

Women, Preaching, the Bible and 1 Timothy 2

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As a female student and teacher of the Bible and someone who seeks to interpret and live out what it teaches faithfully, as well as an ordained minister and preacher, I often get asked how I interpret what the Bible has to say about women and preaching. This paper comes out of a class I have taught sharing some of my perspectives on that question. While I have studied and thought through these passages over some time and in some depth, I don't pretend to have them fully figured out or have the final word on how to read them.¹ I hope that I hold my perspectives with thoughtfulness and integrity, but also with grace and humility. What I do seek is to have is a consistent hermeneutic for how I read the Bible as a whole and to start first with the big picture of God's redemptive plan as revealed in the Scriptures before moving to specific texts.

For me, first and foremost, having both men and women preach the gospel points to the nature of the kingdom and the new creation. It is important to me to start at this big picture level on this topic, because I have had conversations that too often start from one particular verse in one particular passage of Bible as if there is a 'proof text' that can be used to give a full and final word. I find that an unhelpful framework when it comes to the Bible. The Bible isn't made up of individual context-less pieces of information called 'verses', any one of which can then form a lens through which the rest of it is read. I want to start with the big picture and read the Bible from its broader theological context.

The nature of the kingdom and the new creation

The nature of the kingdom Jesus lives and brings and the nature of the new creation he points towards is one in which there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free (Gal 3:26-29). The New Testament's great vision is one of unity where all are one. This doesn't mean differences are eradicated. Revelation's great vision of the new creation is one where people of every tribe and tongue sing with one voice (Rev 7:9-10). But the kingdom of God is a place where all the dividing walls between different groups have been broken down (Eph 2:14), whether between people of different race, different gender, or different status. Whatever barriers we use to divide people into 'us' and 'them'. I believe that the church is a glimpse of this new creation/kingdom community here and now. So we are calling people to the way things will be, not the way things have been. Thus we need people from both genders, all ethnicities, and various classes, to proclaim God's Word.

In practice, this highlights for me the importance of hearing different voices and perspectives. Too often we hear too many of the same voices – whether culturally, in age, in socioeconomic status, or

¹ Two organisations with helpful resources to look into this more are cbeinternational.org and juniaproject.com

gender – in the books we read and the speakers we listen to. Hearing repeatedly from the same perspective reinforces the same ideas and allows us to overlook our blindspots. God speaks through different people in different ways; different life experiences, perspectives and worldviews have something to teach us. This was brought home to me by an indigenous Australian friend a few years ago. I asked him what we as white Australian Christians need to hear from our indigenous brothers and sisters. He said something that has stuck with me because while I believe it, I had never thought of it in this context. He said, ‘we believe that the gospel is enculturated’. That is, we believe that the good news of God is lived out in real time and space through real people in particular cultures and that as that happens, we learn more about the *gospel* and about God from one another. ‘So,’ he said, ‘what do you have to learn from your indigenous brothers and sisters *about the gospel*’? This is not about lip service, or political correctness, or giving equal time for fairness’ sake. It is about the fact that God works through people who have different experiences and perspectives. We need each other. This is true regarding culture and regarding gender. The experiences that women have had are different from those of men, and multiple voices are important to give different perspectives.

Another comment that has stuck with me was from a visiting theologian who said ‘For too long men in our churches have been denied the voice and perspective of women.’² This has been a really helpful perspective for many men and women: the point is not that its ‘unfair’ that women have not been preaching but rather that our communities of faith have missed out by not hearing God speak through half of our people. The issue is the full flourishing of the church as the community that lives out the kingdom and points toward the new creation.

