of the Bible today, and most of them are men.

I have sometimes said tongue-in-cheek that this prohibition of incompetent teachers thus excludes from ministry those who prohibit women from teaching. This is, of course, an exaggeration; if God did not show mercy on us when our interpretations miss his point, none of us could count as competent (a warning not without merit; see Jas. 3:1–2). But in all seriousness, it dangerous thing to turn people from their call, or to oppose their call if it is genuinely from God. On what basis do any of us men who are called prove our call? We trust inner conviction and the fruit of holy lives and teaching and faithfulness to that call, and if these evidences are insufficient demonstration of divine calling in the case of our sisters, how shall we attest our own?

The logic of the case can be battled back and forth with ever-new arguments for years, but in the meantime, we are confronted with the issue of those who claim to be called by God, and with a harvest that is great but for which the laborers are few. My hope is that this chapter will open some minds and hearts to their own call from God, and other minds and hearts to receive the ministry of God's women servants whom God has anointed with his Spirit (Acts 2:18).