

The Clarity of Scripture and the Order of Creation

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Introduction

At the original reading of the Augsburg Confession, on June 25, 1530, Duke William of Bavaria, amazed at what he was hearing and thinking perhaps he had been all wrong about these Lutherans, leaned over to John Eck and asked how it could be refuted. Eck responded, “Not with Scripture, but with the Fathers.” The same reasoning prevailed again 15 years later at the Council of Trent. Andrada and his ilk openly admitted that they couldn’t refute the Lutherans using only Scripture. So solidified the long Roman Catholic tradition of asserting that Scripture is unclear. Whenever a Scripture is quoted that they disagree with, instead of openly disagreeing with it, they simply say it’s unclear. It’s a clever trick. Erasmus of Rotterdam used the same trick to make Paul’s Epistle to the Romans deny original sin and teach Pelagian works-righteousness. Once you say Scripture is unclear, you can then get it to say anything or nothing.

Our age has learned this trick all too well. It used to be that if you wanted to have women pastors or women in authority in the church, you had to deny Paul’s clear words, while at the same time admitting what they clearly said. There was no charge of obscurity. Everyone knew what 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 said and they didn’t try to make them say something else. That didn’t stop them from denying Paul’s words though.

The ancient Gnostics, for example, simply declared that Paul’s words weren’t binding on them. They, together with several little heretical sects throughout the Church’s history, appealed to Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is not male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” The argument was that Galatians 3:28 trumps 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2. This gnostic argument was revived in the LCMS during the Seminex years, well named by John Warwick Montgomery “Gospel Reductionism” – the antinomian assertion that what Paul says about women not teaching in the Church is Law, but we are people of the Gospel, so the law doesn’t apply to us.

Another popular tactic in the last centuries has been the historical-critical attempt to reject Pauline authorship for all 1 Timothy and for the section of 1 Corinthians 14 that deals with women in the church. Here again, there was no attempt to say that Paul’s words don’t mean what they say. The argument was rather that Paul didn’t write these offensive words, and so they don’t apply to us.

And then there was the argument that Paul’s words applied to his time, but not to ours, that Paul’s specific directives to the church of Corinth or to Timothy were meant only for that time, and not for ours. Once again, the charge of obscurity isn’t in view. Everyone acknowledges what the words say. Their argument is simply that the words don’t apply.

Now all of these arguments have failed, and time doesn’t allow me to treat them fully – though we should say a few words on each of them. 1) The Gospel does not override the orders of creation. It actually reestablishes what has fallen apart. A woman does not cease to be woman when she is baptized into Christ, she rather is restored to the woman God made her to be. And so also with a man. Unlike the pagan religions, which asserted here the primacy of the female and there the primacy of the male, or turned, as in the Greek myth of Pandora, the creation of woman into a curse for man, Scripture teaches that woman is a complement to man, a blessing for him, the final perfection of creation. God’s order of man and woman in the garden was very good, and God didn’t need to die to recapitulate it in any way, only to wash away the sin that stained it. The Gospel removes sin, not creation. In fact, St. Paul doesn’t even say that there is neither male nor female in Christ. He says instead, there is not male and female, purposely changing the grammatical structure from “neither slave nor free” (*ouk...oude*) to “not male and female” (*ouk...kai*), that is, in Christ, the curse that sets male and female against each other is taken away by the forgiveness of sins. But they remain male and female, to do what male and fe-

male have been created to do from the beginning, which includes the wife's submission to her husband and the husband's sacrificial love for his wife – both of which are glorious and wonderful in the sight of God our Savior (Eph. 5:21ff.).