The calling and gifting of the Holy Spirit

Within that big picture, I want to hear what God’s word has to say and seek to live it faithfully. There are a number of biblical passages that not only encourage but *call* us to invite women and men to preach God’s Word. There are the gifts lists in books like Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Ephesians. These tell us that the Spirit gives gifts as He chooses; gifts including preaching, teaching, pastoring, and evangelism. These passages seem to me to be the starting point for understanding different ‘roles’ in the church. The Spirit gives different people different gifts and the practice of the church is the outworking of that. People in the New Testament don’t decide who does what; the Spirit gives as he determines (1 Cor 12:11) so that the church is built up until we all reach maturity (Eph 4:11-13). When people have argued that there are limitations on those gifts, in particular on one or two of those gifts, and that they are only for men, that undermines the whole idea of these passages, which is that the Spirit gives as He chooses. There are not two groups of gifts listed – those which the Spirit gives to anyone as He chooses, and those which the Spirit gives only to the men He chooses.

² Ellen Charry, Professor of Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary.

To take a verse like 1 Timothy 2:12, for example, as the proof text through which I read the rest of the Bible would fundamentally change how I read these passages. As a woman, if that were to be my hermeneutic, it would take large sections of the Bible and say ‘these are not for you.’ It would essentially say that these chapters of the Bible are written only for men because when Paul says ‘anyone’ he doesn’t really mean anyone; he doesn’t mean me. Similarly, there are many passages in the New Testament that call on followers of Jesus to proclaim the good news, to teach His word, to announce His kingdom. If there is a restriction due to gender on who can do those things and all those passages are to be read through that lens, then again I find that much of the New Testament does not apply to me.

Women in the Scriptures

I also look to the many examples of women throughout the Scriptures who take on all kinds of ‘roles’ in the community of faith. Yes, there are fewer women named than men, but when we read closely we see that it is not as small a number as some assume,³ and for the cultural context in which the biblical stories take place, the number is quite surprising. We have Old Testament prophets, women who speak forth the word of the Lord. Alongside Moses is Miriam, an example of different gifts given to different people. We find Deborah as a judge, leading the nation of Israel in an ongoing role even before she is called by God to rescue the people. In the New Testament we find women in all kinds of roles. In Romans 16:7 we have Junia who is named as ‘outstanding among the apostles’. Scot McKnight has written a passionate work about her place in church history.⁴ Clearly a feminine name, the obscuring of her gender by many English translations is an example of how we can sometimes be influenced more by our assumptions or cultural perspectives than by the text itself. In Romans 16:1 we have Phoebe who is a *diakonos*, a word usually translated as minister or servant and given to those serving in leadership roles in the early church. In Acts 18 we find Priscilla, a teacher in partnership with her husband Aquila. Some suggest the fact she is often named first suggests she had a more prominent role, but I don’t think it really matters. As a couple they teach and train Apollos. In Luke 10 we find the story of Mary and Martha, perhaps overlooked in this context. Mary is sitting at Jesus’ feet learning. In Jewish culture, the only reason to learn is so that you can teach. This is what Jesus did with his disciples. For three years, he taught them so that they might then go and teach others. Jesus explicitly welcomes Mary learning. If she is not then able to use that learning to teach others, what is the point? In the wider context of the Bible, we never learn so that we can be puffed up about knowing, it is always so that we can pass it on and teach others.⁵ We have the Samaritan woman in John 4, the first person to whom Jesus reveals Himself as the

³ David Scholer, “Women in Ministry: A Biblical Basis for Equal Partnership” notes 12 women named by Paul as ministry partners. <http://fuller.edu/About/Women-in-Ministry/Women-in-Ministry--The-Basis-in-Paul/>

⁴ Scot McKnight, *Junia Is Not Alone* (Kindle edition; Pathos Press, 2011)

⁵ I find it interesting that in Hebrew the verbs to learn and to teach are the same root, *lmd*, the latter being the *piel* or intensive form of the former.

Messiah and who becomes the preacher and proclaimer of the good news about him to her whole community. And of course we have Mary Magdalene, the first witness to Jesus' resurrection and the first proclaimer of that message.⁶

So it is within this wider biblical perspective, and in the light of women throughout the biblical narrative proclaiming and teaching the good news, that I read those particular verses that have been used to suggest limitations on the roles of women within the church. There are two passages, 1 Timothy 2:12-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, that on their face seem to restrict women from certain activities. I want to take these seriously and interpret them faithfully as I uphold the authority of Scripture. These two passages are found in letters from Paul to particular people in particular circumstances. This genre must be taken seriously when we read them, considering the setting into which they are written and the intended application of their words in that setting. This should not, however, become an excuse for not wrestling with their wider implications. In this paper, I will walk through a reading of 1 Timothy chapter 2 in some detail. I am using the NIV but will comment on the Greek at various points as well.

