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March 30th: Proverbs 28 & 1 Timothy 1:18–2:15

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When the righteous triumph. Paul's teaching on women in the assembly.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Proverbs 28. The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion. When a land transgresses, it has many rulers, but with a man of understanding and knowledge, its stability will long continue.

A poor man who oppresses the poor is a beating rain that leaves no food. Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law strive against them. Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the Lord understand it completely.

Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways. The one who keeps the law is a son with understanding, but a companion of gluttons shames his father. Whoever multiplies his wealth by interest and profit gathers it for him who is generous to the poor.

If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.

Whoever misleads the upright into an evil way will fall into his own pit, but the blameless will have a goodly inheritance. A rich man is wise in his own eyes, but a poor man who has understanding will find him out.

When the righteous triumph there is great glory, but when the wicked rise people hide themselves. Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity.

Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people. A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor, but he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days. If one is burdened with the blood of another, he will be a fugitive until death.

Let no one help him. Whoever walks in integrity will be delivered, but he who is crooked in his ways will suddenly fall. Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.

A faithful man will abound with blessings, but whoever hastens to be rich will not go unpunished. To show partiality is not good, but for a piece of bread a man will do wrong. A stingy man hastens after wealth and does not know that poverty will come upon him.

Whoever rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with his tongue. Whoever robs his father or his mother and says, "That is no transgression" is a companion to a man who destroys. A greedy man stirs up strife, but the one who trusts in the Lord will be enriched.

Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered. Whoever gives to the poor will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse. When the wicked rise, people hide themselves, but when they perish the righteous increase.

Proverbs chapter 28 opens with a contrast between the righteous and the wicked. The wicked are here described as paranoid. They are those people who, as a result of their guilty conscience, always find themselves furtively looking over their shoulder, hoping that justice has not caught up with them.

The righteous, by contrast, have a boldness that comes from their innocence and their trust in the Lord, knowing that the Lord is in control of all things and that they have committed their paths to Him. They can act without the fear of those who are trying to escape the Lord's moral governance. The description of the wicked as fleeing when no one pursues is one of the curses of the covenant in Leviticus chapter 26 verse 17.

"I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down before your enemies. Those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you." Guilt has an enervating effect on a people. While being in right standing with the Lord gives a

person the confidence to act with true boldness.

Verse 2 describes the political fallout experienced by a nation that transgresses the word of the Lord. They are afflicted by a multitude of rulers. We might speculate as to the reason why this is the case.

Perhaps this is a consequence of the fact that when people reject the law of the Lord as a standard for what is right and wrong, things boil down to mere power, and there are many people who will compete for that. The righteous and the wise ruler, by contrast, seeks to uphold the law, and as a result he can appeal to a principle of order that has a greater potential for securing consensus than mere power. Such a kingdom built upon righteousness and the law of the Lord will be inherently more secure and enduring.

Elsewhere in Proverbs, the king is compared to rains. In verse 3, however, we have a poor man who is compared to a beating rain, a rain that destroys crops and washes away the soil rather than actually bringing any benefit. This might be a description of the destitute tyrant.

Alternatively, it might be a description of the poor and mean people of the land, who mistreat and oppress their own neighbours and people of their own class. The righteous and the wicked are not merely concerned with their own moral actions, but with the status of the moral discourse of the nation as a whole. Those who rebel against the law of the Lord are not merely doing it for their own sake.

They want to see wickedness prosper more generally, so they will throw in their weight to praise wickedness when at all possible. The righteous, for their part, are not just interested in private morality, but want to see truth and justice triumph. As a result, they will actively campaign against evil when they can, and not merely be passive towards it.

Wicked persons do not merely have a failure in their action. They have a fundamental inability to perceive justice as it actually is. Their view of the world is distorted and twisted, and they act accordingly.

The righteous, however, understand the fundamental grain of the universe, which is that of justice, and act in accordance with it. It is better to be a poor man who acts in such a manner than the rich man in his seeming prosperity who has acted otherwise. Once again in verse 7 we see that the behaviour of sons reflects upon their fathers.

The son who is attentive to and understands the law is a son who brings pride and strength to his father. By contrast, the son who gives himself to the way of folly and gluttony causes shame to his father, and also, far from strengthening his father, leaves his father weaker. Scripture has several warnings against the practice of usury and the charging of interest on charitable loans.

