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Gender Passages in the NT: Hermeneutical Fallacies Critiqued

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The pre-fall bliss man and woman enjoyed in the Garden has given way to much confusion regarding man's and woman's place in God's world, in Christ's church, and in relation to one another. North American culture, with its emphasis on equality and the advances of feminism in this century, has pressed hard upon the church to conform its teachings to new societal standards. As is customary in American public life, special interest groups have been formed representing different sides of the "gender issue" in an effort to influence the various segments within American evangelicalism toward their respective viewpoints.[1]

The last few decades have witnessed an increasing awareness of the importance of hermeneutical procedure in interpreting the gender passages in the NT. Grant Osborne contended in 1977 that "the determining factor in the discussion [of gender passages in the NT] is hermeneutical."[2] Already in 1958, Krister Stendahl had investigated *The Bible and the Role of Women—A Case Study in Hermeneutics*.[3] Robert Johnston in 1978 and again in 1986 attributed the differences in approach regarding the role of women in the church taken by evangelicals to "different hermeneutics," calling the study of women's roles a "test case" of evangelical interpretation.[4]

If Johnston is correct, evangelical hermeneutics seem to have failed the test, since the existing exegetical conclusions on the NT gender texts vary widely. What is perhaps even more disturbing is the apparent lack of consensus regarding a proper methodology.[5]

The authors referred to above provide some constructive suggestions regarding hermeneutical procedure in dealing with gender issues.[6]

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[1] The reference is to *The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* and *Christians for Biblical Equality*; cf. their respective publications, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood - A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991) and Alvera Mickelsen, *Women, Authority and the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1986)

[2] Cf. Grant R. Osborne, "Hermeneutics and Women in the Church," *JETS* 20 (1977) 337.

[3] Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women - A Case Study in Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966).

[4] Robert K. Johnston, "Biblical Authority and Interpretation: the Test Case of Women's Role [sic] in the Church and Home Updated," in *Women, Authority and the Bible* (ed. Alvera Mickelsen; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1986) 30-41. This essay is a revised version of "The Role of Women in the Church and Home: An Evangelical Testcase in Hermeneutics," in *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation* (ed. W. Ward Gasque and William Sanford LaSor; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 234-59. Cf. also Gordon D. Fee, "Issues in Evangelical Hermeneutics," Part III: The Great Watershed - Intentionality and Particularity/Eternality: 1 Timothy 2:8-15 as a Test Case," *Crux* 26 (1990) 31-37.

[5] Cf. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "The Interpretation of the Bible," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelein; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 1.78-79.

However, at times their suggestions are too superficial or otherwise unhelpful. For example, Johnston distinguishes between “obscure” and “plain” passages on gender issues.[7] He cites as an example “the difficult text” in 1 Tim 2 which, according to Johnston, “needs to be read in the light of…Gal 3:28.”[8] But surely this categorization is inadmissibly subjective.[9] Moreover, Johnston illegitimately merges the ancient and the contemporary contexts. The mere fact that a passage is difficult to understand at the end of the twentieth century does not mean that the original audience considered the same passage “obscure” or “difficult.” A similar charge can be brought against the distinction drawn by Osborne between “passages which deal with an issue systematically” and “incidental references.”[10]

The present essay therefore seeks to readdress some of the issues taken up in earlier treatments, taking into account developments since these studies appeared. It also attempts to sharpen further the discernment of improper methodology. It is hoped that the critique of fallacious methodologies will contribute to better hermeneutical procedures. This, in turn, might lead to a greater convergence of exegetical conclusions. In the following article, the usual procedure will be first to identify the fallacy and then to illustrate it by concrete examples found in the interpretations of various writers. After the critique of a given fallacy, a few constructive comments will seek to point the way toward a better hermeneutical approach.

It should also be pointed out that the fallacies treated below are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For example, one’s use of an imbalanced methodology may be due to

an underestimation of the power of presuppositions, or an imbalanced hermeneutic may consist in an interpreter’s improper elevation of alleged background data over the explicit text.

I. Underestimating the Power of Presuppositions

Twentieth-century hermeneutical emphases such as the impossibility of presuppositionless exegesis and the reality of the horizon and preunderstanding of the interpreter have still not been sufficiently applied to the contemporary enterprise of biblical

[6] Cf. also the recent article by Terrance Thiessen, “Toward a Hermeneutic for Discerning Moral Absolutes,” *JETS* 36 (1993) 189-207. Thiessen enumerates five hermeneutical principles for discerning universal moral absolutes: (1) their basis in the moral nature of God; (2) their basis in the creation order; (3) transcendent factors and lack of situational limitations; (4) consistency in progressive revelation; (5) consistency in the progress of redemption. Thiessen often refers to the role of women in the church. His discussion of 1 Cor 14:34 and 1 Tim 2:11-14 unfortunately deals with both passages simultaneously, oscillating back and forth between them (pp. 195-96).

[7] Cf. Johnston, “Test Case,” 31.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Cf., e.g., George W. Knight, who considers 1 Tim 2:11-15 to be the passage which “most clearly” gives Paul’s teaching on the role of women in the church (*The Role Relationship of Men and Women* [rev. ed.; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1985] 17) - the opposite verdict of Johnston’s! Cf. also Thiessen, who distinguishes between clear and less obvious passages but admits that this often-cited principle is not easily applied (“Hermeneutic,” 202).

[10] Cf. Osborne, “Hermeneutics and Women,” 338 (referring to N. Hardesty and L. Scanzoni, *All We’re Meant to Be* [Waco: Word, 1974] 18).

interpretation.[11] In the case of the interpretation of biblical gender texts, every writer has preconceived notions of how male-female relationships are properly conducted. An illusory notion of hermeneutical objectivity will render genuine dialogue with both the text and other interpreters and interpretive communities much more difficult.[12]

Johnston evaluates positively the recent trend from "the myth of objectivity" in interpretation to what he calls "a controlled subjectivism."[13] He rightly chastises evangelicals who, "in their desire to escape the supposed relativity of such reader-oriented perspectives, have too often attempted to hide themselves behind the veneer of objectivity."[14] Whether the kind of "new hermeneutic" advocated by Johnston provides the answer remains another question. Johnston himself seems to see the dangers of such an approach when he searches for ways "[t]o protect against a destructive subjectivism" in order to practice "a reader-sensitive criticism."[15]

Of course, the existence of presuppositions does not mean that all presuppositions are equally valid or that an interpreter's prior convictions in approaching the text cannot become more and more consistent with biblical teaching.[16] Nevertheless, it is helpful to be aware of the way in which one's experience, interpretive and denominational traditions,

cultural and social backgrounds, vocation, gender, education, and other factors influence the way in which Scripture is interpreted.[17]

An example of presuppositions that remain largely unacknowledged is the recent article "Why God is Not Mother" by Elizabeth Achtemeier.[18] In an article that purportedly critiques the radical feminist movement, she states at the outset of her essay what she considers to be the general evangelical consensus:

> The Scriptures *clearly proclaim* that both female and male are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), that husband and wife are to join flesh in a marital union of *mutual helpfulness* (Gen. 2:18), that the ancient enmity between the sexes *and the subservience of women* are *a result of human sin* (Gen. 3), that *such enmity and subservience have been overcome* by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:28), and that all women and men are called equally to discipleship in the service of their risen Lord. The

[11] Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, "Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?" in *Existence and Faith* (ed. S. Ogden; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961) 289-96; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2d ed.; New York: Crossroad, 1982). Cf. also the good survey on the preunderstandings of the interpreter by William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993) 98-116.

[12] Cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); id., *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1991).

[13] Cf. Johnston, "Test Case," 32 and 38.

[14] Cf. ibid., 35.

[15] Ibid., 40-41. Johnston lists (1) the wider insights of the Christian community, past and present; (2) the whole canon of Scripture; (3) reliance on the Holy Spirit; and (4) the witness of multiple cultures in interpreting the Bible.

[16] Cf. Grant Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, esp. p. 324.