2) Second, the idea that Paul didn't write 1 Timothy was utterly unheard of in the church until the snobbish, parochial pedantry of 20th century scholarship declared 1 Timothy's theology too developed for the Apostle Paul. The godlessness of such an argument should be obvious to anyone who actually believes that Jesus rose from the dead and called Paul to be His spokesman and apostle. God's theology doesn't develop, and neither does Paul's. It certainly does vary in vocabulary and emphasis as Paul addresses a different audience, a pastor instead of a congregation. But, even here, the institution of the pastoral office and the specific instruction concerning it are manifest in 2 Corinthians and elsewhere, even when Paul is talking to laymen (2 Cor. 5, especially; cf. 1 Cor. 12-14). The argument against Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy should be rejected out of hand as historically, linguistically, and textually baseless. And as to 1 Corinthians 14:35-40 being unoriginal and a later interpolation, an opinion already set forth by Semler in the 18th century because of conflicting textual traditions, recent scholarship has proven even to academia's content that the text is original, which is why even in the text of Nestle-Aland 28, 1 Corinthians 14:35-40 remains where it stands. (As a side note, Dr. Jeffrey Kloha, of recent fame, shows conclusively in his dissertation that the words of 1 Cor. 14:35-40 are original to the text, and his arguments have persuaded more than a few in academia.)

3) Third, the argument that Paul's words applied at his time and not in ours runs counter to the universal claims and proofs Paul uses in these texts – “as in all the congregations of the saints,” “what I am saying is a command of the Lord,” “as even the law says,” together with Paul's appeal in 1 Timothy to Adam and Eve and the order of creation, and his statement concerning the entire epistle: “I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:14-15). These are not words of occasional import. They are words, according to Paul's express statement, that apply to the behavior of the universal Church on earth.

I'd be happy to give you references to articles that treat these points more thoroughly.¹ But my point here is that until recently, the arguments for women exercising authority in the church were made even while admitting that Paul's words say what we all know they say – a woman may not speak publicly or exercise authority in the congregational assembly. The argument was always to dismiss Paul's words as irrelevant to us in the here and now, not to try to change what those words mean.

And this attests to the overwhelming clarity of Paul's words. They defy misunderstanding. That's why they receive such vitriolic attacks and Paul is defamed as a misogynist in the feminist camps even today. There can be no doubt he forbids women to speak publicly and authoritatively in the Christian congregation.

At least there was no doubt. Now, however, the Roman Catholic doctrine of Scripture's obscurity has leaked into the Church of the Reformation and taken its seat in the American evangelical camp. So when it comes to Scripture's teaching on women's roles in the church, this old tactic of accusing Scripture of being unclear has finally become the dominant one in our day. The Vatican declared in 1976 that the New Testament Scriptures were insufficient evidence to decide the matter of women's roles in the church. And Pope John Paul II, 18 years later, doesn't even mention the key passages 1 Corinthians 14:33-44 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15 in his *Apostolic Letter on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone*. The texts have been declared obscure.

As Holy Mother Rome goes, so goes the rest of the Church. After centuries of Lutherans and Reformed Churches arguing for the clarity of Scripture against the Roman Catholics, the charge of obscurity against 1 Co-

¹ See especially *Women Pastors?* (St. Louis: CPH, 2012).

inthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 has become the favorite method for anyone of any denomination who wants to dismiss these passages or get them to say the opposite of what they actually say.

My paper makes three major arguments from this point. First, why in our time the claim of obscurity is so popular. Second, what these claims actually look like when we are dealing with the text and how flimsy they are. And finally, what our approach as Lutherans in the 21st century must be toward the interpretation of these key texts.

Part 1

Now the claim that Scripture is unclear is always a response to a specific desire for Scripture to be unclear. If we go back to Reformation times and the Roman Catholic insistence that Scripture is unclear, we see that it was prompted by the offensive nature of Scripture's content. People simply couldn't stand what the Bible taught. It offended them. And this for two reasons. Society and sinful human nature. At the time of the Reformation, society, politics, the economy, all depended on a system of hierarchy, of power in the church, with popes and bishops and priests with laity under them, and then again, on money, which is always linked with power, on revenues from the merits of the saints: indulgences and private masses; and all this power, all this income, would tumble to the ground if Scripture were clear and actually said what it clearly said, that man is justified by faith alone, solely on account of Christ the Propitiator, who has appeased God's wrath and shed His blood for the free forgiveness of all sins. And so the papal theologians of the time had a vested interest in declaring Scripture unclear, and running to their fathers or their reason to divine a word of God for their times.