Verse 8 is another example of this. Exodus 22.25 reads, If you lend money to any of my

people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him. Leviticus 25.35-36 If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you.

Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. We are assured here that the person who gathers interest in that way from the poor will end up losing it to the person who is generous to the poor. The Lord declares himself to be the protector of the poor, the one who acts as their guarantor.

He who gives to the poor lends to the Lord, and then also the one who will establish the dynamics of a righteous economy. In Deuteronomy chapter 15 we see a number of examples of this. In verse 6 of that chapter, For the Lord your God will bless you as He promised you, and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow, and you shall rule over many nations, but they shall not rule over you.

The blessing here is described as something directly established by the Lord. Again in verses 9-10 of that chapter, Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart, and you say, The seventh year, the year of release, is near. And your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing.

And he cried to the Lord against you, and you be guilty of sin. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him. Because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work, and in all that you undertake.

Those who give themselves to the way of wickedness, and reject the law of the Lord, do not win favour with God with their sacrifices or their prayers. Even their supposed acts of piety and worship are acts that are abominations to the Lord. For prayer and sacrifice to be acceptable to the Lord, there has to be a consistency of life and of worship.

Verse 10 describes a situation where the righteous are led into an evil way. We might speculate about the sort of situation that is in view here. Perhaps it is a situation where due to their naivety or their ignorance, the righteous are being led into wickedness against their knowledge.

Alternatively, it might be a situation where the wicked are seducing the righteous to evil, delighting and leading them into sin. A number of proverbs in the book have described the danger of wisdom in one's own eyes. Such wisdom in one's own eyes is a particular form of folly.

It is characterised by pride and hubris, and a failure to appreciate the limitations of your knowledge. As we saw in verse 6, wisdom is not the preserve of the rich. There are many people who are poor who have great wisdom, and they will be able to see through rich people who are puffed up in their own perception, believing themselves to be wise when

they are nothing of the kind.

Verse 12, as Michael Fox observes, is similar to a number of other verses in the context. Chapter 28, verse 28, chapter 29, verse 2, and chapter 29, verse 16. He points out that they could be read as a cluster.

When the righteous triumph, there is great glory. But when the wicked rise, people hide themselves. When the wicked rise, people hide themselves.

But when they perish, the righteous increase. When the righteous increase, the people rejoice. But when the wicked rule, the people groan.

When the wicked increase, transgression increases. But the righteous will look upon their downfall. The apparent progression between these proverbs suggests that their ordering is not accidental, and that they are not just merely repetition.

Once again, they concern the larger ramifications for society in the relative fortunes of the righteous and the wicked. The righteous and the wicked are not just individuals, but represent the success of their various principles. When the wicked increase, wickedness and the disorder and the tyranny that that involves increases.

When the righteous increase, righteousness increases, peace, justice, and good order. This is one of the reasons why the justice of the law courts is so important. Justice needs to be seen to be done.

And as it is seen to be done, the righteous will be encouraged and heartened throughout the society. The confession of sins and repentance is not actually a common theme in the book of Proverbs. In verse 13 we encounter a statement that is very similar to those that we find elsewhere in scripture.

For instance, in Psalm 32 verse 5, I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Fearing the Lord and taking sin and the dangers that are associated with it seriously will protect a person from harm, whereas the person who hardens his heart to sin and to the word of the Lord invites disaster for himself.

In chapter 19 verse 12, the king was likened to a growling lion. A king's wrath is like the growling of a lion, but his favour is like dew on the grass. Also in Proverbs chapter 20 verse 2, the wicked and oppressive king is also like a lion, but he devours, tyrannises and oppresses his people, leaving them in a very sorry state.

Verses 16 to 18 however speak about the way that such oppressors and those who have committed injustice are actually inviting their own doom. Their oppression does not actually lead them to prosper, rather it manifests their lack of understanding. It dooms them to death and they can face sudden downfall.

Proverbs chapter 1 verse 19 makes a similar point. Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain. It takes away the life of its possessors.

Verse 19 repeats the claim of chapter 12 verse 11. Various schemes for easy money, to get rich quick, are inadvisable and their likely consequence will be poverty. Far better to adopt the path of diligence and to earn lasting riches in an effective way.

Such hastening to be rich can also be seen in pursuit of injustice. The son who throws in his lot with the brigands for instance. There are various warnings against partiality and judgement in scripture and a number in the book of Proverbs also.

