

1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 prohibit the ordination of women

Jesus' mandate for mission

The last words of Jesus before his ascension are recorded in 'the Great Commission' of Matthew 28:18-20: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of *all* nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe *all* that I *commanded* you. And see, I am with you for *all* time until the consummation of the age'. The significance of the word 'all' can hardly be missed. As he ascends to heaven, our Lord gives this all-encompassing missionary mandate to his disciples. This is his authoritative commission to his church for all time until the close of the age. The church fulfils his commission by teaching all that Christ has commanded.

Jesus regards our obedient response as a mark of our love for him and friendship with him: 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments' (John 14:15; see also 14:21, 23, 24; 15:14).¹ By paying loving attention to the Lord's words and enacting his commands Christians are used by him to bring the gospel to all nations.

The apostle Paul uses the same word 'command' (*entolē*)² in 1 Cor 14:37 to round off his argument that only men may serve in the public office of the ministry: 'Anyone who claims to be a prophet or a spiritual person must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a *command* (*entolē*) of the Lord [Jesus]'. We hold that the male-only teaching office in the church is part of the missionary mandate that remains in effect until the end of time.

1. The Lord's command

Paul never uses the word 'command' lightly.³ In 1 Corinthians he uses it only twice (7:19; 14:37). There can be no doubt that in 7:19 the word has weighty and enduring significance. He says: 'Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but what counts is keeping God's commands'. Its significance can be gauged from both the wider New Testament context and the context of 1 Corinthians itself.

In the wider context we find a close parallel in Gal 5:6: 'In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith active in love'. If we add John's testimony, we see another remarkable parallel: 'This is his *commandment*, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he has *commanded* us' (1 John 3:23). Even though Paul and John do not explicitly say that God has commanded us to have faith and love until the end of time, we would not conclude from this that these were only temporary responses to the gospel rather than permanent characteristics of all Christians for all ages.

¹ The word 'commandment' (*entolē*) in John 14:15 has the same root as the verb 'I commanded' (*eneteilamen*, from *entellomai*) in the Great Commission (Matt 28:20).

² The equivalent word in the Latin Bible (the Vulgate) is '*mandatum*', from which we derive the word 'mandate'.

³ He uses it only fourteen times in his epistles. This includes seven times in Romans, where it always means the commandments of the decalogue, commandments which are still in effect.

In his extensive discussion on marital issues in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul draws a distinction between his own pastoral advice and commands he has directly from the Lord. Whereas he commends his pastoral opinions to the Corinthians for their careful consideration, he places the Lord's commands on a much higher plane as words that have ongoing validity in the church (see 1 Cor 7:6, 10, 12, 25). This distinction prepares the way for and underlines the significance of Paul's apostolic instruction in 1 Corinthians 14:37 that the Lord has given the command that the women should not speak but remain silent in the churches.

Temporary or permanent commands

We have already discussed the significance of the great missionary mandate in Matthew 28:18-20 and the echoes of that mandate in the letters of St Paul and St John. Given the importance of these mandates, it is inconceivable that any Christian could think the Lord's command to 'love one another as I have loved you' (John 13:34) was only a temporary injunction, conditioned by the cultural context in the first century. Nor would it enter anyone's mind that we could not know whether John's command was permanent or temporary unless he claimed that it lasted until the end of the world.

Like the mandates in Matthew 28:18-20 and John 13:34, the two commands in 1 Corinthians 14:37 and their parallel in 1 Timothy 2:12 carry no expiry date. But both the broader context and the immediate framework show that St Paul regards them as highly significant matters that should not be set aside. The silence of women applies to 'all the churches of the saints.' He adds the stern warning: 'Anyone who does not recognise this will not be recognised' (1 Cor 14:33b, 38). Likewise, in his first letter to Timothy, Paul concludes his instructions for the ordering of the church, including the ruling that no woman is allowed to teach, with the solemn words: 'I am writing these instructions to you so that you may know how one should (*dei*) behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth' (3:15).

2. The Lord's command and Paul's teaching on headship

The case for reserving the pastoral ministry for men rests on the Lord's command in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38. Paul connects this command closely with his teaching on headship and subordination in marriage and the church. The two passages that limit the ministry of the word to men explain their prohibition by reference to subordination which, we claim, cannot be understood apart from Paul's teaching on headship. That then is where we will begin with our analysis of the prohibitions in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12.