Here we need to draw an analogy between the offensive nature of the Gospel in Reformation times and the offensive nature of Paul's words on the order of creation in our time. The Gospel is, as Jesus and His Apostles clearly and consistently teach, an offense to the proud. The Blessed Virgin sang in her glorious hymn, "He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts." This is precisely what the Gospel does. It is the joy only of those who despair of their own worthiness and righteousness and wisdom and works, and instead claim Christ by faith as their righteousness before God. For those who wish to keep Scripture as God's word and yet cannot receive this message of the Gospel as God's Word, the only option is to claim that Scripture does not clearly teach what it clearly teaches.

So also in our time, the consistent message of Scripture, not only in Paul, but from Genesis on, that men and women have been created within a certain order, that a woman was created to put herself under the care of her husband, that a husband was created incomplete without his wife, who was given to him to love, to subdue the earth together in having children and raising them in the truth of God's word, this message is an offense. And it's an offense for two reasons, the same two reasons that the Gospel is so offensive to the proud.

The first is the societal reason. Feminism, with its motto of equality between men and women, grew out of Enlightenment thinking, enshrined in American society, that we are all independent from each other, with independent rights not to be infringed upon either by the government or, especially in our day, by family or church. Self-autonomy, self-reliance, independent thinking, these are the catchwords of American society and the way we are taught to live our lives. Men are not taught that they, as Adam did, need a wife as a helpmate, they are not taught that children are a heritage from the Lord, they are not taught that to instruct your wife and your children in God's word is the highest calling any man could possibly attain to. Instead they are taught to selfishly pursue their dreams, which means, get famous and make money, while having as much sensual pleasure along the way as possible. Likewise women are taught that to submit to one's husband, to raise children in the home, to find one's calling in childbirth and in raising children, this is all male oppression imposed on us by patriarchal societies of the past. Instead, denying a woman's role as mother, they come up with psychological conditions like "separation anxiety" to explain how it's perfectly normal for a woman to feel a little sad when she

leaves her infant with a daycare provider as she goes to work to make money her family doesn't need. And so there are societal reasons for being offended and embarrassed at Paul's words.

But there is also the offense our sinful, proud, human nature takes at the Bible's words on the order of creation. The curse of the fall is that woman will have pain in childbearing, that it will be a cross to her, and more than this, that her desire will be to rule over her husband instead of submitting to him in everything. (The most recent edition of the ESV, by the way, finally gets this translation of Genesis 3:16 correct – "Your desire will be contrary to your husband," that is, "Your desire will be to rule over him, when he will rule over you.") And the man's curse is precisely because he listened to the voice of his wife instead of teaching and instructing her in God's word, which is the essence of the husband's love for his wife (Gen. 3:17).

For both of these reasons we are conditioned to cringe at the Word of God when He tells us what, in fact, our true roles as man and woman are and must be as His creation and as His children. And so the solution of asserting Scripture's obscurity, its unclarity, has become the most attractive option in our day for men and women who still want to hold to Scripture as God's Word and yet can't abide what it actually says.

Part 2

So what does this interpretation of a supposedly obscure Scripture look like? Here we finally get to our exegetical section. We begin with 1 Timothy 2:8-15, which reads as follows, according to the NKJV:

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; ⁹ 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, ¹⁰ but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. ¹¹ Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

Now the quickest and most efficient way to render this Word of God obscure is by unnecessary and irrelevant word studies. So let us begin with the words "woman" and "man." The Greek for woman is *gyne* and for man *aner*. These words also commonly mean "wife" and "husband," and are frequently used in this way throughout the New Testament. The first step then, in obscuring this passage, is to assert that "woman" should actually be translated "wife" and "man" "husband." Then, when we come to Adam and Eve, we are talking about Adam and Eve as the first husband and the first wife, where Adam very specifically failed to teach his wife the word of God, which is why she was unable to teach. This must also have been the situation in Ephesus, where husbands were not teaching their wives, and therefore, the wives are here being encouraged to learn first from their husbands, and only then to teach. Once they have learned, they can obviously teach, because they are no longer in the position of Eve, who, because of her husband's fault, did not know the Word of God well enough and so fell into sin. Therefore, Paul is not forbidding women to teach in the church. He's actually doing the opposite, encouraging husbands to teach and wives to learn, so that they can teach in the church together.

