

EVANGELICALS AND GENDER ROLES IN THE 1990s: 1 TIM 2:8-15: A TEST CASE

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I. BACKLASH IN THE 1980s

In her analysis of recent developments in the women's movement in the United States, Susan Faludi has rightly labeled the 1980s the "backlash decade."¹ With this in mind the present study focuses specifically on North American evangelicalism, one of the many important expressions of the broader phenomenon, especially as it appeared in the context of the 1986 national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society. A milestone in the modern debate, the conference chose as its theme "Male and Female in Biblical and Theological Perspective." As many expected, the topic generated more heat than light, more reaction than response, resulting in a schism within the Society and the formation of two opposing yet nationally influential organizations, one called the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood² and the other Christians for Biblical Equality.³ It is not an overstatement to say that these groups, which represent the hierarchical and egalitarian⁴ sides of evangelicalism, also define the opposing sides of a civil strife that has continued full strength into the 1990s.

Despite pleasant rhetoric about mutual commitment to the authority of Scripture and unity in Christ, the intensity of the conflict has been fueled

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¹ S. Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Crown, 1991). Among what she labels the New Right she sharply criticizes such evangelical organizations as the Heritage Foundation (Connaught "Connie" Marshner), Concerned Women for America (Beverly LaHaye) and Operation Rescue (Randall Terry).

² Its confessional creed is the Danvers Statement, a concise summary of the hierarchical position. A collection of articles forming an expanded defense of this position can be found in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (ed. J. Piper and W. Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 1991).

³ Formed as a national chapter of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity in 1987 (see the articles in *Christianity Today* [October 16, 1987] 44; "New Organizations Formed," *Priscilla Papers* 1/4 [Fall 1987] 1-3), their official position paper, "Men, Women and Biblical Equality," first appeared in *Christianity Today* (April 9, 1990).

⁴ Although Piper and Grudem "are uncomfortable with the term 'traditionalist'" and "reject the term 'hierarchicalist'" (*Recovering* xiv), "complimentarity" is really not at the center of their argument. Rather, a unique "male leadership" in contrast to a "shared leadership" (cf. the brief but useful articles by W. Kaiser and B. Waltke, "A CT Institute Supplement on Women in the Church," *Christianity Today* [October 3, 1986] 12-13) continues to be the issue separating the two camps. Therefore I have chosen in this study to retain the commonly accepted and more descriptive titles "hierarchical" and "egalitarian."

by insinuations and accusations from both sides. For example, in their Danvers Statement the hierarchical camp charges "Biblical feminism" with contributing to widespread uncertainty and confusion regarding gender roles in our culture, the deterioration of home and family values, legitimizing of perverse sexual relationships, physical and emotional abuse in the family, crippling the witness of the Church, the appearance of "hermeneutical oddities devised to reinterpret apparently plain meanings of Biblical texts," and undermining the authority, clarity and accessibility of the Scriptures for the average Christian.⁵ For them "Biblical feminist" is an oxymoron. Similarly egalitarians have countered with charges of "hermeneutical gerrymandering,"⁶ of choosing to defer to the traditions of men rather than to take Scripture at face value,⁷ of having been unduly influenced by "the power of patriarchy, androcentrism and misogyny,"⁸ of having interpreted passages "simplistically and in contradiction to the rest of Scripture"—in short, of deliberately treating women as if they were neither fully redeemed nor fully human.⁹

But for others also engaged in the complexities of this study and the struggle it has produced, feeling the heat of battle has not resulted in deeper entrenchment but rather has stimulated fresh inquiry leading to helpful reevaluations of theological positions and key Biblical passages. Many of us have worked under a sense of compulsion, feeling that the subject is "one of the most important issues of our time"¹⁰ and as such has in a way chosen us rather than *vice versa*.¹¹

Some, like myself, have experienced in this process a significant change of mind.¹² More specifically it has resulted in a reexamination of the interpretive tension between 1 Tim 2:8–15, which many regard as "the most crucial text in this discussion,"¹³ and Gal 3:28, which has been called the "*magna carta* of humanity."¹⁴ One might say that the spirit of the decade has encouraged and influenced my rereading of these texts, the results of which are presented here as a case study. The intent is to place the discussion in its broader context and at the same time raise several critical

⁵ *Danvers Statement*, "Rationale," nos. 1–10; cf. Faludi's assessment of the secular parallels in the 1980s in her "Introduction: Blame It on Feminism" (*Backlash* ix–xxiii).