1 Timothy 2

The first letter to Timothy contains instructions, encouragement and advice from his mentor Paul on how the younger leader will conduct himself and lead the church faithfully. What follows is my reading of what we call chapter 2 of this letter. I have found the writings of others including N. T. Wright⁷ and Scot McKnight⁸ helpful, and yet I differ from their interpretations in some places and any mistakes that follow are most certainly my own. My wrestling with verses 12-15 seeks to read the passage within this wider literary context. I have found some discussions that start with verse 12 quite frustrating, because we are jumping into the middle of Paul's thinking. If I were to sum up this chapter as a whole (recognising that Paul is very good at talking about fifteen things at the same time!) I would suggest that his primary concern is the gospel and our public witness to it. The gospel is always Paul's big concern, particularly how it is being proclaimed to those who have not heard it. In this part of his letter to Timothy, he works through a few factors that might affect this.

Verses 1-7

First Timothy 2:1 usually gets pulled out when we have elections, calling us to pray for those in secular leadership in our communities. Paul gives the reason he is calling for this prayer in verse 2:

⁶ See Eunjoon Mary Kim, *Women Preaching: Theology and Practice Through the Ages* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004) who also notes the oral tradition of Mary Magdalene's life story as a preacher.

⁷ N. T. Wright, 'Women's Service in the Church: The Biblical Basis'

<http://ntwrightpage.com/2016/07/12/womens-service-in-the-church-the-biblical-basis/>

⁸ Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008)

that we might live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. He doesn't say here to pray for our leaders that they do a good job, or to pray that we get the right leaders, the latter of which was of course not the same kind of option in New Testament times when leaders were not chosen by the people! Now, of course we should pray for our political leaders in the difficult role they have, but Paul's primary agenda here is that we would be able to live out the gospel. If kings and leaders don't let us live lives that proclaim and point to the reign of Jesus, then it is the gospel that suffers. So we pray that we might be given the space to live as disciples of Jesus. Thus 'peaceful and quiet lives in godliness and holiness' seems to be a shorthand way of saying 'be the church' or 'live out the gospel!' We pray that nothing hinders our witness to the gospel.

Verse 3 continues that this is good, and pleases God, because he wants everyone to come to know him. The motivation is mission: God wants people to know him. Paul then wants to explain why this is, to reiterate the content of this good news at every opportunity he can, stating that there is one God and one mediator, Jesus Christ. I imagine Paul is thinking, 'let me tell you more about this gospel we want everyone to know'! And when he does that, as he often does, he comes to his own calling, in verse 7 reminding Timothy that he is an apostle and herald for the sake of the gospel. So for Paul, it is all wrapped up in being who we are called to be so that people might come to know Jesus because that is what God is always about and what he himself has given his life for.

Verses 8-10

Therefore, begins verse 8, and as the old saying goes, we need to ask, what is it there for? It links back to what Paul has just said: in light of the goal that the gospel might be preached so that people might hear it so that Jesus might be known. Paul addresses men first, then women. He does have some particular things he wants to say to each gender. We want to be able to live as gospel people so that people might come to know Jesus, and Paul seems to be aware of some things that might hinder that for men and women in particular.