There's option one. Here's another way with another word study. The term "to exercise authority" (*authentain*) is what we call a *hapax legomenon* – it appears only here in the New Testament. So it's hard to know what it really means, but we could translate it, "exercise authority in a domineering way," which, we all agree, neither a man nor a woman should do in the church. More than this, it is paired with the verb "teach" (*dokein*) and these two verbs should be taken together (there's a fancy Greek word for doing this, called hendiadys), so that the text really says, "teach in a domineering way." Again, even a feminist can agree with Paul on this. There is still Paul's talk about women being "quiet," (*hesychia*) but this word clearly doesn't mean that women should be

completely quiet. It could be that Paul was concerned with some women gossiping and whispering loudly in church – clearly he doesn't mean they can't pray aloud with the rest of the congregation or sing hymns or participate in the liturgy, and so all that is left is that they don't teach in a domineering way.

Let's look at one more, though we could continue ad nauseam. Paul changes from the plural for men and women in vv. 8-10 to the singular in vv. 11-12. This could be because he has a specific woman in mind, about whom Timothy and the Ephesians, but not we the 21st century readers, would know. She was promoting false doctrine, probably involving the gnostic and syncretistic teachings surrounding the famous Temple of Artemis in Ephesus. So this passage is not simply specific to Paul's time, but quite possibly specific to only one woman.²

The conclusion we are to reach from these word studies is that together with the traditional explanation of the text, which forbids women to teach in the church, we have countless alternative explanations of the text, complete with word and historical studies that show the meaning of the text is not so sure, that it could be saying exactly the opposite of what the church for millenia has believed it to say. One promoter of gender equality says it quite explicitly:

Paul's prohibition about an unknown woman (or women) in Ephesus has effectively caused countless godly and gifted women to be denied the opportunity of ministering with men as equals. This is despite the fact that 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is difficult to understand, and that differing suggestions have been put forth to help explain Paul's meaning and intention. Not only are there various ways to interpret this passage, different churches also apply it in various ways. If Paul's instruction is clear, as some suggest, why is there such a variety of applications? These difficulties and uncertainties should preclude 1 Timothy 2:12 from being used as a definitive text or proof text on the issue of women in ministry.³

The reader who was first offended at the text, because he read it as it reads without trying to change what words like "man" and "woman" or "silence" or "exercise authority" mean, this reader can now accept Paul's words because they fit with his worldview of how men and women should behave in our modern world. This is, by the way, the first and most obvious reason we should reject these alternative interpretations. They are specifically constructed in order to give no offense to our sinful nature and our societal status quo.

But notice also that these attempts to reinterpret the text make it impossible for mere laymen, without "expert"⁴ knowledge of Greek and miraculous knowledge of the circumstances in Ephesus, to understand the text. It's no longer clear. No one could possibly reach the conclusion of these interpretations by simply reading the text. They are not obvious in the least, no matter how good your Greek is. They are only possible if you want the text to say something else and you therefore make up a scenario in which it could say what you want it to say. If, just if, the Ephesians were having trouble with a woman or women bossing around their husbands, then we could make this word *authentain* mean "be mean" and pair it with *dokein*, so that the text would say, "Wives, quit being mean when you teach." And then we can do studies on the Temple of Artemis and argue that women held positions of authority and could have abused that authority in Ephesus. This interpretation is, of course, impossible to prove, but it's also impossible to disprove, and so we have accomplished our aim of obscuring the text, so that it can't offend our status quo any longer.

And this gets us to the basic reason every Christian must reject these alternative interpretations – they have no support whatsoever from the text. The Greek text of 1 Timothy 2 is as clear as the NKJV shows it to be, and it is set within the rest of Scripture, to which, wonderfully, Paul himself refers in our text. Scripture cannot be read except in its own context, which is all of Scripture. We cannot import a context that the text doesn't call for. Instead, we, who know that Adam was cursed because he heeded the voice of his wife instead of teaching her,

² <http://margmowczko.com/1-timothy-212-in-context-5/> (accessed 8/27/2017)

³ Ibid.