In reading verse 21 we might be reminded of Exodus chapter 23 verses 2 to 3. You shall not fall in with the many to do evil, nor shall you bear witness in a lawsuit siding with the many so as to pervert justice, nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit. Several commentators have argued that what is taking place in verse 21 is bread being given as a sort of bribe and as a result justice going astray. However it is more likely that this is describing a mitigating circumstance that should lead the righteous judge to deliver a judgement that is tempered more by mercy in the case of someone who has committed a crime out of the desperation of his poverty.

The man who pursues riches hastily with folly and injustice will find that poverty pursues him. The righteous man who cares for his neighbour is prepared to rebuke him. Faithful are the wounds of such a friend.

Indeed such a person may find that he is more honoured as a friend in the future. By contrast the value of the flatterer's friendship can rapidly depreciate. Those who merely tell their friends what they want to hear will consistently lose the friendship of wise people over time.

Verse 24 speaks to a situation where a son dishonours his father and mother perhaps in seeking to secure the inheritance before they have died and to drive them off it. We find a similar statement in chapter 19 verse 26. He who does violence to his father and chases away his mother is a son who brings shame and reproach.

In speaking to the religious leaders of his day Jesus speaks to another form of dishonouring of parents that fits this description. In Mark chapter 7 verses 9 to 13. And he said to them you have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition.

For Moses said honour your father and your mother and whoever reviles father or mother must surely die. But you say if a man tells his father or his mother whatever you would have gained from me as Corban that is given to God then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down and many such things you do. Verses 25 to 27 give us three

examples of contrast between people who will prosper and people who will fail.

The contrasts in some cases are inexact inviting us to reflect upon some of the features that could fill them out. For instance in verse 25 the greedy man stirs up strife but the one who trusts in the Lord will be enriched. The implication is that the one who trusts in the Lord is also a man of peace whereas the greedy man does not trust in the Lord and despite pursuing riches is not ultimately enriched.

Verse 28 with which the chapter ends relates to verse 12 and we discussed it in that connection. Like that verse it describes the larger social consequences of the prospering of the righteous or the wicked. When the wicked prosper the entire society suffers and the righteous may even find themselves driven into hiding.

A question to consider. We have noted the connection between verses 12 and 28 of this chapter and verses 2 and 16 of the chapter that follows. What can we learn by comparing these verses and by reading them in their succession? 1 Timothy 1 verse 18 to chapter 2 verse 15.

This charge I entrust to you Timothy my child in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you that by them you may wage the good warfare holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this some have made shipwreck of their faith among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. First of all then I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life godly and dignified in every way.

This is good and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all which is the testimony given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle, I am telling the truth, I am not lying, a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarrelling. Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness, with good works. Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness.

I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man, rather she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

Yet she will be saved through childbearing, if they continue in faith and love and holiness

with self-control. In 1 Timothy 1.18 we move into Paul's instructions to Timothy. Paul had left Timothy at Ephesus with instructions to sort out some of the issues in the church there.

At a number of points in the book of Acts we have descriptions of prophecies made concerning particular persons. Verse 18 suggests that certain prophecies had been made concerning Timothy. In his present commission in Ephesus he would have the opportunity to fulfil some of these prophecies.

As a soldier might be charged by his commander, he is charged by Paul to wage the good warfare. Elsewhere in the Pauline epistles we see Paul using the imagery of warfare and speaking of the armour of God that those waging it must wear. Here there is no such elaboration of the imagery, although he does single out faith and a good conscience, both of which he referenced earlier in the chapter in verse 5. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

The failure to maintain these two crucial things have been the cause of the devastation of a number of people's faith, in particular Hymenaeus and Alexander who are singled out here. These two figures seem to have been excommunicated by Paul, which is most likely what handing over to Satan means in verse 20. There is a reference to Alexander the coppersmith in 2 Timothy 4.14 and there is another reference to an Alexander in Acts chapter 19, but it is by no means clear that these are the same person as the person described here with Hymenaeus.

That these two individuals were delivered over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme suggests to many that Paul's purpose in excommunication was remedial rather than punitive. Through their learning not to blaspheme the hope would be that they would be restored to the company of the faithful, having learnt their lesson in time. As a matter of primary importance, the first of all at the beginning of chapter 2, Paul wants Timothy to ensure that prayers are made for all sorts of persons.