⁶ D. M. Scholer, "Hermeneutical Gerrymandering: Hurley on Women and Authority," *TSF Bulletin* 6/5 (May–June 1983) 11.

⁷ W. Kaiser, "CT Institute" 12.

⁸ D. M. Scholer, "Feminist Hermeneutics and Evangelical Biblical Interpretation," *JETS* 30/4 (December 1987) 413.

⁹ Cf. P. Gundry's address, "Why We're Here," and G. G. Hull's "Response" at the Evangelical Colloquium on Women and the Bible, October 9–11, 1984, later published in *Women, Authority and the Bible* (ed. A. Mickelsen; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986) 10–27.

¹⁰ Indicative of this was the cover of *Time* (November 23, 1992), which carried the title "God and Women: A Second Reformation Sweeps Christianity."

¹¹ So confesses K. R. Snodgrass, "The Ordination of Women—Thirteen Years Later Do We Really Value the Ministry of Women?," *Covenant Quarterly* (August 1990) 27.

¹² Cf. my earlier article on this subject entitled "Male/Female Leadership and Korah's Revolt: An Analogy?," *JETS* 30/1 (March 1987) 3–10.

¹³ Snodgrass, "Ordination" 37.

¹⁴ P. K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 142.

questions facing other evangelicals who increasingly find themselves caught in the same dilemma.

II. 1 TIM 2:8-15 REVISITED

1. *Why keep this case open?* In response to the negative interaction that has characterized the debate during the last ten years, many scholars have given up on serious dialogue regarding the basic question of gender roles. They have assumed that anything of real value has already been said and thus they have chosen to focus only on the question "How should we then live?" (assuming whichever model they had previously held). Witnessing the sense of despair on the part of several of my colleagues has caused me to question my own reasons for continuing research. Two factors would not let me put the matter to rest.

First, I had to ask whether it was possible that the Church could have been blind to the prejudices and biases affecting our reading of these texts for nearly two millennia. In considering this I remembered how Luther, Calvin, Owen and Wesley had with certainty condemned Galileo based on the "apparently plain meaning" of Ps 104:5; Isa 51:16.¹⁵ Likewise, based on Gen 3:16 women were once treated as heretics for receiving pain medication during childbirth¹⁶ and were regarded as "defective and misbegotten" (Thomas Aquinas), even "the devil's gateway" (Tertullian), by those whom we now honor as Church fathers.¹⁷ Similarly during the present century Jews have been condemned by the Church and persecuted in the worst possible way as "Christ-killers," and Blacks have been judged by well-meaning Christians as "less than equal," then later patronized with the cliché "equal but separate." It should come as a sobering fact that the three groups mentioned specifically in Gal 3:28 are found in these scenarios. Yes, it is possible that we have been wrong all this time. Moreover it has sometimes been that very spirit of the age that has compelled us to look again and again at the Biblical text to see if we can understand it more clearly. It will simply not do to say that the hierarchical view "has prevailed [in one form or another] throughout the 75 or so generations since the beginning" and "is still the majority view today," so that any new reading of the texts is by definition almost certainly wrong.¹⁸

¹⁵ Cited by P. Gundry, *Woman Be Free* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977) 44 ff.

¹⁶ Cf. the account of a sixteenth-century woman cited by P. Gundry, "Why We're Here" 12-13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 21.

¹⁸ R. D. Culver, "A Traditionalist Response" to A. Mickelsen, "An Egalitarian View: There Is Neither Male nor Female in Christ," *Women in Ministry: Four Views* (ed. B. Clouse and R. Clouse; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989) 207. For examples of how interpretations have been influenced by the spirit of the age throughout Church history see L. Mercadante, *From Hierarchy to Equality: A Comparison of Past, Present Interpretations of I Cor. 11:2-16 in Relation to the Changing Status of Women in Society* (Regent College: G-M-H, 1979); "The Male-Female Debate: Can We Read the Bible Objectively?," *Crux* 15/2 (June 1979) 20-25; J. Hassey, *No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry Around the Turn of the Century* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); R. Tucker, *Women in the Maze: Questions and Answers on Biblical Equality* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992).