[17] For a commendable instance of an awareness and acknowledgment of their personal limitations, cf. Piper and Grudem, *Recovering*, 84: "We have our personal predispositions, and have no doubt been influenced by all the genetic and environmental constraints of our past and present. The history of exegesis does not encourage us that we will have the final word on this issue, and we hope we are not above correction."

[18] Cf. Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Why God Is Not Mother," *Christianity Today* 37/9 (16 Aug. 1993) 16-23.

> Scriptures further show that our Lord *consistently treated women as equals* and *that the New Testament churches could have women as their leaders*.[19]

However, except for the statements that both female and male are made in the image of God and that women and men are equally called to discipleship, all of the above assertions, far from representing an evangelical consensus, are strongly disputed.[20] What, according to Achtemeier, the Scriptures "clearly proclaim" are in fact Achtemeier's own interpretative conclusions.

At times ambiguous wordings conceal the actual thrust of the author's views. Is the phrasing used in Gen 2:18 best rendered as "mutual helpfulness"? Whatever the term "helper" may denote, it is *the woman* who is said to be *the man*'*s* helper and not vice versa (cf. 1 Cor 11:9). What does Achtemeier mean by her contention that Jesus treated women "as equals"? She cannot mean "equal *in every respect*," including women's being fellow-Messiahs. At the same time, she seems to argue for more than simply contending that Jesus treated women with respect and dignity. Achtemeier's point presumably is that Jesus treated women as "equal *to men*." But by wording her contention ambiguously she seems to allow deliberately for a double meaning of the term "equal." And how does Achtemeier

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define the term "leaders" in her final assertion? Would she include pastors and teaching and ruling elders in this definition? If so, she can hardly point to an evangelical consensus on this issue.

Finally, by subsuming both the enmity and "subservience" (another ambiguous term) of women under the consequences of human sin that were "overcome" in Christ, Achtemeier misleadingly suggests that this is the only interpretation allowed by the Scriptural data. Is Achtemeier inadequately aware of her own presuppositions? Is she deliberately using ambiguous language in order to disguise them? Or does she not mention alternative interpretations for other reasons? In any case, her article is a fine example of the power of presuppositions and the importance of acknowledging one's own preconceived notions as well as those of others.[21]

Generally, the practice of seeking to substantiate a theological point by way of appeal to "hard" lexical, morphological, or syntactical data when the available evidence itself seems far from conclusive may reveal a selective appraisal of the data which may be a result of an interpreter's conscious or unrecognized presuppositions.[22]

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[19] Ibid., 17. Emphasis added.

[20] Cf., e.g., Thiessen, "Hermeneutic," 197: "In particular there is lack of consensus concerning the effect of the fall upon the relationship. Whether hierarchy within the marital relationship is of the created order and hence universal, or whether it was the result of the curse and hence removed in the order of redemption, is still a matter of contention."

[21] Cf. also the positive example of the acknowledged presuppositions of Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Toward a Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics: Biblical Interpretation and Liberation Theology," *Readings in Moral Theology IV: The Use of Scripture in Moral Theology* (ed. C. E. Curran and R. A. McCormick; New York: Paulist, 1984) 376.

[22] Cf. regarding this the classic work by James Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: University Press, 1961).

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II. Lack of Balance in Hermeneutical Methodology

In principle, most students of the NT gender passages would probably agree that the process of interpreting a biblical passage should include the following components: an identification of the book's genre, a reconstruction of the historical and cultural background of a document, lexical and syntactical studies, and a survey of the passage's literary context and the flow of the argument. However, interpreters do not always live up to their best hermeneutical intentions. As the examples below will attempt to demonstrate, a lack of balance in hermeneutical methodology (i.e., the giving of inadequate weight to one element of the hermeneutical process at the expense of other components) accounts for varying degrees of distortion in interpreters' exegetical results.

With regard to balance in hermeneutical methodology, the important questions are: (1) What is the *relative weight* given to the various elements of the interpretive process by an interpreter? (2) Which of these factors is *judged decisive* by a given author? And (3) what *criteria* are used to arrive at one's judgment among alternative interpretive options?

For example, an interpretation of 1 Tim 2:8–15, conducted properly, should incorporate the use of all of the hermeneutical procedures listed above in proper balance. What is the genre of the Pastorals? Granted that it is an occasional writing, does that necessarily mean that the letter cannot contain any injunctions of permanent validity? What

is the most probable historical-cultural background for 1 Tim 2:8–15?[23] What are significant words or important syntactical constructions that need to be studied? And what is the passage's function in its immediate and larger contexts? Ideally, the results of these various analyses are properly related in order to arrive at a balanced interpretation of the passage. However, one's overall interpretation will only be as strong as its weakest link. An improper emphasis on one element in the interpretive process or a wrong judgment in one area of study will weaken, if not invalidate, one's entire interpretation.

Thus a given writer may give preeminence to lexical study. George W. Knight, finding no instances of auqentein with a negative connotation in extrabiblical literature, believes he can exclude the possibility that the term can take on a negative connotation in any imaginable context.[24] However, while the lack of extant references to that effect may suggest a certain (some might say high) *plausibility* of Knight's thesis, it seems much harder, if not impossible, to prove the *impossibility* of a term's taking on a certain connotation in a given context.

Other cases of an imbalanced hermeneutical procedure may be treatments that place undue emphasis on word studies. Especially the recent extensive interchange on the meaning of kefalh in the NT and particularly in Eph 5:21–33 comes to mind.[25] Most would agree that

[23] Note that it is not enough merely to reconstruct the general milieu of a given area. What needs to be demonstrated is the plausibility, even probability, that a given background is relevant for the writing of the respective biblical document. See further the discussion of the improper use of background data below.

[24] Cf. Knight, "Role Relationship," 18 n. 1. Cf. also Knight's article, "Auqentew in Reference to Women in 1 Tim 2:12," *NTS* 30 (1984) 143-57.

[25] Cf. the interchange between Wayne Grudem, "Does kephal*e* ('Head') Mean 'Source' or 'Authority Over' in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples," *Trinity Journal* 6 NS (1985) 38-59, and Richard E. Cervin, "Does kephal*e* Mean 'Source' or 'Authority over' in Greek Literature? A Rebuttal," *Trinity Journal* 10 NS (1989) 85-112; also Wayne Grudem, "The Meaning of kephale ('Head'): A Response to Recent Studies," *Trinity*

there is some value to the study of a term’s usage in extrabiblical Greek literature. But these efforts need to be placed in proper perspective and their limitations recognized. Specifically, while such a survey may help determine the term’s range of meaning, ultimately the use of kefalh in the context at hand will be decisive.

To preclude misunderstandings, it should be emphasized once again that word studies are indeed helpful since they set general parameters for what words can be expected to mean in various contexts. However, the issue addressed here is not the value of word studies *themselves* but a (false) confidence that they all but settle a term’s meaning before one has seriously looked for intertextual reference points of a given passage. This confidence, of course, is rarely expressed explicitly. But it seems often *implied* in the relative weight assigned to word studies in certain writers’ discussions of a

gender passage in relation to their study of intertextual reference points in the book under consideration. For example, in the view of this writer, recent discussion of Eph 5:21–33 has placed too much emphasis on the meaning of the word kefalh *in extrabiblical literature* and comparatively not enough on the text and other uses of kefalh *in Ephesians*.

Specifically, in one’s interpretation of Eph 5:21–33, one may profitably consult Eph 1:21–23, where word clusters and concepts similar to Eph 5:21–33 are found (cf. upotassw, kefalh, ekklhsia, swma). Likewise, Eph 4:15–16 surely should be considered. This is not to suggest that the use of kefalh, even in the same letter, is rigidly uniform.[26] The point is simply that one should immerse oneself foremost of all in the theology of a given writer (in the present case, the author of Ephesians). Thus, on balance, in the study of the use of kefalh in Eph 5:21–33 the ultimate emphasis should be placed on the contexts and conceptual interrelationships in the same book, with word studies in extrabiblical literature providing a helpful framework for contextual exegesis. But at times, when reading articles on gender issues in which word studies are prominently featured, one gets the impression that these writers believe the work has essentially been completed when all that has been done is a setting of some basic parameters, with the major exegetical and biblical-theological work still to be accomplished.