⁴ The term "expert" should never be used to refer to knowledge of Greek. Knowing how to read isn't a specialization.

who know that Adam was created first and woman was created as his helpmate in a beautiful order that is praised throughout Scripture and reflects the relationship of Christ and His Church, we who know that Scripture consistently and emphatically extols the woman's role as a bearer and nurturer of children, need to approach this text not according to what our society wants it to say, but according to what the words and context set forth.

First, Paul is giving instructions that he wants to be considered universal (1 Tim. 3:15) for the whole Church of God. Even when he addresses women not wearing pearls and gold and costly attire, this is commentary on a universal rule that has everything to do with the created order, that "women should adorn themselves with respectable clothes, with modesty and self-control." This attains now as much as in Paul's day. Men are sexually attracted to women, and our Lord teaches us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation," and so Christian women should dress in a way that shows modesty and self-control.

When Paul turns from the plural of women to the singular, he is not addressing a particular woman. The Greek has no article before *gyne* in vv. 11-12. The article could suggest a particular woman, but Paul would have, as is characteristic of him, made that woman explicit (cf. Rom. 16, *passim*). Without the article, there is no possible way that Paul could be referring to a specific woman. He is without any grammatical or contextual doubt referring to women in general. He's saying exactly what you say if you want to make a general point.

Could Paul be speaking of wives and not women in general? This is a silly question. Woman was created in the first place to be a wife (v. 13). The semantic range of *gyne* (woman) certainly includes wives, and any wife listening to these words will understand that in being created a woman she has also been created, barring the curse of this sinful world, to become the wife of a man. I realize that this is offensive to our modern sensibilities, but it is, at any rate, exactly what the context Paul cites from Genesis 2 and 3 teaches. Eve was created the first wife and the first woman simultaneously. The two belong together. It is only a modern view that insists on separating the two. Why, after all, does Greek have the same word for woman and wife? Isn't this bizarre? Wouldn't it cause untold confusion? No. Because a woman was expected to be a wife. The Greek language distinguishes between a young girl (*kore*), a young woman (*parthenos*), a bride (*nymphē*), and a woman/wife (*gyne*), because it is making basic sexual and familial distinctions between these classes of women, distinctions that all lead up to the expected outcomes, that a girl grow up to be a young virgin, who then becomes a bride, who then becomes a wife and mother. Only in our day, with its accepted sexual permissiveness, would we think to separate the idea of attaining womanhood from sex and marriage – which, by the way, has led to the tragic increase of Christian women who wish to be wives and yet are not, since men can have sex without commitment and so aren't looking for wives. That is why *gyne* can stand for women in general and for wives, because even if you are an unmarried woman, the expected order of things would be for you to become married, or, in the case of widows, that you had been married. The idea that the word *gyne* is here referring to wives exclusively and not also to women in general exists, in our day, because our culture artificially separates concepts that God meant to belong together. Besides this, the context of 1 Timothy 2:8-10 is that of men in general and women in general, with no contextual reason to focus exclusively on wives.

The word *authentēin* (to exercise authority) is used only here in the New Testament. It is used quite a lot in other Greek texts. And though you can find occurrences where it has the meaning, "to domineer," this is always contextual, that is, the context uses other words that suggest that the teaching is domineering. Otherwise, it is used for people who hold an office with others under them who are expected to respect them. It is, therefore, in and of itself, a neutral term for exercising authority. And since we have no right to read any specific Ephesian circumstances into the text (like that the women there were particularly boisterous and domineering), the word here simply means "to exercise authority." The word *authentēin* (to exercise authority) is coupled with *dokein* (to teach). The Greek reads, in order, "But to teach for a woman I do not permit, nor to exercise authority over a man." It is unnatural, to say the least, to put these words together to express one concept, to say, "to teach in an authoritative way" or "to exercise authority by teaching." The verbs are separated for a reason, and they are

connected with a strong “nor” (*oude*). The word order tells us that Paul is forbidding a woman to teach, and then asserting with finality that she is not to have authority over a man in the church. Paul is perfectly capable of using participial phrases to say “to have authority by teaching.” He doesn’t do that here. He says a woman may not teach in the church or have authority over a man.