Paul says two specific things to men: he wants them to pray and he wants them not to be angry or disputing. Why does he pick these topics for men? This is where we get into speculation, as he doesn't say. Was there a particular problem with the men in Ephesus getting into fights when they prayed? I don't know. Are men by nature more likely than women to fight? Perhaps. Whatever the contextual basis, this is the example Paul gives. This is one thing that could get in the way of our witness. If men gathering to pray are getting in to fights, then the gospel will suffer. What is at stake is their witness to Jesus; that's what is always at stake. But Paul also names a specific action in prayer: lifting up holy hands. This seems to be a cultural practice. Do we read it as a command for all men everywhere in all times and places when they pray? I've never heard a sermon that says men who pray without lifting their hands are sinning. And I don't think that is what Paul is trying to

say. I do think, however, that he might be trying to make a connection. If your hands are lifted up in prayer, what can't you be doing with your hands? Fighting! And the wider point seems obvious: if you are genuinely prayerful for and with one another, then you won't be arguing. The physical might be a demonstration of that, but it's not really about what your hands are doing. It's about what is going on inside you. Now, we could argue that in our culture or in the New Testament culture or in general that men tend to be more prone to fighting and getting into argumentative discussions. But that is certainly not a blanket rule; women can also fight and be argumentative when they want to be. We have to wrestle with the text and understand that this is an example that puts into practice Paul's wider point about living out the gospel faithfully for the sake of those who haven't heard it.

Then Paul turns to women and his first specific command to them is about how they dress. Again, there is an external element but the key is what is going on in their hearts. On the outside this is about dressing modestly, but on the inside it is about living lives that honour Jesus. Here we could ask the same questions as above: were women in Ephesus dressing in particularly unhelpful ways? Are women by nature more likely to focus on their dress? I don't know. We can make those arguments and have those discussions, but in the end it is an example that has come to Paul's mind. Something else that can hinder the gospel can be the way women dress. What is interesting to me here is that I have most often heard this passage applied to speak about sexual modesty. But this is not where Paul goes. His concern is economic modesty. Elaborate hairstyles and expensive jewellery are his 'go to' examples. We can read this and go immediately to what is our biggest cultural issue. Perhaps Paul goes to what seems to be theirs. It is not that the women are wearing skimpy clothes; it's that they are dressing in a way that shows off how wealthy they are. That is what is getting in the way of the gospel. Why would outsiders follow a gospel that leads its followers to showy demonstrations of wealth?

So we seem to be able to take these verses and quite comfortably apply them to our culture in a slightly different way. Is that a valid thing to do? Yes, I think it can be. We can say that Paul is picking a specific issue in his culture but the principle is about heart attitude and what gets in the way of the gospel. This could be applied in our culture around sexual modesty; I think it can be applied in a multitude of ways but this can certainly be one. We understand the key point Paul is making and then we apply it in our context. But we do not make a blanket rule in our churches that women can never wear gold or braid their hair. We understand that as a particular cultural application of the broader point. It's the same as asking whether we require men to lift their hands when they pray: we know it's not about the external action. We do this all the time when we read the Bible, we know the point being made and we are able to find the cultural application of it. Sometimes it is worth making the same application Paul is making. Perhaps we do need to challenge our people about how much they are spending on clothes or where their clothes are made.

But we also recognise that there are other ways we can apply the principle of not doing things that undermine the gospel and get in the way of our witness to Jesus.