When engaging in literary-theological analysis, contextual and syntactical factors should be carefully balanced with lexical considerations. This can be illustrated in the case of 1 Tim 2:12. Word studies of the term auqentein (“to have or exercise authority”) in extrabiblical literature (1 Tim 2:12 is the only instance where the word is used in the NT) are able to supply a range of possible meanings. As one considers the term’s meaning in its specific context in 1 Tim 2:12, one should seek to determine the *probable* meaning of auqentein with the help of contextual and syntactical studies.

Contextually, it is apparent that 1 Tim 2:11–12 is framed by the phrase “in quietness” or “in silence” (en hsucia), while “teaching” (didaskeinw) and “exercising authority” (auqentein) in verse 12 correspond to “learning” (manqanetw) and “in full submission” (en

Journal 11 NS (1990) 3-72. Siding with Grudem is Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Kephal*e* in 1 Corinthians 11:3,” *Int* 47 (1993) 52-59 (for further bibliographical references, see pp. 57-58 n. 2).

[26] Cf. Edmund P. Clowney, “The Biblical Theology of the Church,” in *The Church in the Bible and the World* (ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 54.

pash upotagh) in verse 11.[27] This juxtaposition already suggests that auqentein means "to have or exercise authority" rather than "to usurp authority," as has

been suggested by some.[28] Recent lexical analyses have confirmed this interpretation.[29] Moreover, the question may be asked whether the syntax of the passage helps to clarify further the meaning of auqentein in 1 Tim 2:12.[30] The following syntactical considerations may be relevant:

(1) What is the relationship between "teach" (didaskein) and "have authority" (auqentein) in 1 Tim 2:12?
(2) What kind of connection is indicated by the word oude ("nor") that binds didaskein and auqentein together?
(3) How close is the connection between the two terms in the light of the fact that intervening words separate them?
(4) What significance should be given to the fact that the infinitive didaskein is placed first in the sentence and comes before the finitive verb (epitrepw, "I permit") which governs it?[31]

While lexical analysis can provide the basic parameters for a term's meaning (i.e. its range of meaning), contextual and syntactical studies may be able to provide further help for the interpretation of a difficult Pauline gender passage. With regard to the syntactical questions posited above, detailed analyses of the NT and extrabiblical Greek literature conducted by the present writer have shown that didaskein and auqentein are linked in 1 Tim 2:12 by the coordinating conjunction oude in a way that requires them to share either a positive or negative force. Thus 1 Tim 2:12 could either be rendered as "I do not permit a woman to teach nor to exercise authority over a man" (both terms share a positive force) or "I

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[27] Contra Andrew C. Perriman, who argues that v. 12 is parenthetical ("What Eve Did, What Women Shouldn't Do: The Meaning of Auqentew in 1 Timothy 2:12," *TynBul* 44 [1993] 129-30, 139-40).

[28] Cf. especially Philip Barton Payne, "Libertarian Women in Ephesus: A Response to Douglas J. Moo's Article, 1 Timothy 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance," *Trinity Journal* 2 NS (1981) 169-97; and id., oude in 1 Timothy 2:12 (paper read at the 1988 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society). Cf. also John R. Stott, *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1990) 269, 27780; Carroll D. Osburn, "*Authenteo* (1 Timothy 2:12), *ResQ* 25 (1982) 1-12; Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies) 1.474; and the KJV and the NEB.

[29] Cf. especially the extensive study by Henry Scott Baldwin, "New Evidence Concerning the Use of Auqentew in 1 Timothy 2:12 (paper presented at the 1992 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society).

[30] Cf. especially Douglas J. Moo, "1 Timothy 2:11'15: Meaning and Significance," *Trinity Journal* 1 NS (1980) 62-83.

[31] For a detailed treatment of the syntax of 1 Tim 2:12, cf. this authors "Syntactical parallels to 1 Tim 2:12 in the NT and Extrabiblical Greek Literature" in a forthcoming book on the interpretation of 1 Tim 2:12 tentatively titled, *Women and the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Its Literary, Cultural, and Theological Contexts* (ed. Henry Scott Baldwin and Thomas R. Schreiner). The material was originally presented at the ETS and SBL annual meetings in San Francisco in November 1992. Only a brief synopsis of the results of this study can be given here.

do not permit a woman to teach *error* nor to *usurp* a man's authority" (both terms share a negative force). Moreover, since didaskein in the Pastorals always has a positive force (cf. 1 Tim 4:11; 6:2; and 2 Tim 2:2), auqentein, too, should be

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expected to have a positive force in 1 Tim 2:12, so that the rendering "I do not permit a woman to teach nor to *exercise authority* over a man" is required. Other instances of didaskein in the Pastorals indicate that if a negative connotation or content is intended, the word eterodidaskalein or other contextual qualifiers are used (cf. 1 Tim 1:3–4; 6:3; Tit 1:9–14).

Thus it has been demonstrated in the case of the interpretation of 1 Tim 2:12 that a balanced use of various hermeneutical tools can best supply solid exegetical results. Of course, to the lexical, contextual, and syntactical studies similar analyses of the Pastorals' genre and the historical-cultural background of 1 Tim (and specifically of 1 Tim 2:8–15) should be added. The hermeneutical questions of normativity versus relativity and of the contemporary application of the passage should also be addressed.[32]

III. Underrating the Importance of the Use of the OT in the NT[33]

There is general agreement regarding what the relevant passages on gender issues in the NT are. The references usually listed are 1 Cor 11:2–16; 14:33b–36; Gal 3:28; Eph 5:21–33; Col 3:18–19; 1 Tim 2:8–15; and 1 Pet 3:1–7.[34] To this may be added a number of instances in the Gospels where Jesus relates to or teaches regarding women.[35] It is also commonly recognized that Genesis 1–3 is a foundational passage for the gender passages of the NT.[36] It seems, however, that more could be done in studying the exact way in which Genesis 1–3 is used in the respective NT gender passages.[37] Consider, for example, the following relationships between Genesis and the Pauline gender passages:

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[32] Cf. the forthcoming book *Women and the Church*, to which reference has already been made in the previous note.

[33] It has been suggested that it may be better to entitle this section "Underrating or *Overrating* the Importance of the Use of the OT in the NT". However, in the opinion of this writer, it seems hard to overrate this element in the interpretation of gender passages in the NT (see the discussion below), while, as a survey of the recent literature on NT gender passages indicates, the fallacy committed much more frequently is indeed that of not giving the NT writers use of an OT passage the weight it appears to deserve.

[34] See Osborne, "Hermeneutics and Women," 337; Piper and Grudem, *Recovering*; Mickelsen, *Women*.

[35] See further the discussion of *Isolationist Exegesis* below.

[36] See especially the excellent article by Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Gen 13," in Piper and Grudem, *Recovering*, 95-112.

[37] But cf. the articles by A. T. Lincoln, "The Use of the OT in Ephesians," *JSNT* 14 (1982) 16-57, and A. T. Hanson, "The Use of the Old Testament in the Pastoral Epistles," *IBS* 3 (1981), 203-19 which deal, albeit incidentally, with the use of the OT in some of the gender passages in the NT. In departure from the usual procedure in this essay, no direct effort will be made to present specific instances in the literature on NT gender passages where this fallacy is committed. Rather, in the light of the significant complexity of the issue of Paul's use of Genesis 1-3 when dealing with gender issues, a series of questions will be raised that should be dealt with in order to avoid the fallacy under consideration, i.e. an underrating of the importance of the use of the OT in the NT.