Paul grounds all this in God’s created order, referring to Adam and Eve, Adam created first, and Eve as his helpmate. Attempts have been made also here to say that Genesis speaks nothing of a created order, but presents man and woman as equals. People actually refer to Genesis 1 here to say that man and woman are created at the same time, even though Paul cites Genesis 2 and clearly sets down an order – Adam was created first. There is no word more abused than this word “equal” in our day. Of course, man and woman are created equal, if by equal we mean that man and woman are each created in the image of God and have equal worth before him. But that is not the equality our culture wants. They want an equality that does away with the created order. Our culture wants an equality of functions, of order, in this world, and in our case, they specifically want equality in respect to teaching and having authority in the church. But the created order is that in our equality before God we have certain roles with each other as man and woman. Paul clearly refers to this order when he says Adam was formed first. Eve was formed not as someone inferior to Adam but as one who had a different role to play. They are to conquer the earth together, subdue it together, as equals before God, but their roles in conquering the earth are different. The most obvious of these roles is childbirth, which, of course, Paul mentions in v. 15, to stress this very point. He also refers to Eve being deceived first, which, by the way, until recently, our Lutheran theologians have unapologetically connected with Peter’s assertion that the woman is the weaker vessel (1 Pet. 3:7) whom her husband is to treat with consideration and love, in view of the fact that she was created not as his plaything but in order for him to teach, instruct, and sacrifice for her, as she cares for him.

The accusations of obscurity against this text because of other so-called alternative interpretations are groundless. The alternative interpretations are not really interpretations at all but constructions imposed on the text by people who want the text to say what it doesn’t say. It is as Luther said about the disinterested Turk. The Turk would read the Words of Institution and say that they mean exactly what they mean, because he has no dog in the fight, no vested interest in making “is” mean “represents,” or in coming up with a “spiritual” interpretation of the words “body” and “blood.” The same goes for 1 Timothy 2. The alternative explanations of 1 Timothy 2 are hardly disinterested. They are the direct result of an agenda that has enraptured our culture and fed into our native, sinful inclination to revolt against God’s order of creation. And so in assessing these alternative explanations we need to expose the intent behind them.

The same goes for 1 Corinthians 14:33-40. The text reads in the NKJV:

For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. 34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says. 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. 36 Or did the word of God come *originally* from you? Or *was it* you only that it reached? 37 If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. 38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. 39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. 40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

Here the word studies focus on the words *sigatwsan* (keep silent) and *lalein* (to speak). We’re told that both words are addressed to women who were chattering and asking disorderly questions in church. Since women are clearly permitted to pray aloud in church, Paul having given specific instructions for them to do so in 1 Corinthians 11, the word “silent” can’t mean be silent, but must be responding to a specific kind of speech. The word *lalein* could mean chatter, and could be directed against disorderly, out of turn, talk, of which the Corin-

thians were certainly guilty (cf. the instructions earlier in 1 Corinthians 14). That women should be submissive is merely saying they should be submissive when others are speaking, as is the case also with men – and this then is the reference of the law, a law against being disorderly. And because the problem was women asking disorderly questions, Paul orders them to ask questions at home from their husbands. But there is nothing here saying women can't preach.

Again, the text has been made obscure in order to make it inoffensive. Paul's general prohibition against women speaking in church is turned into a guessing game – what kind of speaking was he prohibiting, and what was the specific circumstance that prompted this prohibition? And since we don't know, the text is therefore obscure and Paul's clear command that women may not speak in the church cannot be used to say women can't preach in the church.

Paul can't win here. His detractors are too clever. He says "teach" and they say he only means "teach in a domineering way" and he says "speak" and they say he only means asking questions. As Melancthon complained in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, there is nothing spoken so clearly that it cannot be misinterpreted.