On the basis of 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 we will clarify:

- the *servant character* of headship
- the *range* of texts that teach headship and subordination
- the *meaning* of the terms headship and subordination

After these clarifications, we will proceed to the issue itself:

- the *validity* of headship and subordination for churches at all times and in all places

- the *application* of the command for women's subordination to male pastors in the church

a. The servant character of headship

The strong pressure on churches to sidestep the prohibitions in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 stems largely from powerful cultural and philosophical forces in our society. Some influential philosophers tend to reduce all human relationships to questions of power and rights rather than service and responsibilities. Thus some of those who advocate the ordination of women decry the grip of patriarchy in the family and church with its sinful exercise of male dominance and power under the dictates of the law.⁴ In the face of male domination oppressed women need to be empowered. Some of them even find fault with biblical language for God because it is shaped by patriarchal presuppositions about male power which are said to privilege the use of male metaphors for him.

When we view everything the Scriptures teach about the man's headship through this prism, our vision becomes distorted because it fails to distinguish power from authority. By itself the word power does not indicate whether it is obtained legitimately and exercised fairly, or whether it is seized illegitimately and exercised tyrannically. The word authority, on the other hand, carries no negative overtones unless authority is abused and a person becomes authoritarian. In itself authority always implies authorisation, a commission recognised by others to perform a particular role. Thus, when the Scriptures speak about headship they refer to responsible authority, its proper use for service of others.

The use of the loaded term patriarchy⁵ to summarise the Bible's teaching on subordination and male headship obscures the difference between Christian teaching and other religions. It is often alleged in a general way that Christianity has been responsible for widespread oppression and abuse of women. While we could indeed compile a lengthy list of abuses,⁶ the rule still applies: 'The abuse of something does not abolish its proper use'

The apostolic exhortation to husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Eph 5:25) has had a deep influence on societies where the leaven of Christ has done its work. Recent scholarship has documented how women in the Greco-Roman world received freedom and dignity under the influence of the Christian faith.⁷ The point is that the Christian teaching on marriage sets a standard of behaviour for men and women which has always had a salutary effect when it is put into practice. With many

⁴ For such an attempt to link the teaching on headship in evangelical circles with patriarchalism, see Peter Carnley, *Reflections in glass: trends and tensions in the contemporary Anglican Church*, HarperCollins, 2004, pages 225-41.

⁵ This pejorative use of the term 'patriarchy' is listed in *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th edition, 1993: 'broadly: control by men of a disproportionately large share of power'.

⁶ So, for example, which Christian man could claim he has loved and honoured his wife just as Christ has loved the church?

⁷ See Alvin J Schmidt, *Under the influence: how Christianity transformed civilization*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2001, pages 97-124; and Rodney Stark, *The rise of Christianity*, San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1997, who says that 'within the Christian subculture women enjoyed far higher status than did women in the Greco-Roman world at large', and 'the Christian woman enjoyed far greater marital security and equality than did her pagan neighbour' (95,105).

pagan religions and philosophies, on the other hand, the standard itself is defective. So while it is true that Christian men have sometimes oppressed their wives and other women, the New Testament and the church has never sanctioned such oppressive behaviour.

In the New Testament we find the opposite of the oppression of women that is commonly sanctioned in all human societies. In fact, Paul's teaching on male headship critiques their oppression of women. For Paul, male headship involves the use of his authority to exercise spiritual leadership at home and in church, rather than to evade his responsibilities, as men are so often prone to do. This kind of headship is not coupled with the exercise of power, but it is exercised solely in service. Nowhere does the New Testament condone a man's lording it over his wife or the congregation, as if his headship implied a chain of command.⁸ Christian headship always involves willing self-giving that is modelled on the self-sacrifice of Christ (Ephesians 5:25).⁹ Husbands are exhorted to love their wives and honour them as 'joint heirs of the grace of life' (Col 3:19; 1 Pet 3:7).

When a man exercises leadership by loving service in the home and congregation, a woman's subordination is made easy. Her subordination can never be coerced; it is her willing gift offered, in the last analysis, to her Lord (Eph 5:22).

b. The texts that teach headship and subordination

Paul's teaching on the subordination of women to male pastors in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 must be interpreted in the light of his teaching on subordination and headship elsewhere. Thus 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 cannot be understood apart from the passage on women's head-coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Everything that the apostle writes about head-coverings comes under the heading in 11:3: 'I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God'. This verse also introduces Paul's lengthy discussion in chapters 11-14 on worship in Corinth. Thus it provides the framework for everything Paul says in 14:33b-38 about the need for women to be subordinate and listen in silence to the man who speaks God's word in the divine service as the head of that congregation under Christ its head.

The two key texts under consideration in this paper belong to a group of texts which speak of the man's headship under Christ and the woman's subordination in marriage and the Christian church (besides 1 Cor 11:2-16, 14:33b-38 and 1 Tim 2:11-15, see Eph 5:22-31, Col 3:18,19 and 1 Pet 3:1-7). What these texts have in common is an admonition either to Christian women to be subordinate to their husbands 'as is fitting in the Lord' (Col 3:18) or to the men to exercise their headship in a self-sacrificial manner (Eph 5:25-33). They show that headship and subordination are two sides of

⁸ Lording it over other Christians is condemned in Matt 20:25, 2 Cor 1:24 and 1 Pet 5:3.

