

# OpenTheo

## July 10th: Esther 6 & 1 Timothy 1:18—2:15

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The humiliation of Haman. Paul's teaching on women in the assembly.

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## Transcript

Esther chapter 6. On that night the king could not sleep, and he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. And it was found written how Mordecai had told about Bithena and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, and who had sought to lay hands on king Ahasuerus. And the king said, What honor or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this? The king's young men who attended him said, Nothing has been done for him.

And the king said, Who is in the court? Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for him. And the king's young men told him, Haman is here, standing in the court. And the king said, Let him come in.

So Haman came in, and the king said to him, What should be done to the man whom the

king delights to honor? And Haman said to himself, Whom would the king delight to honor more than me? And Haman said to the king, For the man whom the king delights to honor, let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set. And let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.

Then the king said to Haman, Hurry, take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned. So Haman took the robes and the horse, and he dressed Mordecai and led him through the square of the city, proclaiming before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.

Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman hurried to his house mourning, and with his head covered, and Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him, but will surely fall before him.

While they were yet talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived, and hurried to bring Haman to the feast that Esther had prepared. Esther chapter 6 is the turning point within the story. Esther is up against a stronger opponent in Haman.

While Esther has certain advantages, Haman has several advantages over her. She needs to fight a political battle against the most powerful political operator in the land. While the king is well disposed towards her, she wasn't invited into the king's presence for over a month.

Haman, on the other hand, is so in favor with the king that he has been exalted over all of the other officials. He is the elevated official that has taken the place of a number of high officials of equal status. This was likely provoked by the rebellion of Bithan and Teresh, after which the king has started to distrust his closest and highest officials and to single out this one man Haman as the one man that he could trust over everyone else.

Esther, however, has the advantage of the fact that Haman does not know that she is a Jew, nor does he know that she is seeking to undermine his genocidal plan. To make her appeal to the king, she first has to sow some doubt and distrust in the mind of Ahasuerus concerning his closest and highest advisor, his very right hand man. She also likely hopes to tempt Haman into imprudent action by aiming for his weakest spot, his exalted ego.

The king starts this chapter with an unsettled mind, struggling to sleep. One can imagine

why. He doesn't yet know what is troubling Esther, and he is likely ruminating over why the queen would specifically single out Haman for an invitation to join them in an intimate banquet, two evenings in succession.

Even if no suspicion has yet grown towards Haman, one can imagine at least some measure of irritation in Ahasuerus' mind. If even his own queen regards Haman as so elevated as to deserve such special treatment, perhaps Haman needs to be taken down a peg or two, to be reminded that, although he is the second most powerful man in the land, Ahasuerus is still the king. As Joram Hazoni observes, one can well imagine the king starting to become troubled about the scale of the authority that he had handed over into the hands of Haman, recognizing that by granting Haman authority over all of the other officials, and by unreservedly authorizing him to act according to his wishes in all sorts of matters, he was greatly weakening his own position and putting Haman in a position to usurp his own power as the king.

Haman has also just been scheming with his family and friends concerning the destruction of Mordecai, planning to hang or impale him upon his tree the next day. Both Esther and Haman are on the brink of making their decisive moves, moves for which they have been preparing. Everything hangs upon how these moves play out.

And then there comes an unforeseen twist, which neither side had anticipated. As the troubled mind of the king prevents him from sleeping, he gives orders for the Book of Memorable Deeds, the Chronicles, to be read to him. Perhaps he regards it as a sort of boring book that could cure insomnia.

There is however the possibility that his mind is weighed down with thoughts concerning the failed coup that had led to the rise of Haman in the first place. Perhaps he wants to revisit and reconsider the events surrounding Bigthan and Teresh's coup, perhaps intending to focus especially upon Haman's at the time. Whatever the king's motives, as the Chronicles are read he hears of the actions of Mordecai in foiling the coup and cannot recall whether Mordecai was rewarded for his actions.

When he discovers that he was not rewarded, he asks who is in the court. Haman, so eager to get to the king to get him to sign off on his plan to hang Mordecai on his great gallows, was already in the court, earlier than anyone else. Ahasuerus likely was not the only sleepless man that night.

Informed that Haman was already there, the king summoned him. The king takes this opportunity to ask Haman a question that might tempt him out into the open, that might reveal some of his ambitions. The king is starting to get something of the measure of Haman, and we can already imagine that he intends to knock Haman down a few notches at this point.