He uses four different terms for prayer here, supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings. The first three terms seem to be largely overlapping in meaning, so perhaps we should not look for some great distinction between these different types of prayer. However the multiplication of words for prayer suggests perhaps the importance of the activity.

The prayers must be offered for all persons and here it is kings and those in high positions that are singled out. The aim of such prayer is that the Christians may live peaceful and quiet lives. Christians are supposed to be good citizens, invested in the good of their nation, wanting to uphold what is righteous and true and desiring authorities to act against evil.

Such prayer is in many respects the Church's primary political task. Christians can often

think about politics primarily about what the Church does outside in the world, but in the act of praying for our nations we are going to the greatest throne of all, a throne to which we have special access through Christ. The greatest political power that Christians possess is not in the ballot box, nor is it in lobby groups, rather it is in the act of prayer.

Our primary concern in such prayer should be the good of our society, that kings and those in authority would perform their stewardship faithfully, in a manner that secures peace and quiet for all in the society. Our ambition should be that of living peaceful, quiet, godly and dignified lives. Christians should desire a sort of respectability.

Although we are at odds with our society's values in a great many ways, we should seek to be good neighbours and faithful citizens or subjects. We don't want to have the reputation of being troublemakers and wherever we can, we pray for the good of our societies and for their leaders. Christians ought not to be revolutionaries or malcontents.

We should treat authorities with honour and respect and lead lives that, as much as possible, allow us to be at peace with all men. This posture in the society more generally, and this concern to pray for all sorts of persons, is a reflection of God's own attitude towards people. God's benevolence and goodness to all people, seen in the Gospel, is something that should be reflected in Christians' own social posture.

In the Gospel we have a message of grace delivered to all peoples. Persons of every tribe, tongue, people and nation receive this good news, which is an expression of God's good favour towards mankind in Christ Jesus. God is the one true God and Jesus Christ is the one mediator between God and man.

There is no other. The uniqueness of God and this one mediator between God and man is connected with a sense of the universality of the message of the Gospel. It is directed to all persons, in all stations of life, in every nation and people and founded upon the sacrifice of Christ, which is for the sins of the entire world.

No person receiving the message of Christ by faith would discover that they had been uninvited. This message of God's grace in Christ, going out to all of the nations, was revealed at the proper time. The wording here might bring to mind Titus chapter 1 verses 2-3, in hope of eternal life which God who never lies promised before the ages began, and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour.

In 1 Timothy 2 as well, Paul refers to his commissioning as an apostle to bear this message of the Gospel. In bringing this Gospel message to all persons, to the Gentiles in particular, making prayer for all persons, and especially those responsible for the peace and well-being of Gentile societies, would be an important part of the witness that the Church would bear. The God that they are praying to is not just the God of the Jews, he is the God of all persons, and his desire is to form a new people from every nation under

heaven.

Continuing the theme of prayer, Paul now turns to the actual outworking of prayer within specific community contexts. Here he is addressing church gatherings, presumably in house church contexts. Christians in a city like Ephesus would meet from house to house, with patrons providing a place in which an assembly could gather.

There would have been several such communities within many cities. Paul now turns to address the activities of these communities in ways that distinguish between the instructions given to men and to women. Men in particular here are charged with the task of prayer that Paul has mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and they are warned about the dangers of anger and quarrelling.

The men are to live in harmony and at peace with each other. The fact that they are charged to pray within these gatherings, in a way that distinguishes them from the women, should probably not be taken to mean that they were the only ones who would be praying. In 1 Corinthians chapter 11 we have references to women praying and prophesying in such gatherings.

However, it likely means that they would be the ones leading in this particular activity. There is a possible allusion here back to Malachi chapter 1 verse 11. The fact that they are praying this way in every place alludes to the universal scope of the gospel, in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy.

That verse from Malachi reads, For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering, for my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. The concluding seven verses of 1 Timothy chapter 2, and verse 12 especially, are the site of some of the fiercest exegetical disagreements in the entire New Testament. Indeed, there are entire books devoted to just these seven verses.

Their bearing upon the question of women's place in Christian thought and ministry makes them key for controversies on these matters more generally. A number of different approaches have been taken in understanding them. Many have traditionally taken them as a reference to more general statements that Paul is making about the order of ministry within the church, straightforwardly backed up by a creational mandate.