A second reason for continuing my study was the interpretive tension that I had long felt between Gal 3:28 and the so-called difficult passages, like 1 Tim 2:8–15. For example, what has been evident in the wide diversity of understandings of this particular passage is that among evangelical scholars even the general focus of the 1 Timothy text is not clear. Is it addressing prominent women who are uneducated, heretical, wealthy, involved in a local fertility cult, or simply being bossy wives? What is the significance of the reference to Adam and Eve? Is it illustrative, typical, normative or culturally conditioned? What does it mean to “teach, remain silent, usurp/exercise authority”? How does “childbearing” fit into the picture with respect to “salvation”? The fact that Gleason Archer, a strong advocate of the hierarchical view, cites 1 Tim 2:11–15 as *the* “Bible difficulty” in his book is significant, especially when he does not judge this to be the case with Gal 3:28.¹⁹ Although I disagree with his interpretation, I concur with his evaluation of the lack of clarity of this passage. Moreover it is unlikely that the Galatians passage would be questioned at all if it were not for the tension created in the minds of interpreters by passages like 1 Tim 2:8–15.

2. *How should the present discussion be focused?* In an effort to address the status of the debate, one must recognize two important factors. (1) There are evangelicals who share a strong commitment to the inspiration and authority of Scripture in both the egalitarian²⁰ and hierarchical²¹ camps. (2) Both camps have representatives who understand the passage as being in some way normative for the Church today, the hierarchicalist continuing to some degree a restriction of women from leadership roles²² and the egalitarian applying other principles derived from the passage, such as not allowing women or men to teach in the Church until they are

¹⁹ G. L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 411–415.

²⁰ Though challenged in the context of radical feminism, the number of scholars representing a theologically conservative conviction and methodology from the egalitarian camp is large and growing. Notable contributions include G. Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: A Guide for the Study of Female Roles in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), which includes extensive bibliography; G. Fee, “Issues in Evangelical Hermeneutics, Part III: The Great Watershed—Intentionality and Particularity/Eternality: I Timothy 2:8–15 as a Test Case,” *Crux* 26/4 (December 1990) 31–37; *Women and the Ministries of Christ* (ed. R. Hestenes and L. Curley; Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1979); E. M. Howe, *Women and Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); G. G. Hull, *Equal to Serve: Women and Men in the Church and Home* (Old Tappan: Revell, 1987); *Women, Authority and the Bible* (ed. A. Mickelsen; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986), a product of the 1984 Evangelical Colloquium on Women and the Bible; D. M. Scholer, *Selected Articles on Hermeneutics and Women in Ministry in the New Testament* (Chicago: North Park College and Theological Seminary, 1989); A. B. Spencer, *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985).

²¹ A familiar characteristic of hierarchical writers, especially in recent times, this need not be documented.

²² A good example of recent moderating tendencies of the hierarchical camp that seek to appeal to the spirit of the age without sacrificing their basic tenets is R. and B. Allen, *Liberated Traditionalism: Men and Women in Balance* (Portland: Multnomah, 1985).

properly educated with regard to Christian doctrine²³ or instructing Christian women concerning effective ways of witnessing to an unbelieving husband.²⁴

To the extent that we are able and willing to recognize such common convictions and purposes we can avoid creating straw opponents and waste less time fighting over what the discussion should no longer be about.²⁵ Further, we can address other key issues that remain unresolved, such as the first-century context of the church at Ephesus, Paul's understanding of teaching and usurping authority, his reasoning regarding creation and fall, the reference to women's role in childbearing, the ultimate concern of this section of 1 Timothy, and the relationship of the text to the larger context of 1 and 2 Timothy as well as to Gal 3:28. Such issues outline an agenda that needs to be addressed further in a collegial fashion by evangelicals from both camps concerned with breaking through the impasse we are now facing.²⁶

3. *Critical interpretive issues related to 1 Tim 2:8-15.* In other passages regarding gender roles we have had to admit that a local phenomenon was playing behind the scenes even when we have not been able to identify precisely what that was. For example, with regard to 1 Cor 11:2-16 there is no clear consensus on the backdrop to the head-covering and hair-length statements. Similarly the setting for the command regarding silence in 14:34-36 is not certain. Yet even hierarchical interpreters have conceded that women do not have to literally remain silent or wear a certain head covering while participating in the assemblies.²⁷ In other words, practical logic has persuaded us that something of local significance was influencing the text, even if we could not identify its exact nature.

As a result of the efforts of egalitarian scholars it has recently become clear that the same is likely to be true regarding the backdrop to 1 Timothy. For example, Catherine Kroeger's suggestion regarding the proposed

²³ This point is made emphatically by Bilezikian, *Beyond* 260-261 n. 45.

²⁴ Cf. G. P. Hugenberger, "Women in Church Office: Hermeneutics or Exegesis? A Survey of Approaches to 1 Tim 2:8-15," *JETS* 35/3 (September 1992) 341-360. He sees here a "husband and wife" context strikingly parallel to 1 Pet 3:1-7 and thus does not use this passage to support a position regarding church leadership roles.