He recognises Haman's pride and ambition, and he asks him a question calculated to

catch him in it. What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honour? Whether the narrator is all-seeing, or whether Haman's internal thinking is patently obvious upon his countenance, we are told that Haman said to himself, whom would the king delight to honour more than me? Given the suspicions and concerns that have been developing in his mind, suspicions and concerns sown by Esther, Ahasuerus, as Rabbi David Foreman suggests, is probably registering with mounting concern the repeated references to king in Haman's response. Haman says, Haman is essentially suggesting that the man the king delights to honour played dress up as the king.

And as we, and presumably Ahasuerus also at this point know, Haman thought this man was him. Unbeknownst to him, Haman had fallen into a trap. He had outed himself to the suspicious king Ahasuerus, revealing himself as one who fancied himself as a king.

Haman does not seem to realise the danger that he is putting himself in. While the king might earlier have wanted to take Haman down a notch or two, now he really wants to humiliate him. Mordecai's reasons for not bowing to Haman, mysterious earlier, might become a little clearer at this point.

Mordecai, as we saw, was in a position to discover and disclose the plots of the highest officials, Bigthan and Teresh, a fact we are reminded of at the beginning of this chapter as the story of the coup is retold. The advancement of Haman had probably resulted from the king's suspicions concerning the other high officials. In treating the question of why Mordecai didn't bow, we observe the parallel between the way that Mordecai's refusal to bow is described, and the way that Joseph's refusal to lie with Potiphar's wife is described in Genesis chapter 39.

In the case of Potiphar's wife, she was the second in command in the household and was acting unfaithfully towards her husband. Haman might be acting in a similarly unfaithful manner towards Ahasuerus. The honour suggested here is similar to the honour that Pharaoh gives to Joseph in Genesis chapter 41 verses 41 to 43.

Haman and Mordecai are rivals. We earlier saw that Mordecai refused to bow to Haman when he was receiving the honoured treatment of the second in the realm. Now the tables are going to be radically turned.

Haman now has to lead in honour the man who refused to bow to him, and Mordecai is being elevated in a manner that is reminiscent of Joseph by Pharaoh. Furthermore, there is a pointedness in the king's statement in verse 10. Do so to Mordecai the Jew.

This statement probably has a chilling effect upon Haman. He has been conspiring against the Jews, specifically provoked by his anger towards and now the king is very pointedly singling out a Jew for honour, identifying him as a Jew. And what's more, he is dishonouring Haman by making him perform this act.

Even before the second feast and Esther's decisive action against him, Haman's fortunes have dramatically turned. As the identified Jew at the king's gate, Mordecai probably stands already for much of the Jewish community. This honouring of Mordecai is not just the honouring of an individual person, it's the honouring of a representative figure, someone who stands for a wider people.

We can see the reversals taking place at this point. The rivalry between Haman and Mordecai began with Haman enjoying great honours at the king's command, and with Mordecai's mourning as a result of Haman's plot. Now Mordecai is the one who is being honoured at the king's command, and Haman is the one who is mourning.

Haman's faction, his wise men and his wife, see what is happening. For them, the triumph of Mordecai at this point is very ominous for what's going to happen in the future. If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him, but will surely fall before him.

They see all of this as an unsettling foreshadowing of what is to come. Haman is then hastened away to the second and decisive feast. Perhaps in the statement of Haman's faction, we can perceive some indication of their knowledge of divine sovereignty working in these events.

There have been several coincidences. The king not sleeping, that specific passage of the chronicles being read at that precise time, the fact that Mordecai was not earlier rewarded, Haman turning up at just that moment. While Esther had been using great prudence in making her moves, by themselves her moves may not have been sufficient to displace Haman.

It is the hand of divine providence that decisively turns things. Man proposes, but the Lord disposes. The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

The Lord is never mentioned in this book of Esther, yet he is clearly the principal actor. Behind all of the human agencies, it is the Lord who is working out his purposes and his promises. A question to consider.

The story of the book of Esther is a story of reversals. This is perhaps one of the greatest points of reversal in the book. Can you think of some others? 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. He 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 2nd Timothy chapter 4 verse 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 learned 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 neighbors 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 honor 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 favor 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 to 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 savior. In 1st 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's 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 quarreling. 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 fulfillment 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 to 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 in 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, verses 3 to 5. The Christian woman is supposed to be characterized 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 to 12, he writes, For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God. But woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man.

Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man, nor man of woman.

For as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman, and all things are from God. 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 judgment upon Adam begins with the words, because you have listened to the voice of your wife. The judgments upon the serpent and the woman also specifically speak to her activity of childbearing. Verses 15 and 16 of Genesis chapter 3, I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. To the woman he said, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing. In pain you shall bring forth children.

Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you. 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 context, 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 sort 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 Jochebed, 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?