NT passage	*OT reference or allusion*
1 Cor 11:2–16 (cf. 14:33b–36)	Gen 2:18, 21–23
Gal 3:28	Gen 1:27
Eph 5:21–33 (par. Col 3:18–19)	Gen 2:24
1 Tim 2:8–15 (cf. 3:1–5)	Gen 2:7, 21–22; 3:1–6

Evangelical hermeneutics affirms the significance of authorial intention in determining meaning. If one seeks to understand the Pauline gender passages with regard to authorial intent, one must not take lightly the fact that Paul in virtually every instance refers to one or the other passage from Genesis 1–3. This, as noted above, has of course not gone unnoticed. However, fundamental hermeneutical questions remain to be asked and answered.

First, regarding authorial intention: What does this consistent reference to some aspect of Genesis 1–3 reveal about authorial intention? That is to say, why did Paul refer or allude to Genesis? Did he do so simply to establish a connection with antecedent Scripture? Did he resort to "prooftexting" to bolster his arguments? Did he use Genesis merely as illustrative material? Did he believe in the authority of the OT Scriptures and use them to establish equally authoritative NT principles? Or did he have any other purposes in mind? How did he craft his arguments?

Second, regarding reader response and the dynamics of the communicative context: How did Paul want his references to Genesis to be received by the recipients of their correspondence? How did he desire his audience to respond? What was his readers' perception of Scriptural authority? What were these readers' perceptions of apostolic authority, especially in regard to Paul's interpretation and use of the OT? How were those writings in fact received and responded to? What impact did Paul's use of the OT have, especially compared with the impact his teachings on gender issues would have had without reference to the OT?

Of course, this last question is a hypothetical one. Still, it is a legitimate question to ask. One should face the fact that the OT, particularly the opening chapters of Genesis, is commonly referred to when Paul deals with gender issues. This procedure should be understood in relation to the possibility that Paul might have used other points of reference or grounds of appeal, such as a direct reference to their contemporary context, community standards, their own personal views, or other forms of argumentation. While these alternative procedures are not completely absent (cf. 1 Cor 11:2, 16), one must give proper weight to the fact that Paul commonly referred to the fundamental passages in Genesis 1–3 as his ultimate reference point in his respective contemporary contexts.[38]

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Third, regarding the text itself: What does the text say explicitly, especially in connection with OT references? Does Paul himself give an OT principle as the reason for his argument in a certain contemporary context, as he does in 1 Tim 2:13 and 14? What is the

[38] Regarding 1 Cor 11:16, see the recent article by Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "1 Corinthians 11:16 and the Character of Pauline Exhortation," *JBL* 110 (1991) 679-89. Engberg-Pedersen argues that Paul does not want to be contentious and thus leaves the decision of what to do about head coverings up to the Corinthians themselves. This rather unconventional conclusion aside, Engberg-Pedersens article is representative of much recent scholarship in focusing his interest on rhetorical criticism to the extent that he completely fails to address the references to the OT found in the passage he discusses. A balanced hermeneutical consideration should do both.

relationship between references to the OT and to contemporary practice or community standards? Are those reference points of equal weight and authority and thus to be placed side by side, or is one more important than the other? Does the contemporary context ever override OT principles? Or is the OT principle the fundamental ground of appeal, with contemporary practice as a corroborating aspect? How the questions posed above are answered will largely determine the final outcome of an interpreter’s historical exegesis as well as her contemporary application.

There seem to be instances where Paul makes the whole force of his argument rest on principles derived from the OT. In 1 Tim 2:8–15, he draws significance from both the historical sequence of the creation of man and woman (v. 13; cf. also 1 Cor 11:8) and from the way in which the historical fall of man occurred, i.e. by a reversal of the created order (v. 14).[39] Finally, by way of synecdoche, Paul assures his readers that the woman will be saved “by the bearing of children,” i.e. by adhering to her God-ordained role.[40]

The interpretive conclusion and implication Paul draws from the narrative accounts in Genesis 2 and 3 is that both creation order and fall have in fact abiding significance for male-female relationships.[41] For the man, to have been created first means that he has first responsibility for the stewardship entrusted to him by God. The role reversal at the fall is a further argument, according to Paul, that the final responsibility and authority legitimately rest with the man. Thus Paul in 1 Tim 2:8–15 draws from the OT narratives abiding

principles for male-female relationships and applies them to his contemporary context. It seems that Paul’s appeal to the OT as well as his own apostolic office were, in his mind, definitive, at least in the context at hand.[42]

[39] The introductory gar (“for”) can be simply explanatory or illustrative, or give the reason or logical grounds for Pauls injunction. Walter L. Liefeld and Ruth A. Tucker (*Daughters of the Church: Women in Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987] 461) seem to lean toward taking the conjunction in the former sense, following Payne (Response, 175-77). But cf. the arguments for the latter force given by Moo (“Rejoinder,” 20-24), who notes that the explanatory use of gar is not only quite rare, but that it makes little sense in the context of 1 Tim 2:12-14. He shows that the movement in Paul’s writings from command or prohibition to the *reason* for the command or prohibition is common. Such a construction appears twenty-one times in the Pastorals alone (1 Tim 3:13; 4:5, 8, 16; 5:4, 11, 15; 2 Tim 1:7; 2:7, 16; 3:6; 4:3, 6, 10, 11, 15; Tit 1:10; 2:11; 3:3, 9, 12).

[40] For this interpretation, I am indebted to an early draft of a forthcoming essay by Thomas R. Schreiner, An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15.

[41] In the context of 1 Tim 2:8-15, Paul’s application is to male-female relationships in the church.

[42] Note the rather categorical I do not permit (ouk epitrepw) in 1 Tim 2:12. Note in this context, and with regard to the interpretation of 1 Tim 2:8-15 as a whole, the interchange between Douglas J. Moo, “1 Timothy 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance,” 62-83, and Philip B. Payne, “Libertarian Women in Ephesus: A Response to Douglas J. Moo’s Article, ‘1 Timothy 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance,’” *Trinity Journal* 2 NS 169-97 (1981), and Moo’s response to Payne, “The Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11-15: A Rejoinder,” *Trinity Journal* 2 NS (1981) 198-222. The term epitrepw is discussed in Moo’s first article (pp. 65-66), Payne’s response (pp. 170-73), and Moos rejoinder (pp. 199-200). Regardless of the question whether permanent validity of Paul’s injunction can be construed from the wording ouk epitre alone, it seems clear that Paul wrote with the consciousness of one who had been commissioned as an apostle with concomitant authority (1 Tim 1:1) and thus would have perceived his injunction to be authoritative at least in this present context. His use of the OT should also be seen from that perspective.

Probably the most difficult passage in this regard is 1 Cor 11:2–16, since reference is made there both to the OT and to contemporary practice.[43] The way man and woman were created (cf. Gen 2:22) as well as the purpose for which they were created (cf. Gen 2:18) form the basic framework for Paul's reasoning (vv. 8–9). According to Paul, the creation narrative clearly indicates "that the husband is the head of (over) his wife" (cf. v. 3). Perhaps it is appropriate here to distinguish between the principle inherent in the way man and woman were created and the way in which Paul desired this principle to be expressed in the churches of his day (cf. vv. 2 and 16). As in other instances (cf. 1 Corinthians 7), Paul's authority does not rest exclusively in himself but is tied to the basis for the respective teaching invoked by Paul. The OT passages referred to in 1 Cor 11:8–9 establish absolute parameters; Paul's authority regarding the application of this principle, while extending to the churches subject to his apostolic jurisdiction, does not necessarily extend to churches in other cultures and times. In any case, the important difference between 1 Cor 11:2–16 and 1 Tim 2:8–15 is that in the latter passage it seems impossible to separate the principle (i.e. the woman's functional subordination to the man in creation) from the way in which this principle is to be applied (i.e. for woman not to teach nor to exercise authority over man in the context of a congregation gathered for worship); neither are there any contextual cues limiting the application of 1 Tim 2:12 to the circumstances at hand.

