

NOTES ON “THE FULL RIGHTS OF SONS”

Author: Kathryn E. Stegall

Dedication

- “Seventy two years ago a young couple were planning their wedding. The bride asked, “Shall I promise to obey you?” The groom answered, “No. The Bible says we should submit to one another.” (page v)

This is contrary to 1 Peter 3:1. “Wives in subjection to your own husbands.” Note in particular Sarah is held out as an example to women as one who *obeyed* Abraham (vs. 6)

Chapter 1

- “I have not looked to commentaries or historical/archaeological evidence in my study.” (page 2)

But this contradicts the express purpose of the book: “the ideas herein discussed are not just theoretical side issues, but real and true and applicable gospel essentials for real people. And, of course, not just real people in my family, but for all people everywhere throughout time...”¹ (page x)

Commentaries and historical/archaeological evidence help to affirm or deny our interpretation of the Bible. If the author’s conclusions are, indeed, part of what is “for all people everywhere throughout time” surely someone in the history of the church would be able to confirm what she is saying. Otherwise it took (some) Christians 2000 years to come to this conclusion.

Indeed, biblical interpretation is a dangerous road to travel when we try to do so on our own (Ecclesiastes 4:9ff.). Even the Reformers (who were charged with bringing novelties into the church) were quite knowledgeable of the church fathers and supported their arguments with citations from them.

Finally, the author cites church authority (speaking of historic orthodoxy for example on the very next page as well as page 99) and the creeds of the church on numerous occasions. It appears this principle is only applied where it can be conveniently used to support her thesis and thus is disingenuous.

- Is the author’s confusion and the (supposed) church’s confusion sufficient reason to overturn the historic church’s teaching on women in ministry? (page 2) People are confused about many issues but that is irrelevant as to the truth of a matter.
- “So many biblical injunctions, beginning with the Great Commission itself, cannot be carried out if one is silent.” (page 2)

¹ It also contradicts the use of ‘language scholars’ (page 55).

The Great Commission is given to the church as a whole, not to individuals isolated from the rest. Its fulfillment does not depend on any one person but on the concerted effort of the entire Body of Christ. Otherwise, infants, the disabled, the mute and others who are incapable of speech would be guilty of not fulfilling the Commission.

- “Straightforward as these passages are, orthodox Christianity has not accepted the obvious meaning.” (page 3) The author cites the following passages as examples (with her own comments):

Colossians 1:15 “We do not believe that Jesus is a created being, but rather God himself.”

1 Corinthians 15:29 “Nor do we believe that one can earn salvation for another who has died in unbelief by being baptized for him.”

James 2:24 “We certainly do not believe that a person can be saved by his own good works.”

Romans 13:1 “Nor do we believe that everything a king or ruler does or says is from God and is therefore subject to no earthly authority.”

Ephesians 6:5 & 1 Peter 2:18 “Nor do we believe that it is right for one person, whether cruel or kind, to own another person as a possession or slave.” (pages 3-4)

In each of these instances there are other scripture passages we use in order to find the meaning of those passages (i.e. comparing scripture with scripture – the *analogia fidei*). Thus the author has erred in comparing these controversial issues with disagreement about women in office simply because there is *no verse* in scripture that speaks positively to the role of women in authoritative positions within the church.

Indeed we have many texts about the ministry that relate to the male and female distinction that exists throughout scripture. These cannot be argued away by a wider lens because their very point is to clarify the larger principles of scripture or reign in what would be unwarranted applications of those principles. This is not unlike any other ethical or practical matter that scripture addresses which itself exists to make it clear that creational and ethical norms continue in the gospel age (e.g. marriage & family, Sabbath, magistrate etc.). The tension only exists in the mind of the author and so she feels compelled to find a solution when it is not needed.

This seems to be a problem throughout the whole book. The author sets up an interpretive dilemma (imagined or otherwise) that is solved by looking at the whole scripture’s teaching (see also chapter 3 on Favoritism). But it should be noted that the problem is not a matter of interpretation, *per se*. The texts, even as they stand alone, can and should be properly understood because scripture’s meaning is one (WCF 1.9).