²⁵ K. Snodgrass argues that the debate should no longer be centered on issues such as traditional family values, homosexuality, authority of Scripture, exegetical sloppiness, radical feminism, the feminist experience, Christology, or the supposed bisexual nature of God ("Ordination" 28-30). J. I. Packer's article, "Let's Stop Making Women Presbyters," *Christianity Today* (February 11, 1991) 18-21, is a good example of an influential hierarchical scholar who continues this kind of unfruitful, misdirected effort.

²⁶ Though this was the stated goal of the 1984 Evangelical Colloquium on Women and the Bible, the exclusive nature of the colloquium (by invitation only and restricted for the most part to egalitarians) was counterproductive to the credibility of their work.

²⁷ Of course there are exceptions like the Plymouth Brethren assemblies that require women to wear hats and generally to refrain from addressing the assembly during worship times. But even these reflect some accommodation to our age and represent a relatively small minority within evangelicalism.

gnostic influence of a female goddess cult at Ephesus has gained some degree of acceptance among scholars.²⁸ To the extent that this can be verified at the time of the writing of this letter, it could explain in part Paul's fears for the spiritual wellbeing of those in Ephesus, especially for any women who might have been directly involved in the cult. Likewise Bilezikian's proposal that women in the first century were not as well educated as men, especially regarding Christian doctrine, could explain the reference to Eve who also "learned secondarily" from Adam,²⁹ though the more recent contribution by Paul Trebilco raises serious questions regarding this hypothesis.³⁰

Thus the caution advocated by Douglas Moo regarding the "many, often contradictory, scholarly reconstructions" of the "false teaching" in 1 Timothy is generally in order. But one must admit that it is also speculative to read into the context, as Moo does, "a tendency to remove role distinctions" as part of the false teaching at Ephesus that occasioned "Paul's teaching about the roles of men and women in church ministry in I Timothy 2:11–15."³¹ Instead of setting forth reconstructions as if they can be easily and clearly understood from the text it makes more sense to admit that, given the data presently available, it is not possible to confirm or deny these hypotheses with certainty. Having done this, we can then place the focus on Paul's stated reason for leaving Timothy behind (1:3)—that is, "to combat false teachers" otherwise identified as "straying elders" who had had considerable influence on some of the women, especially the younger widows.³² Beyond this, both camps must admit that they are reconstructing more or less a *Sitz im Leben* for the passage.

Regarding *authentēin*, the problematic *hapax legomenon*, another significant contribution has emerged as a product of the "backlash decade." In his computer-assisted linguistic analysis³³ Leland Wilshire has updated the earlier lexicographical study of George Knight,³⁴ providing a clearer picture of the meaning of this term before and after the time of Paul's writing of 1 Timothy. Building on the combined results of these studies, Timothy Harris asserts that

²⁸ C. C. Kroeger, "1 Timothy 2:12—A Classicist's View," *Women, Authority and the Bible* 225–253; "The Apostle Paul and the Greco-Roman Cults of Women," *JETS* 30/1 (January 1987) 25–38; R. C. Kroeger and C. C. Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11–15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

²⁹ Bilezikian, *Beyond* 178–184.

³⁰ In his study of inscriptional evidence from Asia Minor, P. Trebilco has demonstrated the probability that many women, including Jewish women, held positions of prominence, including leadership positions in synagogues (*Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* [SNTSMS 69; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1991] 104–126).

³¹ D. Moo, "What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?," *Recovering* 180–182.

³² Fee, "Issues" 32.

³³ L. E. Wilshire, "The TLG Computer and Further Reference to *AUTHENTEIO* in I Timothy 2:12," *NTS* 34 (1988) 120–134.

³⁴ G. W. Knight III, "*AUTHENTEIO* in Reference to Women in I Timothy 2:12," *NTS* 30 (1984) 143–157.

in all of the occurrences of the verb close to the New Testament period, there is one indispensable element: that to exercise *authenthein* was "to hold sway or use power, to be dominant." The word never means (in itself) "to be an official" or "to be authorised," but could mean to have the power to be authoritative.³⁵

In light of this evidence one can no longer simply say that the term was "coming to mean 'exercise authority/power/rights'" (in a neutral or positive sense) around the time of Paul. In doing so, Moo³⁶ misrepresents the bulk of the data that indicates that the term did not have such a connotation prior to or even (clearly) at the time of Paul. Rather, this later meaning, though more common in the Church fathers, could easily have arisen as a result of a then popular interpretation of 1 Timothy. Further, it is more likely that the meaning of *authenthein* understood and intended by Paul in 1 Tim 2:12 included a substantially negative element (i.e. "dominate, take control by forceful aggression, instigate trouble"), which in turn would influence the tone of the more familiar *didaskhein* in the same verse.