The question of authorial intent has great significance for the proper interpretation of the passages in the NT that cite the Old. Paul, Peter, and their fellow-apostles perceived the OT, as well as the evolving NT writings, as authoritative.[44] Thus it can be argued that when those writers quoted the OT in their arguments, they did so because they were

considering it to be authoritative. Furthermore, the canonical process itself guarded and selected those writings of the apostolic era which had continuing value because they were able to transcend contemporary situations. Now it should be acknowledged that the inclusion of a book into the canon does not imply that this book transcends its original occasion *in every respect*. But one should at least consider the issues of apostolic authority and canonicity in the interpretation of the NT gender passages—and that has rarely been done in recent discussion. To be sure, to disregard the results of the canonical decisions entirely is not impossible, but it does remove one from the stream of historic Christianity.

Moreover, since the apostles were given a unique role by God in the progress of formulating the NT, the contemporary interpreter should submit to the apostolic interpretation of the OT where such is available.[45] Evangelicals should be prepared to assign a proper role to

[43] For a survey of the relevant issues and pertinent bibliographical references, cf. Thomas R. Schreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," in *Recovering*, 124-39.

[44] Paul writes in 2 Tim 3:16 that "All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness." Peter notes about Paul's own writings, "our beloved brother Paul… wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught und unstable distort, *as they do also the rest of the Scriptures…*" (2 Pet 3:15b-16). Furthermore, Peter, Paul, and John also thought *of themselves* (i.e. of their own writings) as authoritative (cf. John 21:24; 1 Cor 4:1; 2 Cor 10:10-11 with 11:23; and the openings of the Pauline and Petrine correspondences).

[45] The opposite attitude to a submission to the apostolic interpretation of a given OT passage is the effort to interpret the reference independently by the modern interpreter, with the subsequent attempt to make the NT conform to one's own interpretation of the OT passage. For this kind of approach, cf. Joy L. E. Fleming, *A Rhetorical Analysis of Genesis 2-3 with Implications for a Theology of Man and Woman* (Ph.D. diss.; Strasburg,

tradition. Apostolic tradition is given a very positive role in the NT. The current trend towards individualism and subjectivism in interpretation testifies to the imbalance between the contemporary interpreter’s judgment and his link with apostolic tradition. Rather than islands adrift on a sea of relativity, contemporary interpretive communities should be branches of the tree of apostolic tradition.

IV. Improper Use of Background Data

While certain writers appear to devote too little attention to background matters, others allow their own reconstruction of the ancient cultural milieu to control almost entirely their exegesis of a given gender passage. An example of the latter extreme is the work by Richard Clark and Catherine Clark Kroeger on 1 Tim 2:12.[46] As Yarbrough rightly contends, there is virtually no basis for the existence of the gnostic heresy that the

Kroegers allege forms the background to 1 Tim 2:12.[47] Throughout their book, the Kroegers are so predominantly concerned with the ancient cultural milieu supposedly underlying 1 Tim 2:12 that there is little room in their treatment for contextual exegesis.

Moreover, not only do the Kroegers use late sources to establish the background of a NT writing, there also remains widespread disagreement regarding the interpretation of the available evidence. For example, Steven Baugh has recently argued that “there is not the slightest evidence that there was a feminist movement at Ephesus.”[48] He contends that the worship of goddesses alone does not constitute sufficient evidence for the presence of feminism in a given society.[49] These findings sharply contradict the Kroegers’ assertions, also made by other recent interpreters.[50] In any case, a general reconstruction of the Ephesian milieu in the first century must not be used indiscriminately in one’s reconstruction of the circumstances prevailing in the Ephesian church that occasioned the writing of 1 Timothy.

Now it is one thing to argue that 1 Tim 2:12, for example, no longer applies due to changed cultural circumstances, or even that the author of that passage inconsistently and wrongly restricts the ministry of women.[51] It is quite another issue to reinterpret the textual

1987). Fleming variously ignores or distorts the context of the Pauline arguments and theology to substitute her own views based on an independent interpretation of the OT.

[46] Cf. Richard Clark and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Tim 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) and the reviews by Robert W. Yarbrough, “I Suffer Not a Woman: A Review Essay,” *Presbyterion* 18 (1992) 25-33; id., “New Light on Paul and Women?” *Christianity Today* 37/11 (4 Oct. 1993) 68-69; and Albert Wolters, Review: *I Suffer Not a Woman*, *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993) 208-13.

[47] Cf. Yarbrough, “New Light,” 68.

[48] Cf. Steven M. Baugh, “Feminism at Ephesus: 1 Timothy 2:12 in Historical Context,” *Outlook* 42/5 (May 1992) 10. [See now Baugh’s review article, The Apostle among the Amazons, *WTJ* 56 (1994) 156-71. - *Ed*.]

[49] Ibid., 9.

[50] Cf. esp. Kroegers, *I Suffer Not a Woman*.

[51] Cf. Osborne, “Hermeneutics and Women,” 337-52; Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 112-13, 119.

evidence by selective use of background data.[52] The procedure followed by the Kroegers focuses on what may at best be implicit in Paul’s reasoning at the expense of the explicit argumentation and wording of the text.[53] Specifically, Paul explicitly adduces two reasons from the OT creation account to substantiate his injunction regarding women’s teaching of men (cf. 1 Tim 2:13–14). The Kroegers, however, hardly discuss these OT references, while they give ample attention to their own reconstruction of this passage’s contemporary background.

On the other side of the spectrum, it is sometimes alleged by those who emphasize the importance of their reconstructed historical-cultural background for the interpretation of a given gender passage that interpreters who view that reference as indicating a permanent universal injunction have *by necessity* no regard for the passage’s background. Scholer, for example, uses 1 Tim 2:15 as a launching pad for reconstructing the contemporary context of 1 Timothy. He argues that this verse is the climax of the argument and infers behind the verse a certain kind of heresy. At the same time Scholer charges those who in his view give insufficient consideration to 1 Tim 2:15 with “irresponsible and symptomatic neglect of reading texts in their contexts.”[54]

However, while this charge may apply to certain writers, it is certainly an inappropriate one for *any* interpretation of 1 Tim 2:12 that considers the passage to have normative character. It is possible to give adequate consideration to the contemporary context of 1 Timothy and still find Paul’s injunction universal and permanently binding for the Church.[55] As has already been noted, the occasional nature of a writing by itself is insufficient to establish the non-normativity of a given teaching. To insist fallaciously that occasionality equals cultural relativity renders in the ultimate analysis any divine revelation to humanity impossible, since such revelation by necessity occurs in a cultural, circumstantial context. Thus the question is not whether a given teaching is *occasional* in nature but whether it is *limited to the occasion* by the biblical writer or other textual or contextual factors.

Again, the neglect to consider adequately a text’s explicit argumentation in favor of a preoccupation with questions of cultural background lacks balance. It is certainly appropriate to seek to illumine a text with relevant background information. But to all but ignore explicit textual material and to allow the text to be superseded by background information fails to

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[52] Besides the work by the Kroegers, see also John Temple Bristow, *What Paul Really Said About Women: An Apostles Liberating Views on Equality in Marriage, Leadership, and Love* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

[53] Cf. David M. Scholer, “1 Timothy 2:9-15 and the Place of Women in the Church’s Ministry,” in Mickelsen, *Women*, 193-219; id., “Women in the Church’s Ministry: Does 1 Timothy 2:9-15 Help or Hinder?” *Daughters of Sarah* 16/4 (1990) 7-12. Cf. also S. H. Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers, and the Mother Goddess at Ephesus: A Study of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 in Light of the Religious and Cultural Milieu of the First Century* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991); Catherine C. Kroeger, “Women in the Church: A Classicist’s View of 1 Tim 2:11-15,” *Journal of Biblical Equality* 1 (1989) 3-31; Kroegers, *I Suffer Not a Woman*. Of these writers, only Gritz considers the OT background. The authors are united in giving priority to the presumed religious and cultural background of 1 Tim 2:8-15.

[54] Cf. Scholer, “1 Timothy 2:9-15,” 195.

[55] Cf. the contention by Douglas J. Moo in *Recovering*, 193: "It is surely not enough simply to suggest local or cultural factors that may restrict the application of a text, for with such a methodology any teaching in Scripture could be dismissed - we are justified in requiring very good reasons *from the text itself* to limit the application of this text in any way.”

meet the standard of a hermeneutical methodology that properly employs *all* the tools at its disposal and does so with proper balance.