Thus nothing is proven with respect to the central thesis of the book considering the status of women in the church as it applies to the offices because, in isolation, these principles can prove

pretty much anything about women and men. Case in point, homosexual advocates in the church have used such arguments to baptize their aberrant sexuality.²

The “obvious” meaning is the original meaning or that intended by the author (particularly as moved by the Holy Spirit (page 3). Difficult passages are not a pretext for muddying a rather clear(er) passage of scripture (1 Corinthians 14:34). The author debates the meaning of words, not simply the meaning of the text.

The author speaks of “we” which implies a body of believers (page 3). And yet she claims not to use commentaries or other aids in her research (page 2).

Chapter 2

- “It’s not just that they became one. They quit being two. This is an amazing statement. Jesus is saying that the oneness is so complete that two separate identities cease to exist and are blended into one new identity.” (page 10 – referencing Matthew 19:1-6)

This is an unwarranted conclusion. They become one but Jesus does *not* say that they quit being two. Yes two separate(d) identities cease *insofar* as they come together to be one in marriage, but as scripture and life teaches us, the man is still a man and the women still a women. He says that a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves with his wife.

Furthermore, the original context of Jesus’ statement is in the context of divorce and remarriage. Thus the bond is not ontological but ethical.

- “In the church our differences are all assembled together into one living organism, so there is no division, but rather equal concern for each other. Furthermore, each of our differences is necessary for the common good.” (page 14)

Precisely what stands as the reason for the distinction between the role of men and women in the church which everywhere scripture teaches. If men did what women were meant to do and women did what men were meant to do we would no one doing anything particular which would lead to a loss to the body as a whole.

Chapter 3

- Mrs. Stegall argues that God does not show favoritism on the basis of anything but mercy (pages 19-20).

Certainly, but He gives people different responsibilities. God’s favoritism is not relevant to the matter of the offices but only the ultimate gift: salvation in Christ. Otherwise God showed favorites in the Old Testament by allowing only men to be officebearers.

² This is not to suggest that the author believes that homosexual behaviour is acceptable as she clearly repudiates it in Chapter 15 of this book. But, as we will see at that point, the adopted hermeneutic opens the door to such an error.

- “much of the church says this truth [ed. that God does not show favoritism] has little to do with church government. And I hear some saying it has little to do with worship either, or service, or... Perhaps men and women will be equal in heaven, but here in the church, they aren’t. Here in the church, men are in authority and women are under them.” (page 28)

I cannot speak for others but God’s impartiality with His people does have much to do with church government, worship and service precisely because God does not put any requirements on the offices with respect to ethnicity. Furthermore, God receives worship and service from all races, sexes and ages on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice. The author may object that ‘favoritism’ still exists with respect to sex in the offices but we must note that this is not the only barrier to the offices that Christ has given. Children are barred from office because they are not the right age. New converts too are barred. This, however, is not a show of favoritism on the part of God or the apostle Paul, but a necessary requirement and one that is for the well-being of the church.

Note that here the author equivocates with respect to the use of the word favoritism. God does not show favoritism with respect to our *salvation in Christ on the basis of His own electing grace* (as the author correctly notes) but this does not entail that this favoritism means equality (at least not the modern definition of it). No one is equal in the sight of God precisely because we are all different (as the author recognizes). Even amongst women there are varying gifts, abilities and talents. Equality and impartiality are not the same thing.

Furthermore, the word equality does not mean or have to mean equal in every sense. For example, as I shared with the author by e-mail:

How can it be good for woman alone to bear children and be saved through childbearing? How can it be good for woman alone to have the honor of bringing forth the Saviour into the world? How can it be good for Paul to teach that there should be a role of widows but not widowers? How can it be good that older woman should teach younger woman to love their husbands and children? Why can’t older men be entrusted with this responsibility? ... Witness the blessing exclusively given to the female sex being saved through childbirth and having the honour of bringing the Saviour into the world.

Men will never have these honours and never possess these responsibilities. Are men then not equal to women? Clearly they are emphatically not equal *in toto*. If men were offended by these things then they should grow up and act like men. Men aren’t women and women aren’t men. Men are capable of things women are not and vice versa.

Chapter 4

- “Exercising authority is not the way things are done among his [ed. Jesus] followers, nor a guiding principle for the church.” (page 38) The author contrasts this worldly approach (from Matthew 20:25) with the biblical idea of servanthood.