"To teach" (*didaskhein*) in the Jewish rabbinical context of the NT Church certainly carried with it an emphasis that surpassed our modern conception of transmitting data or educating persons in an academic sense. It even went beyond authoritative proclamation of religious truth to include a mentoring relationship between teacher and student analogous to the master/disciple motif in the NT. This is supported by the connection of the term with the function of "overseer/elder" in 1 and 2 Timothy (cf. 1 Tim 3:2; 4:11–16; 5:17; 2 Tim 2:2; 4:2).

Elsewhere the master/disciple relationship connoted by *didaskalos* is illustrated in two accounts of Jesus' ministry. In Matt 23:8 he uses the noun as a synonym for "rabbi." Moreover the connotation of power or authority is so strong in that context that Jesus forbids his disciples to invoke the titles in this sense for anyone besides God. Though the term itself does not appear there, a relevant parallel theme is found in 20:25–28, where Jesus admonishes the disciples to be servants rather than to "exercise authority" (*katexousiazousin*) over one another like the rulers of the Gentiles did (v. 25). What is especially instructive about these two accounts is that the cautions of Jesus are not simply set against being "teachers" or "rulers" in a general sense but rather condemn the kind of un-Christian practices one might expect to find among unbelievers.

When this model is compared with the combination of *didaskhein* and *authenthein* in 1 Tim 2:12 it is at least possible that Paul is making a similar point. More specifically he could be prohibiting the women being addressed from aggressively usurping the then-established male leadership or otherwise "lording it over them as teachers" in a sense similar to that condemned by Jesus with his disciples (Matt 23:8). If this is correct, then 1 Tim 2:12 does not address the question of women being elders in the sense of an office

³⁵ Cf. T. J. Harris' discussion of Wilshire's work in "Why Did Paul Mention Eve's Deception? A Critique of P. W. Barnett's Interpretation of I Timothy 2," *EvQ* 62 (1990) 342–343.

³⁶ "What Does It Mean" 186–187.

or properly exercising a leadership role. Moreover the negative prohibition would apply also to men—both then and now. This is consistent with the nature of the gender-specific, though not gender-exclusive, instructions in vv. 8–10, which are applicable to both genders though they are expressed in this context with specific reference to men and women.

The most difficult part of any interpretation of the 1 Timothy passage is not 2:15, as so many claim, but rather Paul's enigmatic reference to the creation and fall narratives in vv. 13–14, especially the reference to Adam's priority in creation. Introduced by the preposition "for" (*gar*), these might imply to the casual reader³⁷ that a logical reason is being given for the restriction. But if this is so one still must ask what kind of logic is being employed. Can we say with certainty that it is a more formal, western style of reasoning, perhaps reflecting the Greco-Roman setting of the letter? Rather, the popular hermeneutical principle needs to be inverted: "If the (apparently) 'plain' sense makes no sense, seek some other sense." Thus one must ask whether there may have been a different reasoning process behind Paul's use of Genesis 1–3, perhaps reflecting his rabbinical training and background.³⁸

Following the work of Pierre Bourdieu,³⁹ Sherwood Lingenfelter makes the helpful suggestion that a practical logic is being employed here, like that used when Jesus reduced the entire Hebrew Scriptures to loving God and neighbor (Matt 22:37–40) or when Paul argues that "nature teaches" that long hair is a dishonor to men (1 Cor 11:14). Referring specifically to 1 Tim 2:8–15, Lingenfelter concludes:

In this context of the local church where the emphasis is on teaching for practical living and godliness, Paul dips deeply into the same generative core of beliefs to buttress his admonition to Ephesian women. This is precisely what Bourdieu argues is characteristic of practical logic. Individuals organize from a few generative principles the totality of thought, perception and action. The resulting economy of logic furnishes a practical coherence rather than a systematic coherence.⁴⁰

Applying his theory to the interpretation of 1 Tim 2:8–15 that is developed in the present study, it can be argued that Paul was reminding the women at Ephesus of Eve's secondary place in creation and subsequent failure in Eden to evoke a response of humility as they moved from their

³⁷ There is a fine line of distinction between a casual or cursory reading and the apparently plain meaning of a Biblical text.