To respond briefly to this obscuring of 1 Corinthians 14, *lalein* means speak, and in many contexts of the NT, it means to speak publicly, which it most certainly means here, because the location forbidden for this speaking is the church, which is the public assembly of the saints. Paul doesn't want women speaking publicly before the assembly, whether to preach or read the lessons (which go together, of course, cf. Luke 4:20-21), or to ask questions publicly, since that would of course be public speaking. If he had wanted to address only disorderly questions, he would have done so with unmistakable language. Instead, he used unmistakable language to say women may not speak publicly in the church. That they can sing and pray and participate in the common liturgy of the church goes without saying, since singing, praying, etc. are communal acts which no one has ever considered public speaking – except those who want to obscure this particular passage of Scripture. Paul once again grounds his teaching in the order of creation – the Law, which is the Old Testament, and specifically Genesis 2 and 3, as it was explicitly also in 1 Timothy 2.

Part 3

This is all a matter of the clarity of Scripture. And it has bearing on the very foundations of our faith. Even if it were possible to give up on the order of creation and remain a Christian – and I don't think it is, at least not for more than a generation or two – it is certainly not possible to give up on the clarity of Scripture and remain a Christian. Because if Scripture does not clearly give us the Gospel, we are without hope. "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" asks the Psalmist. If we allow the obscurity of Scripture to prevail in matters that seem less important (though we have seen in recent times how important the order of creation is!), we will be without an excuse when the Gospel itself is attacked with this same tactic. And that fact is that the same tactics that have been used against 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 have been used also against Paul's articulation of the Gospel in Romans, Galatians, and elsewhere. The strategy is the same – discover some particular, unprovable circumstance Paul is writing against and make his general proclamation of justification by faith alone in Christ outside of works into a specific, timebound, ephemeral clarification of Christian faithfulness vs. Jewish law. And if it does nothing else, it plants seeds of doubt to bolster our flesh and make us question our loving God's Word to us. The issue is the same as at the time of the Reformation. Can we stand on the clear word of God?

So what is the solution? It is humility, humility before the words of our God, with the firm conviction that His words are light and not darkness, that they are to inform us and not we them. The text of the Bible is, in one way, just like every other text. It's composed of words, the same words that we use in ordinary, everyday conversation. But on the other hand, these words are the words of very God. And since this is so, we need to approach the biblical text as God speaking to us. He's using our language so that we can understand him, but it is

He who is speaking to us with a clear and unmistakable voice. And that means we may not mess with these words. We are to fear God and that means we fear His words. They're not ours to play with. They're ours to receive.

And when it comes to looking at the texts that deal with men and women in the church and in society, we need to keep this in mind. If you are embarrassed when you read 1 Timothy 2:12 or 1 Corinthians 14:34, if your first reaction is to try to explain the words away, you're not approaching the text correctly. The Spirit God gave us in our Baptism is a Spirit that rejoices in the truth – that's what love does and God is love. It rejoices not simply at the truth we want to hear – that we will live eternally, for example – but in every single thing God says. And if our first reaction to God's word is not to rejoice but to want to moderate what God says, explain it away, make it more palatable for a twenty-first century American, then we need to repent. Our flesh will always cringe at God's Word, but our spirit must never. God gives us the law not as something foreign to our spirit, but as the will of the very Spirit who joins with our spirit to cry to our God, "Abba, Father."

I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be silent. Does that make you cringe? Does it make you want to explain it away, to run to the Greek to find some way out of this English translation? Repent. The English says exactly what the Greek says. God does not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be silent. This is God's rule for His Church. And it is a good rule that comes from a good God. If the Gospel is to enter in here, it enters in by assuring us that the God who makes such rules is the same God whose unending love led him to suffer the pains of hell to save us from our sin and our due punishment. What this God speaks is, as my vicarage supervisor so often said to me, pure gold.

And it is. God's order of creation is a beautiful thing, as a husband loves his wife, sacrifices for her, and she submits to his care and his teaching, and as the pastor, in Christ's stead, cares for the Church, His Bride by speaking the Word of God to her. And it is in hearing this Word of God, submitting to it, both men and women, that we will find that it is no burden, but a divine joy, to live as men and women in this world, as God created us to do, even as we see the world rage around us. Because in our homes and in our churches, we have the peace that comes only from God's Spirit, who not only forgives us by Christ's sacrifice, but also gives us the only life worth living on this earth, as Christian men and women, who at the same time are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.