In more recent decades, many scholars have focused more narrowly upon a specific historical context that Paul is addressing, whether it's the wider context of his particular period in history, and the pragmatic concerns that that raises for the gospel, or whether it's a very specific context in the city of Ephesus. A number of scholars have suggested that in the city of Ephesus, in association with the worship of Artemis, there would have been a strong tradition of priestesses and women in religious leadership. Others have

focused more upon the phenomenon of the new Roman woman in the context of Ephesus, wealthy women who put themselves forward in a domineering fashion, who would dress immodestly and in an unchaste manner.

Some of these scholars point to the ways in which this figure of the new Roman woman might have latched on to certain aspects of Paul's gospel message, the message of there being no male or female in Christ would have been an equalising message that would have been appealing to such Roman women. The curse on Eve has been lifted, and now men and women can act on equal terms. This sort of aggressive new feminist movement would have been something that would have been a problem for the church within that particular context.

Scholars who advance this position see these concerns lying behind Paul's instructions to women in this chapter. Paul's concerns, for many of them, are seen largely as pragmatic, rather than matters of absolute principle. Some feminist scholars have seen Paul as abandoning his true principles at this point.

They believe that he loses the nerve of teachings such as Galatians chapter 3 verse 28, and surrenders to the old patriarchal order. Others see it more as a curb upon the excesses of an extreme feminist movement, and understand the terms of Paul's restrictions as cutting back on those excesses, rather than suggesting a more general submission of women to men. What Paul would be tackling here then is women giving false teaching, or domineering over a man, the alternative being a quieter approach, not necessarily complete silence.

Some scholars who imagine a situation more particular to the city of Ephesus see Paul's restrictions here as contextually pragmatic. For this period of time Paul is not allowing women to teach or exercise authority over men, but if circumstances were to change he would have no issue with it. Other scholars like Andrew Perryman or Philip Towner also see a pragmatic restriction here, but see this pragmatism extending a great deal further.

The rise of women to leadership, for instance, requires more general education of women, and a lot of other social changes that had not yet worked out within that context. As with the institution of slavery, the gospel sets a time bomb next to the submission of women, but it will be many centuries before it truly explodes. In the meantime, and in keeping with Paul's desire that Christians live a peaceful, quiet, godly and dignified life, Christian women would have to accommodate themselves to the not yet of their culture's norms.

There are a great many different questions that face the interpreter of this chapter. We have to consider the background. What situation gives rise to Paul's teaching here? We need to consider the particular words that he uses.

The term, for instance, translated to exercise authority over in the ESV is one that has

been greatly debated. We need to consider the extent of Paul's prohibition. Is this just a temporary lack of permission, or is this a more universal and continuing restriction? What then are we to make of verses 13-15? Is the reference to creation grounding Paul's teaching in some creation mandate? Is it just illustrating his point with a specific story? Is it a more specific application? Or is it addressing a misreading of the story of Genesis, which was held by certain of the people in the church in Ephesus? All of these questions and considerations from various lines of interpretation have to be borne in mind as we work through this passage.

It begins with a reference to the way that Christian women should dress. Presumably the context and view here is especially that of gathered assemblies. Women are supposed to dress in a way that is modest and chaste, in a way that flaunts neither their wealth nor their sexuality.

Decency and propriety seem to be important concerns for Paul here. Christian women should be adorned by godliness, and they should also adorn the way of godliness in the way that they behave. Paul's teaching on this point here might remind us of Peter's teaching in 1 Peter 3-3-5.

The Christian woman is supposed to be characterised by self-control, by moderation and restraint. By her dress she should be able to communicate that she is a person of discretion and prudence. It is important when reading such passages to consider the sort of situations that Paul might have been addressing.

This is perhaps a sort of shadow reading, reading the character of a situation or some opponents from the shadow that they cast upon the texts that are addressed to them. One of the strengths of certain forms of the New Roman Women thesis is the way that they help us to understand why Paul is addressing these particular issues. The instructions concerning dress give the strong impression that Paul is addressing a situation where women might behave otherwise.

The sort of women who would wear costly attire, jewels, braided hair and gold and pearls are the sort of women who would be well to do. These would be wealthy women who presumably would be patronesses of the church. And in a context where the church largely met in a domestic setting, such women would have quite a lot of influence.