³⁸ Appealing to the rabbinical backdrop of Paul as an aid to understanding his reasoning process in this text and others like it does not necessarily impinge upon the divine nature of the text. Such an implication reflects an unwarranted, western philosophical arrogance.

³⁹ P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1977).

⁴⁰ S. G. Lingenfelter, "Formal Logic or Practical Logic: Which Should Form the Basis for Cross-Cultural Theology?" (unpublished paper presented at the Consultation of Anthropologists and Theologians; La Mirada: Biola University, April 14–15, 1986) 21–22. A similar distinction between a logic "born of experience, empirical logic" and the "formal logic of the Greeks and their successors" was developed earlier by W. F. Albright, *History, Archaeology and Christian Humanism* (London: Black, 1965) 84–100.

former status under the law to a newfound freedom in Christ. This does not necessarily imply that women subsequently could never recover the oneness they once knew with their male counterparts, but rather it encourages them to wait on God's timing to accomplish his redemptive purposes so boldly expressed by the same apostle regarding their new covenant relationship in Gal 3:28. Though the ban had been lifted in the community of the Church, nevertheless in God's wisdom there needed to be a transitional period before kingdom blessings would be established more fully.

The interpretation suggested above is supported further by the otherwise enigmatic reference to women being "delivered through childbearing" in v. 15, for it was also as a result of the sin of Eve that women had borne the burden of "multiplied pain in childbirth" (Gen 3:16). But now Paul is assuring them that they can find deliverance "through" this ordeal (though not "from" it) by trusting God and living a life of piety. Though this does not guarantee that a godly woman will never suffer or at times even die in childbirth, it does mean that a partial healing from the judgment on the first woman can take place along the way as a foretaste of kingdom blessings. In fact this has been the case with childbearing as well as with the status of women in general around the world. Moreover it does not imply that we may not or should not work toward a complete healing in both areas. On the contrary, by God's grace we must. Instead, like the promise regarding healing in James 5 it offers hope to the righteous person whose effective prayer—or in this case "lifestyle of faith, love, sanctity and discretion" (1 Tim 2:15)—are of great value before God. It is given as a symbol of hope in the context of burdens incurred in the fall.

Fee argues that the apostolic restriction of these women should not be misinterpreted "as a rule in all churches at all times" but rather is imposed because of the particular occasion of the letter. Hence the answer to the hermeneutical dilemma of the passage, he continues, lies in "our obedience to the ultimate concern of the text, even if at times the particulars are not carried over to the 'letter.'"⁴¹ If the analysis above is accurate, it follows that the ultimate concern of this text might be understood more generally as being that of humility, patience and hope set over against the attitudes of prideful aggression and despair that were being fostered by the heretical elders and absorbed by many of the women at Ephesus. In response Paul advises them to submit willingly to the existing leadership, to be patient, to have hope.

It is important to note, however, that such an admonition does not necessarily deny that they had received such freedom. On the contrary, considering Paul's two-to-three-year teaching ministry among them—including daily instruction in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 18:23–19:41)—it is almost certain they they would have heard the controversial message that the apostle had written earlier to the Galatians. In response there would have been a natural tendency to push their newly discovered liberty to its limits

⁴¹ Fee, "Issues" 35.

all at once. Thus the seasoned apostle cautions them to learn but to do so with respect, patience and hope, in contrast to immediately jumping into the role of teachers before they or their congregations were ready.

This approach responds to the admonition of Fee to address the ultimate concern of the text without excessive reconstruction of the specifics of the occasion for its writing. It makes sense whether the occasion involves women and men in general or wives and husbands in particular, regardless of what specifically served as a catalyst for the un-Biblical aggressiveness and prideful behavior. Moreover it emerges among the various evangelical attempts at reconstructing the particulars of the occasion for this admonition as a bridge that can with a greater degree of certainty be applied as normative today to both men and women regardless of one's understanding of the particulars. This is not to say that efforts should be discontinued toward recovering the letter's more specific occasion. Rather, caution should be used when applying conclusions drawn from those specific data that are not as clear instead of from the clearer concerns of the text.

The theme of humility versus pride, especially as it concerns leadership roles, seems to be the primary focus of Paul in this passage with patience and hope functioning as secondary themes. This is supported by the broader context of the letter, which develops the subject of humility at the outset (1:7), then applies it to women with regard to their physical appearance (2:9–10), to anyone who would aspire to leadership in the assembly (3:1–13), to the treatment of elders (male and female) by younger critics (5:1–2), to conceited persons teaching strange doctrines for personal advancement (6:3–10), and to those tempted to become proud because of their wealth (6:17–19). Thus it is not a theme that needs to be introduced on the basis of reconstruction but rather is one that flows from and is consistent with the book's broader context.