⁹ Muriel Porter also holds that the concept of male headship in the church and the family is central to the debate on the ordination of women. But she caricatures this teaching as an 'ideology of male domination over women'. She pays no attention to the texts in the New Testament that reject anyone who lords it over others and Paul's call for the exercise of headship in loving service. Instead she regards it as domination which is 'oppressive', 'dangerous', and 'frightening', enshrining 'a form of systemic abuse of women within [the church's] power structures'. ('The Anglicans' oppressed majority', *The Age*, October 8, 2004, 17)

the same coin. This comes out clearly in Ephesians 5:22-24: ‘Wives, be subordinate to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. Now as the church is subordinate to Christ, so also wives should be subordinate in everything to their husbands’.¹⁰

c. The meaning of headship and subordination

Headship

In 1 Corinthians 11:3 Paul asserts:

‘The head of every man is Christ,
the head of the woman is the man,
and the head of Christ is God.’

The key to understanding this general statement is the meaning of the term ‘head’.

Before the modern debate on women’s ordination, commentators never questioned that when Paul spoke of headship he meant the authority of that person as a leader in a community. However, recent commentators have advanced the view that ‘head’ (*kephalē*) means ‘source’, just as a river has its source in its headwaters.¹¹ But even when applied to a river, *kephalē* does not necessarily mean ‘source’; it can also refer to the river’s mouth.

After examining all the known occurrences of *kephalē* in biblical texts and non-biblical literature from the Biblical period, Grudem concludes that in each case where some one is said to be the head of another, it refers to authority over that person. So, for example, the leaders of Israel’s tribes are called the ‘heads’ of the tribes [LXX 3 Kings 8:1].¹²

Subordination

¹⁰ So unpalatable has the teaching on headship and subordination become that many argue the references in Ephesians 5:22-24 are nullified by the preceding verse: ‘Be(ing) subordinate to one another in the fear of Christ’ (see Bilezikian: 153-59). Ephesians 5:21, in keeping with many Pauline passages, does commend the loving subordination, consideration, and humble service of all Christians to others in the church. But verse 21 may not be played off against the subsequent verses that set forth distinctive roles for wives and husbands. A parallel is 1 Peter 5:5, where Peter urges younger men to subordinate themselves to those who are older, but immediately adds: ‘All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another’ (see Piper and Grudem, pages 165-78). As paradoxical as it may seem, the New Testament plays both themes together: the subordination of all Christians to one another *and* the subordination of each Christian to some others. Similarly, in 1 Peter 3:6,7 Peter speaks in one verse of Sarah’s subordination to Abraham and in the next verse of Abraham’s honouring her as a joint heir of the grace of life (see also Gal 3:28).

¹¹ Fee notes that ‘all commentators up to Barrett [1968] and Conzelmann [1975]’ understood the headship metaphor in terms of authority (1987: 502, note 41). Now the pendulum has swung so far that, in a recent commentary Thiselton even skirts around the obvious translation of *kephalē* as ‘head’, with its implications of authority, by translating 1 Corinthians 11:3 as follows: ‘However, I want you to understand that while Christ is preeminent (or *head? source?*) for man, man is foremost (or *head? source?*) in relation to woman, and God is preeminent (or *head? source?*) in relation to Christ’ (2000: 800).

¹² Grudem’s findings have been challenged by Kroeger (1994); but see Grudem’s rebuttal (2002: 145-202).

The passive voice of the verb ‘to subordinate’ (*hypotassō*) means ‘to be placed under someone’s authority’.¹³ Such subordination may be involuntary (Rom 8:20) or voluntary (1 Pet 5:5). As in all the other places where he calls for subordination, Paul uses the middle form of the verb in 1 Corinthians 14:34 to appeal for voluntary subordination. The Son’s voluntary submission to the Father provides the model for this (1 Cor 15:27,28). Christians, then, are to subordinate themselves willingly to God and to Christ (Eph 5:24; Heb 12:9; James 4:7) as well as to God’s law (Rom 8:7) and gospel (Rom 10:3,4). From this higher subordination of all Christians to God and God’s word spring all other forms of subordination, such as wives to husbands (Eph 5:24; Col 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1,5), children to parents (Luke 2:51), servants to masters (Titus 2:9; 1 Pet 2:18), subjects to rulers (Rom 13:1,5; Tit 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13), and all Christians to their teachers in the church (1 Pet 5:5).