One could imagine a congregation hosted by such a wealthy woman, where many of the men in the congregation, who would be outnumbered by the women perhaps, would be slaves or new believers. In such a situation it would be very easy for the woman who hosted the church as its patroness to come to exercise an excessive influence over others. As the church's associational identity across a city and between cities started to be built up, the influence of such women, which largely arose from the fact that the church was grounded at that point in a domestic context, rapidly diminished.

These verses address the gathered assembly of the church and in this context women are instructed to learn quietly with all submissiveness. The submissiveness referred to here may be more specific to the context, not to men in general. It may be about being submissive to the order of the assembly.

It is not the relationship of marriage or relationship to men in general that is being referred to. Verse 12 should also be related to the same context. The teaching and exercising authority, or whatever that term means, concerns the appropriate behaviour of women in the assembly of the church.

While it is not unrelated to the way that women and men should interact more generally, it speaks to a far more specific situation at this point. Various translations of the term translated to exercise authority over in the ESV have been proposed. Many scholars have argued that it should be given a more negative tone, to assume authority, to usurp authority or to domineer over.

Others see it as referring to taking the initiative over men. While this has bearing upon formal office within the church, it is not directly addressing formal office here. It seems to be speaking to more general behaviours.

While many scholars have taken the teaching and the exercising authority to be interchangeable, the terms are distanced enough in the Greek to make this less likely. Rather one may be a more specific example of the other. The teaching in question is not restricted to false teaching.

If this were the issue, it seems unlikely that Paul would single out the women, nor speak of the women as a general group. We should bear in mind, for instance, that Priscilla, of Priscilla and Quilla, had been in Ephesus, and she was clearly well instructed in the gospel. There is also the fact that many of the false teachers were men.

Paul's concern then seems to be broader than merely the possibility that women might convey false teaching. Also the teaching is specifically in relationship to exercising authority over a man. No such restriction is given for other women.

The evidence, I think, seems to point in the direction of Paul making a more general statement about the proper relationship between men and women. And this, I believe, is borne out in the verses that follow. The three verses with which the chapter ends refer back to the creation narrative.

This is not the first time that Paul has used the creation narrative to make a point about the relationship between men and women. In 1 Corinthians 11, verses 7-12 he writes, In 1 Timothy chapter 2, Paul references three key aspects of the creation and fall narratives. First of all the order of the creation of Adam and Eve.

Second, the different relationship that they had to the fall. And then, although this is

debated, the way that childbearing functions in the vocation of the woman after the fall. We should consider the way that Paul is giving a shorthand retelling of the creation and fall narratives in a way that serves to support his point.

By considering the story of Genesis chapter 2 and 3, we might be able to make more sense of the logic of his argument here. In Genesis chapter 2, the man is created in response to a problem of the earth. The earth needs someone to till it, and the man is created for that specific task.

He is trained for the task of exercising dominion over the world in a very special way prior to the creation of the woman. He is placed in the garden, given the task of serving the garden, but also guarding and maintaining its boundaries. He is given the rule concerning the tree.

The woman is not given that rule, rather she is given it second hand by the man. By the time that the woman is created then, she is created as the helper of the man. The man has been given the fundamental vocation, and the woman comes alongside the man to complete what he starts.

The point of the text is not that the man is over the woman or greater than the woman, but that the man comes first in his vocation. One could see this perhaps as the man's task of establishing the foundations and guarding the boundaries. He is supposed to do the initial act of taming and mastering, and then the woman is supposed to glorify and fill those things with life.

Her work is not less important, but it comes second. The man has the leading role, and the leading role, if we consider, is not primarily exercised relative to the woman. It is primarily exercised out into the world.

This commission is given to the man before the woman is created. When the woman is then created, she has to follow the man's lead, completing and glorifying what he has begun. Moving into the story of the fall, we can see similar patterns.

It was the man that was given the instruction concerning the tree. It was the man that was held responsible for the tree as well. Genesis chapter 3 verses 11 and 17 make clear that the man is held especially responsible.

He is the one that was given the instruction. He is the one held accountable when the commandment is broken. The woman had received the commandment concerning the tree second hand, from Adam, not directly from the Lord.

As a result, she could be deceived in a way that he was not. However, although Adam was not deceived, his wife played a very particular role in leading him astray. A wife, through the power that she has over the heart of her husband, can easily lead her husband astray.