Two issues require mention at this juncture regarding the interpretive tension between 1 Tim 2:8–15 and Gal 3:28. First, regardless of one's dating of Galatians (AD 49 or 55), the so-called difficult texts of 1 Corinthians 11, 14 (AD 56), Ephesians 5 (AD 61) and 1 Timothy 2 (AD 63) could be understood as representing a specific application of the foundational principle stated earlier by Paul in Gal 3:28—namely, that the gospel had eradicated the old covenant phenomenon of gender roles in the community of God's people.⁴² Stated differently, 1 Tim 2:8–15 might be described as an exception to the rule of Gal 3:28, reflecting a deliberate restriction of Christian liberty advocated with good reason in this specific situation. This principle is developed more clearly elsewhere by Paul regarding food offered to idols and observance of Jewish holidays and festivals (1 Cor 6:12–20; 10:23–33; Romans 14).

Second, the Jew/Gentile paradigm, so predominant in Galatians and elsewhere, must be taken more seriously as an analogy for the other two groups cited in Gal 3:28—namely, slave/free and male/female. As Steve Lowe argues convincingly, when Paul develops the Jew/Gentile question

⁴² Cf. the similar conclusion reached by Lingenfelter, "Formal Logic" 16.

in Romans and Ephesians he concludes without question that the "status equality" of the Gentile always leads to a "functional equality" in the Church.⁴³ Though Paul on occasion limits his liberty or that of others, he never negates the enduring truth that Gentiles are now fully equal partners in the gospel in a functional sense, not merely in status before God.

4. *Conclusions regarding 1 Tim 2:8–15.* After attending the Evangelical Colloquium on Women and the Bible in 1984, J. I. Packer concluded (as a hierarchical scholar) that "the burden of proof regarding the exclusion of women from the office of teaching and ruling within the congregation now lies on those who maintain the exclusion rather than on those who challenge it."⁴⁴ On this premise I have chosen to reexamine the relationship of 1 Tim 2:8–15 to Gal 3:28, keeping in mind the exegetical tension between the texts along with the lessons learned from other similar interpretive mistakes in Church history. The result of taking this kind of fresh look at a familiar text has been a personal change of mind regarding the gender role question.

Specifically this study has led me to draw the following conclusions: (1) The first-century backdrop to Ephesus can be reconstructed sufficiently to demonstrate an influential fertility cult in a context where many women enjoyed unusual prominence in both religious and secular leadership positions. In other words, Christian women could easily have been tempted to aggressively challenge the existing religious leadership. (2) *Authentein* is best understood as having the negative connotation of "aggressively usurping authority," which in turn infects the meaning of *didaskein*. Thus Paul prohibits forcing one's teaching on the existing eldership, an action that would have been wrong for either gender though it is specifically applied to women in this context. (3) Paul's reference to creation and fall makes more sense as a reminder of the first woman's humble beginnings and failure, designed to evoke a response of humility on the part of the proud women desiring leadership positions in Ephesus. Thus, as he does elsewhere, so here he uses an illustrative practical logic rather than a formal reasoning process. (4) The reference to being "delivered through childbearing" is best understood as carrying forward the creation/fall motif, calling the women of Ephesus to be patient and at the same time giving them hope that deliverance from the curse of male dominance is also possible. (5) Focusing on the ultimate concern of the text not only demonstrates a thread of unity between the divergent interpretations of this passage but also provides a bridge for a contemporary application of the same principles of humility, patience and hope for those struggling with similar temptations. (6) Humility stands out as the predominant theme in 2:8–15, reinforced by the broader context of the letter. (7) The clearer, more general proclamation of Gal 3:28 rightly serves as a foundational principle against which the more obscure text of 1 Tim 2:8–15 can

⁴³ S. D. Lowe, "Rethinking the Female Status/Function Question: The Jew/Gentile Relationship as a Paradigm," *JETS* 34/1 (March 1991) 59–75.

⁴⁴ J. I. Packer, "Understanding" 289.

be interpreted. This is made even clearer by the well-developed Jew/Gentile paradigm in Galatians and elsewhere in Paul's writings.