In 1 Corinthians 14:34, Paul calls on women to be *subordinate* by voluntarily fitting in with God’s *order*¹⁴ for the church and its worship. That includes the male teachers of his word.¹⁵ He refers to this liturgical ‘order’ (*taxis*) in 14:40. All members of the congregation must fit in with that divinely instituted order by practising subordination to Christ, his word and the teachers of his word, so that the congregation can be built up as his temple (14:26) and enjoy peace rather than *disorder* (14:33).¹⁶

We need to connect Paul’s call for subordination in 1 Corinthians 14:34 with his teaching on the subordination of the Son to the Father in 1 Corinthians 11:3 and 1 Corinthians 15:24-28. This wider context ties the relationship between man and woman to the relationship between God and Christ: ‘I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God’ (1 Cor 11:3). And 1 Cor 15:28 completes the portrait, as it speaks of the eternal future: ‘When all things are subordinated to him [the Son], then the Son himself will also be subordinated to him who put all things in subordination under him, that God may be all in all’. As Thiselton states, ‘the proof of the permanence of the principle of order...emerges in 1 Corinthians 15:28’ (Thiselton: 1155).

¹³ See Luke 7:8: ‘I am a man placed under authority (*hypo exousian tassomenos*), having soldiers under me.’

¹⁴ While this term was commonly used in secular Greek for the arrangement of troops as a unit in a set order under their centurion for battle, it is used elsewhere in the New Testament for the order of priests for the service of God (Luke 1:6; Heb 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:11,17).

¹⁵ While Thiselton rightly acknowledges the semantic and theological connection between subordination and order, he ignores logical connection between subordination and headship by blunting the force of the prefix ‘sub’ (Greek *hypo*) in subordination (*hypotassō*). He translates 14:34: ‘Let them keep to their ordered place’ (1131; see REB, ‘they should keep their place’) and criticises the translation in the NRSV: ‘they should be subordinate’ and the even worse translation in the NIV: ‘they must be in submission’. He argues that the case for the interpretation of the prefix ‘sub’ as ‘under’ rests ‘partly on lexicography and partly on the exegetical tradition which understands Paul’s mention of the law here as a reference to the subordination of Eve in Genesis 3:16. Thus, he suggests, the whole argument for submission is based on the punishment of Eve after the fall in Genesis 3:16. But Paul’s parallel argument in 1 Timothy 2:13,14 shows that when he spoke of the law he mostly likely had in mind the story of Eve’s creation in Genesis 2:7, 20-25 as well as the story of her temptation in 3:1-13.

¹⁶ Note the play on words here. Paul connects the ‘order’ of the divine service in 14:40 with the ‘subordination’ of women in 14:34 and contrasts it with the ‘disorder’ that is rejected by God in 14:33.

The flow of headship and authority in 1 Corinthians 11:3 is one-directional.¹⁷ To say that God is the head of Christ is consistent with God's creation of the world through the Word, his sending of his Son, and Christ's ongoing involvement in the work of redemption as the exalted Lord. To say that Christ is the head of the man is beyond dispute. The third link in the chain is under dispute: 'the man is the head of the woman.' We hold that this applies both to the role of the husband in marriage and the ministry of the word in the church.

The differentiation in the roles of men and women, given since creation, in no way negates their equality and unity in Christ (Gal 3:28). The subordination of all members of the church to their male pastors promotes the peace and harmony that result when every part of Christ's body functions properly and the body grows and builds itself up in love (1 Cor 13:1-13; 14:33,40; Eph 4:16).

To sum up the argument to this point: the modern preoccupation with patriarchy and empowerment obscures a proper understanding of headship as service in marriage and the church. The claim that only one or two texts on the fringe of the New Testament develop the theme of subordination and headship ignores the range of teaching on the topic, while the interpretation of headship as source rather than authority distorts its intended meaning.

Cultural Conditioning

Before we return to the question of the permanent or temporary nature of the Lord's command, it may be helpful to address the notion that the apostolic teaching no longer applies because it is time-bound and conditioned by a thoroughly different culture. This notion skews a straightforward exegesis in a number of ways.

1. According to this argument, the women's disputatious questions in the Corinth of Paul's day brought shame on their husbands and the church community (1 Cor 14:35). Such behaviour is said to have offended against community standards for discreet behaviour. But today it is equally offensive if the women are not given equal rights to speak in church.

However, when Paul writes that 'it is shameful for a woman to speak in church', this does not mean the whole non-Christian community observes the behaviour of Christian women in Corinth and takes offence at it. They would be quite unaware of what was happening in the divine service, for they did not participate in it. Paul simply means that the behaviour is shameful in God's sight.

