

Feminism and Exegetical Mayhem

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 14:33–35; 1 Timothy 2:9–15

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No other passage of Scripture has been subjected to more scrutiny in the feminist debate over the role of women in the church than 1 Timothy 2:9–15. Entire books have been devoted to refuting the historical and traditional interpretations of this important passage (e.g., R.C. Kroeger and C.C. Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman* [1][Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992]).

To capsulize the variety of interpretations from evangelical and charismatic feminists, J. David Pawson offers this revealing paraphrase in his book *Leadership Is Male*:

Verse 11: You must teach women so that they can become teachers themselves; as with men under instructions, the women also must not interrupt with aggressive opinions of their own.

Verse 12: Personally, I don't make a practice of letting women teach because hitherto they have not had the educational opportunity to study the Scriptures; asserting their somewhat ignorant ideas in an authoritarian manner could be seen as putting down their husbands.

Verse 13: Nevertheless, when Adam was created, he was immediately given a colleague to complete and complement him as a coequal, sharing fully his dual role of ruling the world and teaching others the word of God.

Verse 14: Satan was able to deceive Eve only because she was not present when God spoke to Adam and she had only a secondhand report of what was said; Adam, on the other hand, knew better and his sin, unlike hers, was inexcusable.

Verse 15: This is why God spoke so tenderly to Eve, promising to vindicate her innocence and save her from undeserved dishonor and shame by choosing a woman to bear that special Child who would defeat Satan and thus save all women of faith, love, holiness, and good sense. [2] *Leadership Is Male* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990], 82-83

Others, such as Gretchen Gaebelin Hull, don't want to even deal with passages like this one or 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and 14:33–35 because they are too "hard" to interpret. [3] *Equal to Serve: Women and Men in the Church and Home* [Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1987], 183-89 Hull even added Ephesians 5:22–24, Colossians 3:18, and 1 Peter 3:1–6 to the list. In her attempt to prove that the Bible does not teach male headship, she was forced to dispose of those passages that indeed teach male headship. Hull concluded, "Those of us who respect God's Word cannot force meaning where meaning is unclear. Therefore we may legitimately put these Scripture portions aside for the very reason that they remain 'hard passages'—hard exegetically, hard hermeneutically, and hard theologically". [4] *Ibid* p. 198

If all theologians were to follow that principle of interpretation, Satan wouldn't need to attack the truthfulness of Scripture; he would only have to cause enough confusion over the "hard passages" for scholars to ignore them. John W. Robbins explains the tragedy of such an approach:

The demand for the ordination of women, as rebellious as it is in itself, is a symptom of a much more serious malady. The ordination of women might disfigure the church, but the disease of which it is a symptom will kill her unless it is quickly diagnosed and treated. That disease . . . is the rejection of Biblical inerrancy.

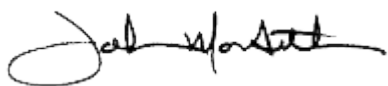
[One seminary professor] entertains the possibility that Paul contradicts himself. [Another] asserts that the Bible contains “antinomies,” a polite word for contradictions. [Yet another] picks and chooses which of the Biblical requirements for elders he is going to tolerate. . . . If the rest of Scripture, the passages concerning the Trinity, Christ’s deity, or justification through faith alone, for example, were subjected to the same exegetical mayhem as wreaked on 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy, there would be no truth at all in our theology. [5] Scripture Twisting in the Seminaries, Part One: Feminism, “The Most Serious Error” [Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1985], 51, 53

Some evangelical feminists assert that Paul was simply dealing with a cultural issue and never intended his instruction to go beyond that. Among those in that camp are R.C. Kroeger and C.C. Kroeger. Peter Jones commented on their book *I Suffer Not a Woman*:

The great insights of this study concerning Paul’s biblical answer to Gnostic distortions are vitiated by the authors’ rejection of this answer as applying only to an extreme, first-century situation. The authors fail to see that this same Gnostic heresy is back with a vengeance via the New Age teaching seeping into the contemporary church and society, and that Paul’s teaching has perhaps never been more relevant than now. [6] *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P. and R., 1992], 41

Scripture is timeless, thus it is contemporary. Just as God never changes, neither does His Word. It is as active and living today as it was two thousand years ago (Hebrews 4:12). I believe no passage is more affirming of women and more necessary for them to understand—in spite of what feminists claim—than 1 Timothy 2:9–15. As you move through Paul’s words to Timothy regarding the women in the Ephesian assembly, you’ll find that his commands and restrictions are means of great blessing, not declarations of second-class status.

That’s where we’ll pick it up next time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John MacArthur".

(Adapted from [Divine Design](#).)

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