In short, there is no compelling reason to read into 2:8-15 a hierarchical prohibition of a more general nature regarding women's role in teaching or church leadership for all times. The language and context of the passage neither requires nor warrants it. Moreover such an interpretation flies in the face of the clearer message of Gal 3:28. After seventy-five or so generations of Church history it is long past the time to admit that we were wrong.

III. GUARDED OPTIMISM IN THE 1990s

Though I have written this article as a test case of one who has changed his mind on this question during the past decade, I have sought to apply my research and experience to the direction of the debate in the 1990s. Consequently, just as Paul communicated a message of humility, patience and hope, so this study concludes with two comments regarding these themes in connection with evangelicals and gender roles.

1. *Humility leading to cooperative research and dialogue.* A positive result of the recent backlash has been a score of helpful contributions from both hierarchical and egalitarian evangelicals, which has demonstrated that the term evangelical is broad enough to include both. Thus the time has come to do more than just "grieve together that this unresolved issue is hindering the witness of the Church."⁴⁵ Instead we must avoid the conclusion that there is nothing new to be said regarding this and combine our efforts to turn the present strife into a cooperative effort toward recognizing and learning to cope with our diversity in a mutual learning process that encourages a scholarly openmindedness and patience, especially for those who find themselves in transition within their own ecclesiastical communities.

The Evangelical Theological Society has made significant strides during the past decade regarding the secondary issue of dispensationalism.⁴⁶ Perhaps a similar study group within the Society, dedicated to increasing understanding and dialogue between the hierarchical and egalitarian camps, could yield similar results on a topic at least as important and relevant.⁴⁷ This seems to be a task for which the Society is especially suited, given its strict doctrinal statement regarding the nature of Scripture. Only a group with this kind of clearly orthodox focus, yet inclusive of both

⁴⁵ G. G. Hull, "Response" to Gundry, "Why We're Here" 24.

⁴⁶ Though the theme of the 43rd annual meeting of the Society in Kansas City (November 21-23, 1991) was "Christ and the Kingdom in the Old and New Testaments," the dispensational study group contributed or organized several plenary presentations reflecting cooperative accomplishments toward developing what was labeled "progressive dispensationalism."

⁴⁷ A similar invitation was made by N. Hardesty and M. Branson in 1982, but to the best of my knowledge it has not yet yielded the kind of cooperative effort envisioned here. Cf. M. L. Branson, "A Working Group on Biblical Feminist Theology," *TSF Bulletin* (November-December 1982) 8-9.

sides of the debate, can make a significant impact on the evangelical community at large.

2. *Patience and hope regarding the status quo.* While we work together toward a consensus on this question, two things can be done to improve the situation for women in both camps. First, both patience and persistence must characterize the egalitarian camp. If first-century women at Ephesus needed to wait until the time was right, so must we today in situations where God has not fully opened the door on this matter. Having said this, however, I must immediately state two qualifications: (1) This posture should not be confused with "the old 'feminine' strategy—just be good and patient; the world will eventually take pity on women who wait."⁴⁸ Rather, it should be perceived as trusting in a God who has already taken pity on women as coequal image-bearers of the Godhead and who is working actively, though according to a divinely ordained schedule, to fully establish the kingdom. (2) This principle seems to apply less today than it did in the first century when this was really news. Nearly two millennia later it could be reasoned that women have been patient for a long time and that the Church has had plenty of time to understand the message and make the transition to a new covenant model. Nevertheless in some cases pressing the matter too hard or too fast can actually do more harm than good, especially if it is done in the wrong way or with a prideful spirit.

Second, regardless of our conclusion as to where or if we draw a line for women in Church leadership, there is considerably more that most Christian organizations can do to support and encourage women's participation in ministry at whatever level they deem appropriate. Writing as one who has functioned within hierarchical organizations all of his life, I see this as being especially applicable to this group, which has been the least sensitive to women's concerns. Some of the effort that is being expended by both sides discrediting their opponents must be redirected to a positive application of whatever conclusions have been drawn. Just as the internal strife has driven many evangelical women who sense a call to ministry to less conservative seminaries than they would have otherwise chosen for training, so also the lack of support in general that they have found from within their own ecclesiastical communities has simply told them that they are not welcome. On this point evangelicals from both sides of the debate must renew their efforts to influence the evangelical community and the Church to become a more responsive, more inviting place for women to minister.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Faludi, *Backlash* 456.

⁴⁹ Cf. a similar statement made by L. DenBesten in his address, "Women's Concerns: Fuller's Clear Five-Point Commitment to the Future," delivered at the Women's Concerns Ten-Year Banquet of Fuller Theological Seminary, April 3, 1986.