2. The case for women's ordination runs with the view that while it was offensive for women to teach God's word in Paul's day it would no longer be offensive today. Sometimes this argument is linked to a claim that the apostle issued his command because he was aware of the sensitivities of his intended audience which, it is alleged, was mainly Jewish. Jewish women were not allowed to be students of the law, let

¹⁷ We may not use Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:11,12 about women and men's interdependence 'in the Lord' in order to nullify the heading and thrust given to the whole section in 11:3. Verse 3 cannot be interpreted in terms of mutual submission, as if (in addition to Christ's headship of the man, the man's headship of the woman, and God's headship of Christ) it were equally true that the man was the head of Christ, the woman was the head of the man, and Christ was the head of God.

alone teach it. So, it is argued, it would take time before they were ready to assume their God-given right to take their place alongside men as teachers and preachers in the church.

It is difficult to sustain this argument, particularly in the case of 1 Corinthians. Clearly the Corinthian congregation was composed largely of gentiles, and it was baggage from their pagan days that troubled the congregation and weighed most heavily on the apostle rather than the concerns of Jewish converts.¹⁸ Instead of adopting traditional pagan customs in the hope of advancing the gospel, Paul challenges common pagan practices in Corinth such as consorting with prostitutes, engaging in homosexual acts, and sexual cohabitation outside marriage. His approach is counter-cultural. Likewise, his instruction that only men were allowed to serve as pastors challenges the Greco-Roman culture where women commonly served as priests in particular cults.

d. The permanent validity of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians

Ecumenical practice (33b-34a)

Paul claims that the prohibition of women as speakers in the church and the requirement for them to remain silent during the speaking of God's word applied to 'all the churches of the saints'. This therefore was an ecumenical rule, a common practice for all Christian communities in all cultural settings. Previously Paul had repeatedly reminded the Corinthians, a congregation inclined to go its own way, that they were linked to the church 'in every place' of worship by a common confession of faith (1:2) as well as by the same teaching of God's word (4:17; 7:17; 11:16). As Thiselton notes, Paul's emphasis here on ecumenical teaching and practice anticipates the later teaching on 'the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church' in the Nicene Creed (1155). Thus the reservation of the public ministry of the word for men is not just a local custom but an ecumenical requirement.

The law (34d)

After appealing to the church's world-wide practice, Paul undergirds his ruling by pointing to its agreement with what God has to say in the 'law', the Pentateuch. Thus the subordination of women to male pastors is not a recent innovation of the apostles. It is consistent with the teaching of God in the early chapters of Genesis.

By speaking of the law Paul has in mind the same passages that he appeals to in 1 Timothy 2:13,14, the creation of Eve in Genesis 2 and the temptation of Eve in Genesis 3. Adam was formed first, and so, according to biblical theology, he has the priority. He was the first born, the teacher, who received God's teaching about the need for obedience (Gen 2:16,17). Eve usurped the spiritual headship of Adam by ceasing to be a student and becoming a teacher of her husband, while Adam dodged his responsibility to teach his wife by weakly following her teaching, with tragic

¹⁸ At the heart of 1 Corinthians we find three chapters about the old customs of the people in Corinth who still dined in pagan temples and ate food offered to idols, things that no Jew would ever have done (1 Cor 8:1-11:1). Other old habits such as litigiousness, visiting prostitutes and involvement in homosexual activity, also stemmed from their pagan background (1 Cor 5:1-6:20). The opening chapters (1-4) respond to the Greco-Roman adulation of rhetoric which was a feature of the second Sophistic movement of Paul's day.

consequences for both. So women were not to assume this role again, and the men were not to renege on it.

Like Jesus before him, Paul recalls the creation of our human parents when he speaks of the relationship between men and women in marriage and the church. In response to questions from the Pharisees, Jesus rejects the practice of easy divorce that was permitted under Mosaic law on the grounds that ‘from the beginning it was not so’ (Matt 19:8; Mark 10:6). For Paul, too, the original order for marriage that God had established by the creation of Adam and Eve still governed the relationships between men and women in the Christian home and the Christian church. He acknowledged that the gospel does not overthrow these universal structures that were established at creation.

Carl Braaten explains this well:

The point of this doctrine is to affirm that Christians, like all other human beings, exist in a framework of universal structures that are prior to and apart from the fact that Christians believe in Christ and belong to his Church. God has placed all human beings in particular structures of existence – such as nationality, race, sexual identity, family, work, government – that in some form or other are simply givens of creaturely existence. The law and commandments of God are revealed through these common created morphological structures of human existence and function apart from and in tension with the special revelation of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. (1992: 120).