Verses 11-12

Verse 11, then, says that a woman should learn in quietness and submission. Verse 12 is translated by the NIV 'I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.' This is the verse that has most often been used to say that women shouldn't preach. The first thing I want to point out is that there is only one imperative in this verse, and indeed in verses 11-15 as a whole. In general terms, indicative verbs describe what is, infinitive and participial verbs are dependent on other verbs, and imperative verbs express prescriptions or commands. The single imperative here is about women learning. As a third person imperative, a literal translation might be 'Let women learn!'⁹ From this imperative we can infer that perhaps women were not learning, whether someone was stopping them from doing so or it was something that had never been done. It was probably unusual in the culture for a woman to learn (remember the Mary and Martha story). So in its original context, Paul's audience would have pricked up their ears at the command for women to learn. Then he says they are to learn in two ways: *hēsuchia* and *hypotagē*, translated by the NIV as 'quietness' and 'submission'. The latter is translated just a few verses later (1 Tim 3:4) as 'obedience' and indicates the response to the teaching received, rather than to anyone else. The former is used again at the end of verse 12, notoriously translated by the KJV as 'silent' in these two places. But it has also been used previously in this chapter, back in verse 2, for the 'quiet' lives we are praying that kings will allow us to live. There, the KJV translates it as 'peaceable.' I find it interesting that the same Greek word in the same passage has been translated in different ways. Certainly we can do that; words can mean more than one thing and so we need to look at the context in which they are being used to understand their nuance. But it may also suggest that translations have been influenced by cultural assumptions or traditions as well. It is worth asking how Paul is using *hēsuchia* in this letter and chapter. 'Silent lives' in verse 2 would make little sense. Verse 2 seems to be a kind of shorthand for lives of being who we are called to be, living out and proclaiming the gospel. Similarly, I would argue that in verse 11-12 *hēsuchia* seems to indicate a heart attitude of quietness, peacefulness, holiness, and obedience. It is about the attitude towards learning – not jumping up and making a fuss, or asserting their authority, but learning in order to obey, live out, and pass on what is learned.

I have another small quibble with the NIV in verse 12 regarding the verb translated 'I do not permit' a woman to teach. Permit is not an imperative but a present indicative, which can thus be read 'I am not permitting', 'I am not allowing', or 'I am not giving over to'. Wright seems to go this third way,

⁹ Jesus uses third person singular imperatives in his parables, translated 'The one who has ears, *let them hear!*' (e.g. Matt 13:9; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; 14:35;

that is, if the main imperative is about women learning, Paul is noting that he is not now commanding them to teach, or handing the teaching over to them. If currently only men teach, Paul is not saying that the current order is reversed so that only women teach and rule over men. This is certainly not the only way of translating this, but the idea resonates with me in making sense of the passage as a whole. Others have suggested that the present continuous aspect of this verb means it can be read as Paul's current practice rather than an ongoing prohibition.¹⁰ Whichever way it is taken, I think what is clear is that there is work to be done on translating and interpreting this expression.

Another complicating factor in this verse is that the verb *authentēin*, 'to assume authority', is a *hapax legomena*, a word occurring only once in the biblical text, making it more difficult to translate as there is no other context with which to compare it. This is an unusual word, not just about having authority but taking or usurping it. It thus seems to have connotations of women taking over, which often seems to be a fear that has been held in various contexts: if we let the women do this, they will take over! Paul says no, their attitude must be *hēsuchia*, the same attitude we are all to have in all our lives. For followers of Jesus it is never about grasping for position or authority or trying to be top dog; it is always about submission to, and the priority of, the gospel. So for me, this passage is quite consistent with Paul's teaching overall and with Jesus' words. It seems to me that Paul is here saying, 'let the women learn, not that I am now commanding the women to take over the teaching from men'. It does not seem that he is saying that women should never teach, and of course if he was, then he would seem to be contradicting his own practice, which raises much bigger hermeneutic issues. There are many different ways of dealing with this verse. This is where I land but I recognise others draw analogies, for example, to the commands about men lifting hands and women not wearing gold; that this is a cultural application of a principle given the context at Ephesus and how women teaching might have meant the gospel would not be heard.

Verses 13-15

The passage doesn't end here. Paul goes on, saying that Adam was formed first and Adam was not the one deceived. He appeals to the story in Genesis 2 by way of explaining his point. The traditional way of interpreting this has been to say that Paul is appealing to creation and the created order. That is, that the basis of why men should preach and women should not is the way God created the world to be and that is therefore the end of the discussion. I find verse 14 quite interesting, however, for this interpretation because Paul makes a distinction between Adam and Eve not just in the order they were created, but in the order they sinned. This is thus not simply an

¹⁰ See Philip Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 2009) who notes that Paul uses the same grammatical construction in 1 Cor 7:7, 26, 32, 40 and Phil 4:2 for current practices rather than universal prohibitions.