V. An Arbitrary Distinction between "Paradigm Passages" and "Passages with Limited Application"

A hermeneutical fallacy that is quite common in the discussion of gender passages in the NT is the arbitrary distinction between passages conveying a "general principle" and those of "limited application." Specifically, Gal 3:28 is often viewed as establishing Paul's general parameters and thus providing the paradigm into which "passages of limited application" such as 1 Tim 2:8–15 or 1 Cor 11:2–16 and 14:33b–36 have to be fitted.

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As Osborne writes, "Feminists are quick to argue that Gal 3:28 is the theological and hermeneutical key to the issue."[56] "On that basis," Osborne continues, "the Galatians statement, 'there is no male and female,' becomes the *crux interpretum*, and women in the new dispensation are completely equal to men."[57] On the other hand, those who do not share the view that Gal 3:28 is the paradigm for the interpretation of all the gender passages in the NT are at times said to "de-emphasize the importance of the verse for understanding male and female relations in this age."[58]

Indeed, as Snodgrass charges, "For them, it is not the primary passage for discussing the relation of male and female. In fact, it is not even a key text. Focus is usually placed instead on 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 and 1 Timothy 2."[59] Snodgrass concludes, "I view 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15 as statements necessitated by specific problems in Corinth and Ephesus, respectively, and as shaped by an ancient culture. These texts do not become less important than Galatians 3:28, but they are less direct in their application."[60]

However, the question arises whether or not Gal 3:28, too, could be seen as "necessitated by specific problems" in the Galatian church. Moreover, it appears that Snodgrass uses the term "necessitated" in an unduly limited sense, i.e. as meaning "limited to the instance which occasioned a teaching." It is also unclear what Snodgrass means when he calls the texts in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy "less direct in their application." Snodgrass also fails to provide convincing evidence that would allow one to limit the application of 1 Tim 2:12 to the Ephesian context.

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[56] Cf. Osborne, "Hermeneutics and Women," 348, referring to Hardesty and Scanzoni, *All Were Meant To Be*, 18-19.

[57] Ibid. Note that Osborne is using the expression *crux interpretum* in a novel way. The term usually is taken to refer to an interpretive crux, i.e. a passage that is extremely difficult to interpret in its own right and context. Osborne, however, uses *crux interpretum* in the sense that how one takes Gal 3:28 becomes rather important in the entire debate.

[58] Cf. Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Galatians 3:28: Conundrum or Solution?" in Mickelsen, *Women*, 164-65.

[59] Ibid. Snodgrass cites Richard N. Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 84-86 and Scott Bartchy, "Power, Submission, and Sexual Identity among the Early Christians," *Essays in New Testament Christianity* (ed. C. Robert Wetzel; Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 1978) 58-59, as examples of scholars who view Gal 3:28 as a normative text while they regard texts such as 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 as descriptive or dealing with problems in the early church.

[60] Ibid., 180.

It may be argued that this writer underestimates the fact that the interpretation of Gal 3:28 needs to be just as sensitive to the occasion at which the teaching was given as the interpretation of the texts Snodgrass considers "less direct in their application." Indeed, one may contend that, insofar as Paul appeals to contemporary practice, 1 Cor 11

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and 14 have no direct application for today. It seems more difficult to find such qualifying or limiting factors in 1 Tim 2. Thus one may legitimately wonder what warrants Snodgrass's inclusion of 1 Tim 2 among culturally limited passages.

But Snodgrass's statements seem restrained compared to unequivocal statements such as the following comment by W. Ward Gasque: "*Galatians 3:28 is the necessary theological starting place for any discussion on the role of women in the church*…Other texts must not be used to undermine this fundamental theological affirmation."[61] Gasque also refers to F. F. Bruce who comments, "Paul states the basic principle here [Gal 3:28]; if restrictions on it are found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, as in 1 Cor. 14:34f…. or 1 Tim. 2:11f., they are to be understood in relation to Gal. 3:28, and not vice versa."[62]

This decision regarding "paradigm passages" tends to predetermine one's exegetical conclusions.[63] As Gasque summarizes, "By taking Galatians 3:28 as the starting place for Paul's view on women, it becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible, to come to the traditionalist conclusion."[64] Interestingly, it is not just writers who argue for the cultural limitation of a passage like 1 Tim 2:8–15 who show a preference for Gal 3:28. Thus George W. Knight introduces his discussion of NT gender passages by contending, "The momentous words of Galatians 3:28 provide us with the framework within which any and all differences or role relationships must be seen and considered …"[65]

In order to resolve the tension between teachings on gender issues in the respective Pauline writings, some postulate a development in Paul's thought. According to these writers Paul, while holding to an egalitarian position at the time of writing Galatians, retreated to a more conservative position in dealing with problems at Corinth or Ephesus. Betz compares Paul's comments on gender issues in 1 Corinthians and Galatians as follows:

> 1 Corinthians is different and emphasizes the subordination of the woman. The parallel to Gal 3:28 in 1 Cor 12:13 does not contain this line [i.e., "neither male nor female"]; instead we find the woman "under man" in a hierarchy of beings (1 Cor 11:2–16). The question arises, furthermore, whether the extraordinary space given to the women's issues in 1

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[61] W. Ward Gasque, "Response," in Mickelsen, *Women*, 189.

[62] Ibid., 89-90. The reference is to F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 190.

[63] It must be said in all fairness that those who uncritically assume 1 Timothy 2 to be the central NT teaching on gender issues likewise need to take care to substantiate this contention rather than merely asserting it. But it seems that generally writers are less aggressive in arguing that 1 Timothy 2 is a "paradigm passage" than those who assign central importance to Gal 3:28. As a matter of fact, it is often those writers focusing on Gal 3:28 who isolate 1 Timothy 2 as the only passage of its kind in the NT, thus dichotomizing between different kinds of gender passage of the NT and seeking to marginalize and relativize 1 Timothy 2. But for the reasons adduced in this section, this practice must be rejected.

[64] Gasque, "Response," 190.

[65] Cf. Knight, *Role Relationship*, 7.

> Corinthians…reflects difficulties which arose from the emancipation of the women proclaimed in Gal 3:28c. *This may imply that in 1 Corinthians Paul has retracted the Galatian position*. 1 Cor 11:11–12 may still use similar words, but in fact Paul argues in the opposite direction compared with Gal 3:28c.[66]

Betz concludes, "While Paul admits the radical implications in Galatians, he has obviously changed his position in 1 Corinthians, and it may not be accidental that the whole matter is dropped in Romans."[67] But besides the obvious negative implications these views have on issues of inerrancy, inspiration, and canonicity, one may wonder whether Betz's evaluation is based on a fundamental misreading of Gal 3:28.

Again, modern presuppositions regarding gender issues may raise their head. When Snodgrass remarks, "Being in Christ did not change a Jew into a Gentile, rather, it changed the way that Jews and Gentiles relate to each other," and again, "Being in Christ does not change a woman into a man any more than it changes Gentiles into Jews, but it changes the way that men and women relate to each other just as it changed the way Jews and Gentiles relate," does he represent Paul accurately or are his statements flavored by his contemporary concerns?[68] Was it really Paul's point in Gal 3:28 to address the issue of how Christ "changes the way that men and women relate to each other"? A reading of the passage in its context of chapters 3 and 4 makes this interpretation rather dubious. As the ensuing discussion details, Paul's concerns are salvation-historical rather than relating to social, racial, or gender issues as such.

Similarly, when Gasque comments, "In Galatians 3:28, Paul opens wide the door for women, as well as for Gentiles and slaves, to exercise spiritual leadership in the church,"[69] one may legitimately ask whether this is *really* Paul's point in the text's context or an implication drawn by Gasque himself. If the latter, it would be advisable to distinguish more clearly between historical exegesis and contemporary application. A failure to draw this distinction unnecessarily confuses the issues.