‘The Lord’s command’ (14:37)

Paul clinches his argument with an appeal to a command of the Lord. He says: ‘If anyone thinks he is a prophet or a spiritual person, let him recognise that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command’ (14:37). Here Paul tells the Corinthians that he received this teaching from Jesus as a part of oral tradition that was not recorded in the gospels. Two other examples of this are found in Acts 20:35 and 1 Thessalonians 4:15 (see also John 20:30; 21:25). This is confirmed by his question about the origin of the apostolic tradition in the preceding verse (14:36): ‘Did the word of God originate with you [Corinthians], or are you the only ones it has reached?’

Present validity

Paul claims that his teaching on the subordination of women to the men who were the teachers of the word in the divine service is based on ecumenical teaching and practice, the teaching of the Pentateuch and the command of the Lord. If that is so, how can we determine whether this teaching still applies in the church today?

Some divine commands are temporary, designed for a particular time or circumstance. The following examples are found in the New Testament.

- Jesus called the divorce legislation in Deuteronomy a temporary concession to the hard-heartedness of the Israelites (Mark 10:2-9).
- Upon his descent from the mount of transfiguration, he commanded: ‘Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, *until* the Son of Man has been raised from the dead’ (Matt 17:9).

- Jesus received commands from his Father relating to his ministry in a specific time and place (John 10:18; 12:49).
- The epistle to the Hebrews sees the ceremonial law in the Old Testament as a temporary arrangement until its fulfilment by Christ (Heb 7:4-19).
- Although it is not called a ‘command’, the decision taken by the Jerusalem council that gentile Christians who wished to receive communion with Jewish Christians should abstain from eating blood, is a divinely inspired but temporary decree that extended God’s prohibition to the Jews in Leviticus 17:10-12 to the gentiles in the early church: ‘it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us’ (Acts 15:28).¹⁹

Wherever a divine command in the New Testament has only temporary significance there are contextual indicators to that effect, such as ‘don’t tell anyone....*until...*’ (Matt 17:9). Without clear indications in the context, divine commandments issued or reissued in the New Testament are permanently binding.²⁰ For example, Jesus confirms the ongoing validity of the law (Matt 5:17-19). He does not set a time limit to his ‘new commandment’ that his disciples love one another (John 13:34; see also John 15:12; 1 John 2:7-11). Similarly, there is no time limit to the divine commandment to ‘believe in the name of [God’s] Son Jesus Christ and love one another’ (1 John 3:23) and to walk ‘in truth’ (2 John 4).

Those who advocate the ordination of women often point to Paul’s instructions about head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 as an example of an apostolic command that is no longer observed. We must, however, distinguish between a divine command and a human custom that exemplifies how that mandate may be put into effect at a particular time and place. The story of the footwashing in John 13 serves as a good illustration of this. While Jesus tells the disciples: ‘you ought to wash one another’s feet’, his action is simply an ‘example’ of how the disciples should show their love (13:15). The custom of footwashing may no longer a helpful way of demonstrating and enacting Christian love in our culture. But the new command of Jesus to love one another still applies (John 13:34). Similarly, it is no longer customary in western cultures for women to wear head-coverings; other customs have emerged to express a woman’s love and respect for her husband, such as wearing a wedding ring or taking on his surname. But headship of men in marriage and the church still remains in effect (1 Cor 11:3).

¹⁹ This temporary requirement must be seen against the background of Jesus’ earlier declaration that all foods are clean (Mark 7:19), a declaration with abiding validity.

²⁰ Horrell maintains that in certain contexts Paul believed higher considerations of Christian discipleship could require ‘the setting aside of a specific instruction, or word, of Jesus’. He appeals to 1 Corinthians 9:14,15, where Paul quotes the Lord’s command that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel, but goes on to say that he has not used this right. Horrell holds that this has implications here for our attitude to women’s ordination (1997: 587-603). It should be clear from Paul’s language that he is not setting aside an instruction from Jesus. He writes: ‘The Lord *commanded...* but I have *not used*’. Not all directives are of the same nature. For example, a person who is granted citizenship in a country is not required always to live there and exercise ‘all the rights and privileges of citizenship’. The Lord issued a decree to the apostles that they had the *right (exousia)*, 1 Cor 9:6,12,18 – not the *duty* – to receive support. Paul exercised his right to support in his ministry among the Philippians (Phil 4:15,16). At Corinth, he chose not to exercise his right. Similarly, a pastor who declines an honorarium or donates it to a worthy cause is by no means violating Christ’s command.

To argue that by making much of the law and the command in 1 Corinthians 14:34, 37 we fall prey to legalism betrays a failure to grasp the breadth of these terms in the New Testament. God's commands embrace not only the Ten Commandments but also 'the whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27), everything our Lord has commanded us to teach about faith and love, the sacraments and the ministry (Matt 28:18-20). By keeping his commandments we show our love for him (John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10, 14).