It should be noted that the words used to describe ‘authority’ in Matthew 20:25 are not about mere

authority but the manner in which it is exercised (“lord it over” ESV). The rulers of the Gentiles act this way but Jesus disciples are not to rule *in this way*. The same principle is at work in another context: when Jesus instructs His disciples about prayer. They are not to pray *as* the Gentiles (namely in a superstitious way – see Matthew 6:7) but that does not mean that they are not to pray at all.

Therefore true servant hood is not contrasted to exercising authority. The former is the way Christ’s disciples are to exercise the latter. Yet the author clearly rejects any idea of authority whatsoever (see page 44).

- The author distinguishes between the verbs submit and subordinate. “*Submit* means to voluntarily yield oneself to another. It may or may not be to someone in authority. Submission is an act of heart, not lines on an authority flowchart. *Subordinate* does not mean acting submissively or one who is submissive. The word *subordinate* as a verb means “to make subject or subservient to; to treat as of less value or importance.” (page 40)

The author goes on to say that it is our duty to submit to one another, but denies that the duty of subordination exists in the church. Assuming that the term submit means something in contrast to ‘subordinate’ we might be inclined to agree with the author’s conclusion. However as there are many verses in scripture that tell us that there is a real authority to which we ought to obey (1 Peter 3:6; Hebrews 13:7&17) we conclude that this is a false dichotomy.³ True, all obedience should be submissive or heartfelt, but that does not mean that we are also not obliged or required to obey because of the nature of the relationship (see LC, Q&A 127-130), noting even, in some circumstances, when one must rebuke *out of or from* the authority they have been given (Titus 1:13 & 2:15) precisely because the party who is supposed to submit to the authority is unlawfully resisting it.

The author goes on to say that men do not have authority over their wives (as in Ephesians 5:22ff.) because a biblical definition of submission excludes authority (page 41). She uses verse 25 to note that husbands are called to love their wives just as Christ loves the church.

But the command in vs. 25 is to “husbands” not women. The fact that the command to wives is different from the command to husbands is an indication of a distinction in roles within marriage. When women receive a command it is to submit. Yes men ought to exercise their authority in a loving way, just as Christ, but this in no way mitigates the wife’s duty to submit. This is one of the most egregious arguments in the book.

- “Jesus is the only one to have authority.” (page 41)

Certainly Jesus as the head of the church possesses authority like none other (insofar as he is the head), but he has appointed others to exercise authority in his name (Luke 9:1; Titus 2:15).

³ The statement that “[w]e do not submit because we are under authority” (page 49) would be accurate if the author have written “[w]e do not submit *merely* because we are under authority.” For example, Romans 13:1 makes it plain that we as citizens *do* submit to our government because they have authority from God.

The author goes on to say that Jesus “chose to show his love by casting aside his authority and becoming a servant.” (page 42) This is simply false. Even in His sacrificial death (which is the context of the argument), Jesus’ authority remained intact: John 10:17-18 “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. *No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.* I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

- According to the author, the Golden Rule teaches that there is no hierarchy and “equality is the goal.” (page 43) Again, this is false. The Golden Rule is not intended to teach anything about hierarchy as the active verb of the statement concerns *doing* not *being*. Equality is not the goal because it is about love (the summary of the law or “the law and the prophets”): i.e. what we are required to do (love in action), not about what we are required to be or become (equal).
- “Women are told to submit so often because women are often put under authorities ‘instituted among men.’ The woman is the ‘weaker partner’ just as Peter says. The female is in a much more vulnerable position in this sinful world than is the male... in a physical contest of strength, the woman will usually lose... as mankind sets up authority structures, women often end up under authority.” (page 46)

Though I agree that women are more vulnerable and oppressed than men, consider that scripture calls both sexes to cheerfully submit themselves to authorities: as slaves to masters (Ephesians 6:5), citizens to the magistrate (Romans 13:1) & church members to their leaders (Hebrews 13:17). Therefore, it cannot be merely assumed that submission is only an issue (or potential danger) for women.

Note here that the woman is not called to submit *because* she is the weaker partner. That statement is given in the address to the *husbands* as we see in 1 Peter 3:7. She is not weak but weaker (by comparison) and thus the husband is to treat her accordingly. This verse is not, then, about the domineering attitude of men which must be submitted to by women but the careful and loving attitude of men towards their wives.