A hermeneutical procedure that assigns certain passages into "paradigmatic" categories and others as passages with "limited application" is highly suspect. The superimposition of a topical grid onto a cluster of "gender passages" is probably one of the major culprits for the development of such arbitrary distinctions. To use Gal 3:28 as an example, the interpreter who puts aside his interests in gender issues, at least temporarily, when approaching Gal 3:28 will discover that the verse is linked with Gal 3:16.

There Paul argues that Gen 12:7 pointed not to Abraham's *many* offsprings, but "to one [ef eno"] which is Christ." Thus the statement in Gal 3:28b, "For you are all one

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in Christ Jesus," refers back to the divine promise made to Abraham of which all believers are indiscriminately heirs. This is made clear by v. 29 which draws this exact conclusion: "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."

The other important contextual reference point of Gal 3:28 is Gal 3:26. The statements in vv. 26 and 28 are parallel, as can easily be seen: "For you are all sons of God through faith

[66] Cf. Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* [Hermeneia, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979] 200.

[67] Ibid., 201.

[68] Cf. Snodgrass, "Galatians 3:28," 176-77.

[69] Gasque, "Response," 192.

in Christ Jesus” (v. 26: Pante" gar uioi qeou este dia th" pistew" en Cristw Ihsou) and “For you are all one in Christ Jesus” (v. 28: pante" gar umei" ei" este en Cristw Ihsou). The two parallel elements are “sons of God” in v. 26 and “one” in v. 28. This further underscores the conclusion reached with regard to the relationship of Gal 3:28 with 3:16 and 29 above. “You are all one in Christ Jesus” means essentially, “You are all *sons of God* in Christ Jesus.”[70]

In the context of the divine promise to Abraham, Paul’s point is that in the one Son of the promise, Jesus Christ, all believers are indiscriminately heirs of God’s promise to Abraham. There is no discrimination in that promise between Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, as Paul proceeds to develop in chapter four of Galatians.

Thus an interpretation that starts with the assumption that Gal 3:28 relates directly to contemporary gender issues will have difficulty entering into Paul’s argument in the context of the passage. Contrary to the assertion that Gal 3:28 contains “an unequivocal statement of absolute equality in Christ in the church” where “Paul excludes all discrimination against Gentiles, slaves or women,”[71] Gal 3:28 in fact contains the salvation-historical demonstration that the divine promise to Abraham includes Jews as well as Gentiles, slaves as well as free, and men as well as women. That is Paul’s point in Gal 3:28 in the context of chaps. 3 and 4, and, indeed, of the whole epistle.

Of course, some insist that Paul’s statements in Gal 3:28 *imply* a change in human relationships. But whether a change in human relationships is implied in Gal 3:28 or not, this does not appear to be the point Paul actually intended to make. The interpreter should take care to distinguish between authorial intention and possible implications. Moreover, it seems questionable to focus on the implications of Paul’s statements to the extent that the point Paul actually intended to make all but retreats into the background.

It is also interesting that the same commentators who view Gal 3:28, a passage that is clearly part of a polemical context, as a paradigmatic passage for gender roles, tend to be the ones who seek to limit the applicability of 1 Timothy 2, a passage that is much

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less clearly polemical but rather seems to be self-consciously and explicitly grounded on antecedent OT Scripture.

Finally, I. H. Marshall contributes a yet different, rather nuanced approach that is nevertheless not without its problems.[72] In a very helpful article that addresses many of the hermeneutical concerns dealt with in the present essay, Marshall deals with apparent theological contradictions in the NT. He introduces a distinction between “what a writer actually says and what may be presumed to be his real intention.”[73] According to Marshall, one has to form a judgment as to “which texts are to be taken as expressing the real intention of a writer or the main thrust of the Scripture and how they are to be interpreted.”[74] But no

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[70] For a similar pattern of parallelism where one phrase is explicated by the other, cf. John 3:3, 5.

[71] Gasque, “Response,” 189.

[72] Cf. I. H. Marshall, “An Evangelical Approach to ‘Theological Criticism,’” in *The Best in Theology, Volume Three* (ed. J. I. Packer; Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 1989) 45-60. The article first appeared in *Themelios*.

[73] Ibid., 48-50.

[74] Ibid., 50.

clear criteria are given. Also, the introduction of the concept of a writer's "real intention" seems rather artificial.

Marshall subsumes the teaching of the Pastorals on gender issues under "teaching which appears out of date or untrue for the church today." Arguing that the Pastorals' "refusal to allow women to teach" is a "local, situation-bound restriction," Marshall maintains that "what seems to me to be a central part of the concern of the NT, namely the principle expressed in Galatians 3:28, overrules it," as well as that "we do actually see women fully engaged in ministry in the NT itself."[75] Marshall concludes, "there is a contradiction within the NT message itself if this passage is judged to be normative for all time, including NT times."[76]

It appears that this discussion is based on Marshall's definition of "biblical authority" earlier in the same essay. Marshall writes, "When we speak of the supreme authority of Scripture, we speak of *the authority of Scripture taken as a whole* rather than of isolated texts within it. This means that we assume that Scripture as a whole is harmonious in its teaching, and therefore we can take its total message as our guide."[77] This, according to Marshall, has an important implication, "namely that isolated texts taken on their own may convey a message which is at variance with that of Scripture as a whole."[78]

Marshall recognizes that the Pastorals do not allow women to teach men (albeit the specific reference in 1 Tim 2:12 is to teaching men in the context of public worship). But Marshall's analysis is flawed on a number of counts. It is not necessary to respond in detail to Marshall's contention that the NT portrays women "fully engaged in ministry."

Few would deny this; the question is whether the NT elsewhere portrays women *in the capacity of overseers or pastors*. Since it does not seem to do so (even though this is, of course, hotly debated), Marshall's alleged contradiction has been resolved. The NT portrays women fully engaged in *ministry* but not in the role of a *public, church-recognized proclamation of the Word*, so that 1 Tim 2:12 is not at odds with other parts of the NT.

Marshall's contention that the Pastorals are incompatible with the central principle enunciated in Gal 3:28 has already been dealt with above. By adding "it seems to me," Marshall already indicates the subjective nature of this judgment. What makes Marshall's discussion profitable is his thoroughly hermeneutical focus, a feature which in turn makes more transparent the hermeneutical foundation from which interpreters arrive at their exegetical judgments. While there may be residual presuppositions that remain unacknowledged in Marshall's analysis, he sets the example in frankly dealing with evangelical presuppositions and difficult issues such as development and diversity in the NT.

VI. Isolationist Exegesis

The danger of fragmentary exegesis has already become apparent in the discussion of Betz's view of a development in Paul's thinking from an "egalitarian" position in Galatians to a "subordinationist" stance in 1 Corinthians. The pendulum has swung too far in the direction

[75] Ibid., 58.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid., 51.

[78] Ibid.

of diversity in recent scholarship. While the interpreter should avoid forced, dogmatic, or superficial harmonization, there should be at least an openness to explore the possibility that the various gender passages in the OT and the NT cohere and mutually inform each other.

A caricature of the various parts of the canon may look as follows. The OT reflects a patriarchal approach though perhaps one that is progressive in comparison with the surrounding cultures. Jesus is the great liberator who treated women equally. Paul, on whom recently much emphasis has been placed, is variously characterized as a misogynist or, to the contrary, a champion of equality, or as one who regressed from the latter disposition to the former.