We have already noted the significance of the word command in First Corinthians, where it appears only twice, each time in a context that underlines its significance (7:19; 14:37). The context of 14:37 does not indicate that the command for women to be silent was a temporary restriction.²¹ Everything points to its authority as a divine command with permanent and universal validity. Paul underlines the seriousness of the command by adding a warning (14:38) that God will not recognise the ministry of anyone who ignores the Lord's will in this matter (see 1 Cor 3:11-15). This warning of divine disapproval shows that he does not have in mind such minor matters as the chatter of loquacious women or their disputatious questions. Rather, he is speaking of a clear command that remains valid to the end of the world.²²

e. The application of the commands for silence and subordination

1 Corinthians 14:33b-38

Scholarly opinion about the intended scope of Paul's directive in 1 Corinthians 14:34 varies widely. Carson (129-31) believes the prohibition applies only to the evaluation of prophecies. At the other end of the spectrum, Bruner (300-301) argues that in this directive Paul does not allow women to speak in tongues or to speak a word of prophecy, the two kinds of speaking that are discussed in this chapter.²³ A detailed explanation of how 14:34 relates to Paul's passing reference in 11:5 to the women who pray and prophesy goes beyond the scope of this paper.²⁴ However, it must be said that the brief reference in 11:5 may not be used to discount the apostle's final and much fuller statement on the issue in 14:33b-38.

According to biblical usage, to prophesy is to speak God's word to his people on the basis of a special revelation by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 14:30; Rev 1:1-3; 22:18,19).²⁵ Thus prophecy belongs to a different genre of speaking from

²¹ Some interpreters suggest 1 Corinthians 14:37 could be a temporary concession to Jewish Christians who had only recently become accustomed to the higher regard in which women were held in Christianity, and were by no means ready for the further step of seeing women in teaching roles. More persuasive is D J Nadeau's contention that Paul is 'deeply concerned to avoid any confusion between the emerging Christian churches and marginal Graeco-Roman or oriental cults in which women exercised more prominent roles than in the synagogues which formed the Jewish roots of the churches' (*Le probleme des femmes en 1 Cor 14:33b-35*, 63-65, cited in Thiselton, 1157).

²² 'He/she is not recognised' is a divine passive: 'is not recognised by God'. It also has eschatological overtones similar to those in 1 Cor 3:12-15, which speak of a person's work in the ministry as being either recognized and rewarded by God or forfeited and lost on the Day of Judgment.

²³ Bruner argues that Paul places a prohibition particularly on a woman who speaks in tongues in the congregational meetings.

²⁴ For a discussion of five different ways of relating 11:2-16 to 14:33b-38, see G Lockwood (2000: 527-34).

²⁵ Friedrich says that 'all prophecy rests on revelation (1 Cor 14:30). The prophets... speak to the congregation on the basis of revelations'. It is important to distinguish between this narrower sense of the word 'prophecy' which is standard in the scriptures, and the broader sense of the word which has

preaching and teaching. While New Testament prophets received God's word as he revealed it to them, preaching was the proclamation of the apostolic gospel in the light of the Old Testament. The *Good News Bible* is therefore misleading in its translation of the verb 'prophesy' (*propheteuo*) in 1 Corinthians 11:5 as if it meant the ordinary proclamation of God's word: 'Any woman who prays or proclaims God's message in public worship with nothing on her head disgraces her husband'. This equation of prophecy with preaching confuses the issue under discussion by assuming that in Paul's day women commonly preached in the divine service.²⁶

1 Timothy 2:11-15

This close parallel to 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 is part of Paul's apostolic charge to Timothy and the churches entrusted to Timothy's care. Here Paul presents himself as an appointed 'herald and apostle, ...a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth' (2:7). His instructions to women in 2:8-15 are part of a broader admonition both to men and women about how they should 'conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth' (3:15).²⁷ This makes it clear that his teaching does not just apply to the church in Ephesus but to the universal church.

This broader admonition begins with a charge that all Christians should pray for all people (2:1-7). Secondly, Paul teaches that he wants the men everywhere 'to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing' (2:8). Thirdly, even though women should pray together with men, he wants the women to be modest and sensible in their dress (2:9,10). Fourthly, even though they should pray together with all the men and be students of his word like them, they must not become teachers but must remain disciples who listen to the word of God 'in silence' and in 'full submission' (2:11-15).²⁸

Christians who believe that these admonitions still apply to the women in the church today differ in their understanding of how widely Paul's words about the silence of women apply to their participation in the divine service.²⁹ But one boundary line stands out clearly. That boundary is set in 1 Timothy 2:12. It reads: 'I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.'