Indeed women are not under authority because they happen to end up that way: women are under authority as God has designed that they be *in* the relationship between men and women as the apostle teaches explicitly in 1 Peter 3:1-6. For this, as Peter says, “which is in the sight of God of great price” (vs. 4) or, in other words, what pleases God (not what about what pleases men – or women for that matter) for it is an expression of trusting Him (1 Peter 3:5).

Later, the author goes on to say that this subjection was necessary due to the time in which the women of Peter’s day lived. They had to obey their husbands because they had “absolute say over their life.” (page 48) Living in a different time, however, we have the opportunity to revisit this teaching since women are not expected to live in such a way as this any longer.

Though it is true that the roles and expectations of men and women are different now than they were in the days of the apostles, Peter does not base his arguments merely or even indirectly on the circumstances of the time. He notes holy women of old as their example (a meta-cultural argument since these women were not Gentiles like the readers of Peter's epistle were), and Sarah in particular. Romans 15:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:6 establish the pattern or teaching of scripture that the lives and examples of the godly (or ungodly) are to be followed. Their example is to be followed not because they happen to line up with the time's cultural expectations but because they are God's 'timeless' expectations.

The example of Sarah having to 'submit' to Abraham in the deception of Pharaoh is not relevant to the issue at hand (as the author argues - page 48) because, in fact, scripture does not say that Sarah had to submit to his plan (nor does it say she did, in fact, agree without consent). In this matter, she would have been better off to gently speak to her husband and convince him that what he was doing was wrong since we are never to submit to those in authority over us when it means we must sin against God (tell a lie). In other words, no earthly authority is absolute.

Rather, Peter says that Sarah's example (or the part of her life/testimony that is being upheld as an example) is that she *obeyed* Abraham calling him lord. The word 'calling' is in the present tense and modifies or fits with 'obeying.' Sarah was not submissive to Abraham by doing something (against her will) but by saying something. This is an obvious reference to Genesis 18:12 not Genesis 12:13.

- Further clarification from the author is needed, but it appears that she believes that those who teach that only men ought to occupy the offices of the church ("the one who creates separations in the body of Christ" page 50) are subject to the judgment of Christ (citing 1 Corinthians 3:17). This seems to be the natural interpretation since the masculine "his" is used to describe the one who should fear God because they have tested Him. If this is the case, one must wonder all things being equal, if women in the church who oppose the ordination of women would also come under this judgment?

Chapter 5

- The author acknowledges that "[l]anguage scholars tell us there are two possible meanings for the Greek word translated 'head' in the New Testament. It could mean 'authority over' or 'source of.'" (page 55) She concludes that 'head' is related to fullness (Ephesians 4:13 – page 56), grows from (Ephesians 4:15-16 & Colossians 2:19 - page 57), holds together (page 57 – Colossians 2:19 and his body (Ephesians 4:12-13,15 & Colossians 1:18, 2:19). Though she contends this does not mean that Christ does not authority over the church, it is not conveyed in this imagery (page 59). She concludes that "we find nothing about the head having authority over the body, or of the head exercising authority over the body." (page 59)

Here I will respond with communication lifted from my e-mail conversations with the author:

If Ephesians 1:20-23 is not about authority (“far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is name”) I don’t know what is. All things are under his feet (authoritarian and ruling language). Surely you realize the prominent place that this passage has in Symington’s “Messiah the Prince.” It is the locus classicus of the Mediatorial Kingship doctrine. It is all about authority and rule.

Similarly Colossians 1:18 tells us that He is the head “that in everything He might be preeminent” and 2:10 tells us we are filled in him “who is the head of all rule and authority.”

Even in a passage such as Ephesians 4 where the notion of authority is not immediately present we see it in the simple fact that we grow up into Christ (not another or the pope or some other kind of earthly ruler). Only Christ has the authority to command such obedience because He is the head.

In summary, scripture emphatically does teach (in these passages) that head entails authority, even as it does in Ephesians 5.

Chapter 6

- The author concludes that “[w]hat people look like or what they wear isn’t important to God” (page 63) because the Lord looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). But God says this in the context of Samuel judging the appearance of Jesse’s sons as the criteria by which they may be acceptable as king. It is not God’s judging that is under scrutiny in this text but man’s. Yet it is God’s assessment of (not man’s) what people ‘look like’ that matters according to Paul (vs. 4-5).
- The author concludes that “every man” also refers to “the church, which is Christ’s body.” (1 Corinthians 11:3 – page 64). This interpretation is forced and should not be regarded as in any way accurate to the meaning of the text.
- The author comments on 1 Corinthians 11:11 “However implies that the equality and interdependence between man and woman spoken of here is more fundamental than the differences spoken of in the preceding verses” (page 69).