Into this state of affairs, it seems appropriate to issue a call to courage. Rather than simplistically caricaturing the different biblical writers, interpreters should set out to explore the underlying continuity among the teachings on gender issues by the OT, Jesus, and Paul in his earlier and later writings. What is needed is a systematized biblical theology of manhood and womanhood that is based on a careful exegesis of the relevant passages but transcends such exegesis by integrating interpretive insights into a systematic whole.[79]

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Here we agree wholeheartedly with Johnston who contends, “The Bible has an overarching consistency despite its multiple theological foci. Thus, all interpretations of given texts can be productively correlated.”[80]

Frequently the study of gender passages in the NT focuses on the Pauline epistles. However, Jesus’ own example and teaching need to be given proper attention as well. As Osborne contends,

> Too often discussions on women in the church center only upon Paul and ignore the formative example of Jesus’ attitude toward and use of women in his own ministry. For this reason several recent works on women and ministry have stressed Jesus’ relationship with women. However, they often simply categorize Jesus and Paul as separate models and fail to note the very real correspondences that exist between the two.[81]

But how is one to relate Jesus’ and Paul’s teachings with one another and both to the OT? Longenecker proposes a “developmental hermeneutic.”[82] He enumerates four implications of such an approach: (1) the priority of redemptive over creation categories; (2) Jesus in the Gospels and the Pauline epistles as proper starting points; (3) a distinction

[79] An example of a good basic treatment along these lines is Werner Neuer, *Man and Woman in Christian Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), though much more thorough study needs to be done.

[80] Cf. Johnston, “Test Case,” 31.

[81] Cf. Grant R. Osborne, “Women in Jesus Ministry,” *WTJ* 51 (1989) 259; see also this authors conclusions regarding the relationship between Jesus and Paul’s teachings on pp. 288-91. For separate studies on women in Jesus and the early church’s ministries, cf. Ben Witherington, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus* (SNTSMS 51; Cambridge: University Press, 1984); id., *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (Cambridge: University Press, 1990); and id., *Women in the Earliest Churches* (SNTSMS 59; Cambridge: University Press, 1988).

[82] Cf. Richard N. Longenecker, “Authority, Hierarchy and Leadership Patterns in the Bible,” in Mickelsen, *Women,* 8085, and the responses to Longenecker’s proposal on pp. 87-96. Cf. also the same authors essay, “On the Concept of Development in Pauline Thought,” in *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology* (ed. Kennety S. Kantzer and Stanley N. Gundry; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 195-207; and id., *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984). See also the critique of Longenecker’s developmental hermeneutic by Thiessen, “Hermeneutic,” 203-6. Thiessen writes, My major point of discomfort with Longeneckers proposal is the disjunction it introduces between creation and redemption and the suggestion that there is an unresolved tension in Paul’s own ethical teaching that later Christians must resolve (p. 206).

between the proclamation of gender principles and their actual implementation in the first century *AD*; and (4) a recognition of the effect of circumstances on Christians in the first century as they sought to implement the gospel.[83] Longenecker's burden is that contemporary interpreters "stress the redemptive notes of freedom, equality and mutuality."[84]

While his proposal has not gained widespread support, Longenecker should be commended for his effort to lay out a program for integrating the various biblical teachings on gender in a framework that is conscious of the development from the OT to Jesus and to Paul. However, it remains unclear why "redemptive categories" should be

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given priority over "creation categories." Are these two sets of categories, whatever they may contain, necessarily in disagreement so that one has to prioritize?

VII. Leveling the Distinction between Historical Exegesis and Modern Contextualization

The importance of maintaining a distinction between historical exegesis and modern contextualization has already become apparent in the discussion up to this point.[85] The power of presuppositions, however, tends to inject at least some elements of the modern interpreter's contemporary horizon into the interpretive process. Openness to correction by the ancient horizon of the text is required in this "hermeneutical circle" (or, hopefully, "spiral") in order for this tendency to be counteracted. In practice, as has been seen in the examples given above, the line between the ancient and the contemporary horizons is often blurred. Topical concerns with modern "gender issues" often supersede in effect biblical-theological considerations, resulting in superficial systematizations. Moreover, contemporary social and cultural concerns exert pressure on one's exegetical endeavors so that at times one may forget that modern concerns regarding gender roles in the church are not necessarily addressed directly in the various contexts where biblical teaching on male and female roles is found.

Thus, having come full circle from the way in which this essay started, it is clear that the modern interpreter has to distance himself to a certain extent from his own contemporary personal or cultural concerns as he approaches the biblical passages where the issue of gender roles in the church is addressed. Foremost of all, it appears that while contemporary Western culture is preoccupied largely with sociological, economic, and psychological concerns, the NT, including Paul, is written primarily with a view toward biblical-theological and salvation-historical categories. What therefore is of primary interest in the present discussion on gender issues may at times be found in Paul's writings at best on the level of *implications* rather than as the primary focus of the apostle's teaching. Certain interpretations of Gal 3:28 that were discussed above may be among the best examples of this kind of reversal between ancient and contemporary priorities. A naive evolutionary perspective on the social "progress" made in Western culture may tend to elevate the modern culture over the ancient one. But it is exactly at this point that the Scriptures must be allowed to challenge contemporary developments, if

[83] Ibid., 81-84.

[84] Ibid., 84. The similarity between this slogan and the motto of the French revolution, "Liberté, égalité, fraternité," may be accidental.

[85] Cf. especially the discussion of the interpretation of Gal 3:28 above, under the heading, "An Arbitrary Distinction between "Paradigm Passages" and "Passages with Limited Application."

indeed the Scriptures are believed to provide transcultural and permanent principles for human relationships.

For these reasons it is important not to level the distinction between historical exegesis and modern contextualization. Of course, once the interpreter has determined the

authorial intention in the ancient context and reconstructed the historical message, his task still remains unfinished. While it is essential to distinguish clearly between historical exegesis and contemporary application, both are required for the process of interpretation to be complete. R. T. France calls for "the priority in biblical interpretation of what has come to be called 'the first horizon,' i.e. of understanding biblical language within its own context before we start exploring its relevance to our own concerns, and of keeping the essential biblical context in view as a control on the way we apply biblical language to current issues."[86]

If France's call were heeded, perhaps a greater consensus could be reached at least on the level of historical exegesis, i.e. what the text *meant* to its original recipients. It would then be easier to draw appropriate applications for the diverse contemporary contexts various interpreters find themselves in. Unfortunately, however, modern hermeneutics has witnessed a radical shift toward the subjective element in interpretation. A pluralism that affirms the legitimacy of "feminist hermeneutics," "liberation hermeneutics," "African-American hermeneutics," and, it may be supposed, "white Anglo-American hermeneutics," contains within itself the seeds of a subjectivism that denies the priority of what France calls the "first horizon." The reader's response, not the author's intent, decisively shapes the interpretation of the text.[87]

VIII. Conclusion

The following hermeneutical fallacies were critiqued: (1) underestimating the power of presuppositions; (2) lack of balance in hermeneutical methodology; (3) underrating the importance of the use of the OT in the NT; (4) improper use of background information; (5) an arbitrary distinction between "paradigm passages" and "passages with limited application"; (6) isolationist exegesis; and (7) leveling the distinction between historical exegesis and modern contextualization. As the various examples have shown, each of these fallacies distorts an interpreter's understanding of the NT's gender passages. Perhaps by raising these hermeneutical issues to a conscious level

this essay can make a contribution toward the avoidance of these fallacies and toward a greater degree of methodological consensus in the study of NT gender passages. It is hoped

[86] R. T. France, "The Church and the Kingdom of God: Some Hermeneutical Issues," in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: The Problem of Contextualization* (ed. D. A. Carson; Nashville: Nelson, 1984) 42, quoted in Grant R. Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 415.

[87] Cf. the two appendices in Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 366-415. Note in this context also E. D. Hirsch's distinction between "meaning" (i.e. what the text *says*) and "significance" (i.e. what the text *means to me today*) in *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967). Thiselton, in *The Two Horizons*, has tried to mediate between Hirsch and reader-response models. This a wide-open field. The final word has not been spoken. Only genuine dialogue will make it possible to find the proper balance between the various elements in the process of interpretation: the author, the text, and the reader.

that even those who disagree with some parts of this essay may gain a renewed appreciation for the crucial role hermeneutics plays in the contemporary discussion of the biblical teaching on gender issues.[88]

[88] I would like to express my appreciation to Drs. D. A. Carson, Grant R. Osborne, and Thomas R. Schreiner for their suggestions for improvement of an earlier draft of this essay.