appeal to creation; it is an appeal to the fall. And appealing to the fall as the basis for the way things should be seems theologically untenable. I have to wrestle with why Paul would use the fall as a basis for his theology. The question is then: what is the difference between Adam and Eve in their sin? In the Genesis 2 story, they both eat the fruit and they are both held responsible. But there is a difference in the story in how this happens. The point Paul seems to be making is that Eve was deceived, that is, tricked. She thought she was right, but the serpent had convinced her of something that wasn't true. Adam, on the other hand, wasn't deceived; he knew it was wrong and did it anyway. This is not to say one of these is worse than the other. But if you're going to make a distinction between Adam and Eve in their sin, it seems to be between disobeying and being deceived.¹¹ That is the distinction in the Genesis 2 story and the distinction Paul makes here. How then is it that Eve could be deceived? This goes back to who was formed first, as Paul has just noted. Reading the story, Adam was formed first. Then God gave him some instructions including not to eat from the tree. And then Eve was created. The order of the story in Genesis 2 (and Paul's exegesis of it here) says that Adam was created and told not to eat the fruit, and then Eve was created. So why was Eve able to be deceived? Because she didn't learn. She hadn't been taught. Adam had been taught and chose to disobey. Eve had not been taught and was deceived. The point Paul seems to be making is that those who have not been taught and have not learned can be deceived. So ... let the women learn! This reiterates a common theme in Paul's writings; false teachers can deceive, so we must study and learn to ensure we are not taken in. So, these ideas all link back to the imperative in verse 11 and make sense of Paul's argument as a whole.

We then come to verse 15, probably the most difficult to interpret of the whole chapter. The NIV says 'women will be saved through childbearing'. On first glance I think, 'where did that come from'? How does this logically follow? Two things are worth noting. The NIV has a footnote on 'women' saying 'she'. There is no noun here. The feminine pronoun is found within the verb in Greek, so this is a better translation as it leaves the subject both singular and as a pronoun. We then need to look for the antecedent, the noun referred to here. This could be the 'women' in verse 11, but the most recent woman spoken about in the passage is Eve. Grammatically it seems better to see this as referring to her. She (Eve) will be saved. Secondly, this verb, *sōzō*, can mean 'kept safe' or 'unharmful',¹² but it is commonly used by Paul to refer to salvation in Christ. My basic understanding of the gospel says that there is only one way we are saved and that is through faith in Jesus. A Sunday School child can tell me that if we are talking about being saved, the answer must be Jesus! So, how could this verse possibly be about Jesus? The noun *teknotōria* is another *hapax legomena*, although it is clearly derived from the noun 'to bear children'. So here we have Eve saved through

¹¹ Some have suggested that Paul is arguing here that women are by nature more likely to be deceived. This doesn't seem to hold true in practice, nor is it seen throughout the Scriptures. Paul generally links deception to false teaching or lack of learning.

¹² See Lynn Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians: Illuminating Ancient Ways of Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 138–140, who canvasses the range of options here.

the birth of a child. There is of course a child born of Eve mentioned throughout the Scriptures who saves people. His name is Jesus. This takes me back again to the Genesis story, where God says that the woman's *zera* or seed will crush the serpent's head. Jesus as the one 'born of Eve' might seem odd to us at first glance, but it is the same as calling Jesus the 'son of Adam', which the New Testament does frequently. I imagine Paul writing this passage with Genesis 'in front' of him, whether literally or in his memory, looking at and working through the story. He is reminding us that despite her deception and sin, God promises Eve a child who will defeat Satan and overcome the sin. He is thus using the idea of a child born to Eve to talk about Jesus. The final part of the verse is then classic Paul: saved by Jesus ... if we continue in faith and living it out. Salvation is from God but we are called to respond to it faithfully.