Paul insists that a woman should not teach or have authority over a man. Here, as in all his pastoral epistles, Paul does not use the verb 'teach' in a general sense for any kind of instruction but as a technical term for the transmission of doctrine, the

been common in church history. Luther, for example, referred to himself as the 'prophet of the Germans' (*LW* 47:29) and spoke of the need for more such 'prophets', pastors well versed in Hebrew and Greek and thus equipped to 'dig into Scripture' (*LW* 45:363).

²⁶ For another misleading translation of 1 Corinthians 11:5, see J B Phillips, 'if she prays or preaches with her head uncovered'.

²⁷ The introductory words to chapter 3, 'This is a trustworthy saying', could apply backwards, as a conclusion underlining the trustworthiness of what Paul has just been saying in chapter 2 (see the similar function of 1 Cor 14:37,38).

²⁸ Paul's wish that the woman be a student of God's word stands in contrast with the prevailing attitude of Pharisaic Judaism.

²⁹ Christians have debated whether a woman may read lessons, vote at church meetings, serve as a chair person, or help administer Holy Communion.

apostolic ‘teaching’ of God’s word (1 Tim 1:10,11; 2 Tim 3:16; 4:2,3; Tit 2:1,10).³⁰ Thus Timothy is to ‘teach’ what he has received from Paul (1 Tim 4:11; 6:2) and to pass it on to others to ‘teach’ (2 Tim 2:1). So a woman may train other women (Titus 2:3-5), instruct her children (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14, 15; see Acts 16:1) and, like Priscilla, take an active role – possibly even a leading role - in the private instruction of a man like Apollos (Acts 18:25,26). Yet this does not mean that women are permitted to serve as the preachers and teachers in the liturgical assembly where men, women and children are gathered for public worship.

The New Testament distinguishes the office of apostles and prophets, with their special tasks during the church’s foundational period,³¹ from another office variously designated as ‘pastor’, ‘teacher’, ‘overseer’ and ‘elder’ (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11; Acts 20:17, 28). This office, this gift of God to his church, continues through the centuries. Paul instructs Timothy and Titus to prepare and install such men in the churches of Ephesus and Crete (2 Tim 2:1-2; Tit 1:5-9). One of the chief qualifications of these pastors is that they be ‘apt to teach’ (1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 2:24; see also 2 Tim 2:2). He also assumes that these pastors would be men (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6).

At a time when confessional Lutheran churches need to emphasise the pastor’s sacramental ministry in reaction to the low view of the sacraments in many Protestant churches, we also need to reaffirm the biblical teaching of the pastoral office as a teaching office. Paul emphasises this in Ephesians 4:11 where he speaks of Christ’s gift to the church of ‘pastors who are teachers’.³² It is an office of word and sacrament, for the sacraments need proper teaching to provide the right setting for their evangelical administration. That office is necessary for the life of the church at all times and in all places.

To sum up:

- In the church the Lord has forbidden women to be teachers and he has commanded them to be subordinate to those men who exercise their headship under him.
- Biblical headship is always exercised in self-sacrificial service.
- The woman’s subordination to her ‘head’ is her voluntary, loving gift.
- There are six significant texts in the New Testament that develop the teaching on headship and subordination for the Christian home and the church.
- Headship means authority over another, while the subordination of a woman in marriage and the church involves her voluntary acceptance of the authority of her husband and her pastor.
- This divine arrangement has permanent validity, grounded in the creation of the first man and the first woman.
- Finally, its application to the respective roles of men and women in the church means that only qualified men may fill the pastoral office and teach in the church, while women (and most men!) are to listen and learn.

³⁰ Thus the term teacher is used in the New Testament for an apostle (1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11) as well as a pastor (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor 12:28,29; Eph 4:11; James 3:1).

³¹ In Ephesians 2:20 Paul speaks of the church being ‘built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets’.

³² ‘The pastors and teachers’ is a hendiadys, which expresses one idea by using two words connected by ‘and’ such as in ‘nice and warm’. This is reinforced by the fact that the article is not repeated.

Conclusion

Opinion about the scope and applicability of the Lord's command in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 varies widely. But if we follow the principle that one part of Scripture interprets another part of it that deals with the same topic, then the parallel passage in 1 Timothy 2:12 should remove all doubt that Paul has in mind authoritative speaking and teaching of God's word. A woman may teach other women, she may teach children, she may take part in the private instruction of a man like Apollos, but when a congregation assembles for public worship, women have no authority to serve as the preachers and teachers.

The church has no mandate to ordain women; it is bound by Christ's prohibition of women as teachers of God's word in the divine service. If we accept the Lord's prohibition we will fulfil one part of his great commission to bring the gospel to all nations.