This is one of the reasons why the Lord's judgement upon Adam begins with the words, because you have listened to the voice of your wife. The judgements upon the serpent and the woman also specifically speak to her activity of childbearing. Verses 15 and 16 of Genesis chapter 3. Putting all of these pieces together, how do they relate to Paul's argument? First of all, in the original creation, we see that the man was supposed to lead the way in the human vocation.

He was supposed to guard the boundaries and lay the foundations. It was Adam in particular that was given the task of guarding the garden, of maintaining the law concerning the tree, and of teaching his wife concerning these things. Things went wrong when the woman took the initiative.

The woman was deceived and she used her influence over her husband, even though he knew better, to lead him into transgression. The question of whether Paul's argument depends upon a belief that women are more easily deceived in general is one that has given rise to great controversy. Many famous names in the history of the church have held such a position.

Given their contexts, in times when women weren't educated to the same degree as men, their beliefs on this front may be somewhat more excusable. Elsewhere in scripture, women are associated with wisdom, and women also shrewdly deceive many tyrants in ways that deliver poetic justice upon the serpent that once deceived Eve. The claim that Paul's argument is that women are less intelligent than men would seem to be quite unsustainable.

It is possible, however, that Paul is making a more specific point here. Guarding and upholding the boundaries of truth is not just about intelligence in general, but requires a particular sort of judgment that is more commonly found among men. The judgment in question is one that can put pity to one side, that is able to draw sharp distinctions, that contends for its own position and against opposing positions, and which tests things rigorously without being so susceptible to sentiment.

Male groups, for instance, far more characteristically engage in vigorous stress-testing of ideas. Men are treated as combatants in argument and don't pull their punches with each other. There is much less likelihood of things becoming personal.

When women enter the argument, however, men, on account of their uxoriousness, will often be excessively affirming of women's positions, or protect them from attack. All of this compromises the capacity of such conversation to guard the boundaries that really matter. Besides this, when women are in the conversation, there is a lot more concern for sensitivity, and while those concerns are important, the more that the concern of sensitivity and empathy has driven the debates of the Church, the more that it is compromised with all sorts of modern errors and sins.

Adam wasn't deceived concerning the tree, but due to Eve's influence over him, he followed her nonetheless, never engaging his critical ability that could have protected them both. The implication is that by remaining silent, the women make it easier for the men in the Church to perform their proper task of establishing the foundations and guarding the boundaries of the truth of the Gospel. None of this should remotely entail the idea that women are to be inactive in the intellectual task of the Church.

The task of guarding the boundaries and establishing the foundations is only one part of a far greater duty. However, as women do become more prominent in this particular part of the Church's and society's task, we should not be surprised to see certain sorts of deceptions take root, and we should be clear this is not just because of women, this is also because of men's appropriate desire to be obliging to women and not to attack them. It is very difficult for a man sharply, strongly and directly to challenge a woman, and as a result some of the fundamental ways that the boundaries of truth are maintained within a society are compromised.

Paul was very concerned that this not happen in the context of the Church. 1 Timothy chapter 2 ends with a reference to childbearing. Indeed, some have seen it as a reference to the childbearing, the woman who bears the seed that will crush the serpent's head.

Most likely this is a reference to the context in which most women would be living out their salvation. Childbearing comes with a blessing, it is not merely a context of judgment. The Christian woman in such a Church who bears children and raises them is playing her part within the greater drama of salvation.

She does not have to usurp the place of Adam to have that significance. Childbearing, so often marginalised in modern society, is by no means marginalised in Scripture. So much of the Scriptural narrative is centred upon stories of women bearing children.

The story of Sarah, the story of Rebecca, the story of Rachel and Leah, the story of the Exodus is told as a story of childbearing, beginning with Jehokabed, the Hebrew midwives and the women of Israel. The story of the Kingdom begins with Hannah praying in the Temple. The story of the Gospel begins with Mary and Elizabeth.

While modern society privileges the activities of men, the Scripture sees the activity of women in bearing children as centre stage to all that is taking place. The entire story of Scripture can be told as the story of women struggling to give birth, all leading up to the great victory as the seed of the woman defeats the serpent. A question to consider.

If prayer is the primary political task of the Church, how can we commit ourselves to performing it more mindfully?