So my translation of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 would be something like this: 'Let women learn in quiet holiness and obedience. Not that I am now commanding women to teach or assert authority over men, but to be in quiet holiness. For Adam was created first, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but Eve was deceived into disobedience. But she will be saved through the child born, if they continue in faith, peace and holiness with self-control.' This is by no means perfect, and there are still challenges with, for example, the way Paul switches between the singular and the plural. Nor have I touched on possible cultural issues with women, men, and false teaching in Ephesus that may have been influencing Paul's thinking.¹³ But it is clear that this is a difficult passage, with numerous ideas that can be read in different ways. I don't think it is possible to claim that you can just read this passage on its face and be certain of what it means. It is also one that has been translated and taught based on various assumptions that are worth at least taking a second look at. It is therefore particularly unhelpful to use it as a lens through which to read the rest of Scripture.

Conclusions

A similar exercise could be undertaken with respect to 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.¹⁴ It is clear from earlier chapters in 1 Corinthians that women are publicly praying and prophesying which means the 'silence' enjoined in these verses cannot be absolute. These verses come in the context of Paul's discussions to the church at Corinth about order, given the issues happening in the church at the time around the use of tongues and prophecy. His key point is not about teaching and authority but about order in the church so that the gospel is proclaimed and heard. There are also plenty of questions worth raising about the cultural background of the passages. Personally, I find it intriguing to consider the kind of space the church was meeting in. I cannot read my own cultural assumptions of a large meeting hall into the text. It is more likely they were meeting in homes, with

¹³ See Timothy D. Foster, "1 Timothy 2:8-15 and Gender Wars at Ephesus" 2016 *Priscilla Papers* 30 (3): 3-10. <https://www.cbeinternational.org/sites/default/files/02-timothy.pdf>

¹⁴ See David Scholer, "Women in Ministry: A Biblical Basis for Equal Partnership" <http://fuller.edu/About/Women-in-Ministry/Women-in-Ministry--1-Corinthians-14-34-35/>

different rooms and spaces being used simultaneously. What difference might this make to how we read these verses? We need to take time to wrestle with what it looks like to faithfully interpret texts like this, both on their own terms and in the wider context of the Scriptures and the vision of the kingdom and new creation the gospel calls us to live out.

My secondary question with these texts is whether hermeneutics is the only thing that has been driving how they have been read. In practice, while we may like to talk about ‘what the Bible says’, there are often other factors influencing our practice. In some cases, our own cultural and experiential issues can actually be more significant challenges. We are often driven by what we are used to, comfortable with, culturally expect, and assume. For example, there are cultural issues around perceptions people have of women speaking and women in positions of authority. Some don’t like the idea of women ‘telling them what to do’, which of course says something interesting about what they think preaching is! How people hear women is also a challenge. Think for example of the cultural perception that women ‘nag’. Furthermore, we are far less used to hearing women’s voices in public spaces such as political discourse or even in popular culture.¹⁵ Additionally, some people have had negative experiences of women preaching. In situations where women have rarely preached, perhaps when a woman has spoken they have been quite forceful or come across as doing so to prove a point. Or, similar to the situation addressed in 1 Timothy 2, some women might not have had the training and experience of their male counterparts and so haven’t done such a great job. Finally, when women or men take on a role that has been traditionally filled by the other gender, the bar tends to be set higher: think women Prime Ministers or men childcare workers. They can be perceived as representing their gender and so one poor woman preacher can mean women are perceived as bad preachers in general.

In the end, we are dealing with a complex matrix of biblical, theological, historical, and cultural issues when talking about women, preaching, and the Bible. We need to put our discussion into this wider context rather than assume that there is a ‘proof text’ that settles the question. I believe that the Scriptures affirm the calling on women and men to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit and to respond to both the call of God and the need of the world for faithful proclamation of the gospel. I believe we can wrestle with the texts that have been used to limit this calling in ways that are hermeneutically consistent and evangelically faithful and come to more generous conclusions. Let us preach the Word of God that Jesus might be known. And let us raise up the next generation of Marys, Phoebes, Junias, and Priscillas to play their part in the flourishing of the church, the witness of the kingdom, and the demonstration of the new creation yet to come.

¹⁵ Research from the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, for example, shows that in the top 200 grossing films of 2014 and 2015, male characters spoke two times more often than female characters. <https://seejane.org/research-informs-empowers/data/>