I disagree. However (or ‘nevertheless’) implies nothing of the sort. It is a contrast but one strains to see what Paul says here to be more fundamental than what he previously asserted. Furthermore, the author does not demonstrate how the text speaks of the equality of men and women.

Personally I see this more as an interlude or parentheses in Paul’s thinking since he goes in vs. 13 to continue to talk about the matter of headcoverings. It is instructive, though, that Paul does not consider a women’s submission to her husband as something that men ought to boast in.

- “Fullness is repeatedly described as ‘from’ the head. Fullness is never described as ‘over’ the head” (page 70).

As a matter of fact, 1 Corinthians 10:26-28 speaks of fullness in the context of being ‘under’ God’s rule (as a well-timed application of Psalm 24:1). We see the same thing in Ephesians 1:23 where the idea of ruling is used in context (vs. 22).

Chapter 7

- The author argues that Paul’s command given to husbands to love their wives and the command to wives to submit to their husbands are not “meant exclusively for those addressed” (page 84). As Mrs. Stegall implies, in the dynamic of church life there are many relationships that require submission. This is certainly true of men as well as women (see 1 Peter 5:5 for example).

But the submission of a member to their elder(s) is of a different nature or application than a women to her husband. As a pastor I do not have direct authority in the home of the member, at least not with respect to the everyday life of the family. Yet not so with the husband.

Indeed, Ephesians 5 is not a general exhortation to all believers but to husbands *as husbands* and wives *as wives*. Ephesians 5:22 “*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.*” Note the reflexive, personal language: ‘yourselves... your own husbands.’

This is, of course, consistent with the admonition of husbands to ‘love their own wives.’ Yes Christian men are to love everyone in the congregation but they love their own wives in a particular way that they would not (or should not) with the other women in the congregation.

- “Wives are not told to submit because they are under the authority of their husbands, but because they love the Lord” (page 85). This is a false dichotomy. Why can’t it be both? Again Paul says in Ephesians 5:22 “*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.*” The title Lord reflects Christ’s rule of His church. All Christians call Him Lord and are to live lives worthy of His Lordship. This does not exclude a loving relationship, rather their submission is one expression of their love to Him. A women who submits to the authority of her husband does so out of their love for the Lord. Note that this is reiterated, so as to leave no doubt as to meaning or application: Ephesians 5:33 “*Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife [see] that she reverence [her] husband.*” The word ‘reverence’ is the Greek word ordinarily translated as ‘fear’ (the same verb used of the Christian’s godly fear of God).
- “Wives are to submit and husbands are to love. But also wives are to love and husbands are to submit” (page 86).

Assuming that the author is implying such, husbands are never called to submit to their wives in the scripture.

Chapter 8

- “Complementarians may use these differences within the Trinity to support their position. They may assume that because there are differences, there must also be a hierarchy of authority. They say that the Father is the ultimate authority and that the Son and the Spirit are subordinate to the Father” (page 99). The author contests this interpretation on the basis of ‘orthodox Christianity’ and that the subordination of the two to the one would cause us to think of three gods. She then contrasts this with the idea of ‘oneness through servanthood.’

Yet at the author notes, when we speak of the Trinity we also speak of the economical Trinity and the ontological Trinity. These are not two kinds of Trinity but different ways of understanding the Trinity. The subordination of the Son is not ontological (making Him less God than the Father) but is economical (less than the Father with respect to His work of redemption) and submission to the Father’s authority in His earthly ministry.

Certainly Scripture speaks everywhere of this, including Jesus own submission to the Father (‘not my will be done but thine’). I cannot speak for complementarians (as I do not profess to be one) but the orthodox understanding of the Trinity does acknowledge a kind of authority that the Father *as* Father possesses which the Son *as* Son does not.⁴ The Son expresses His authority, in terms of His redemptive calling and work, in a derivative way (see John 5:27, 8:28 & 1 Corinthians 15:24&28). As the author notes there is much mystery in this doctrine but, mystery or not, it is real. After all, the very Athanasian Creed she later cites notes that the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father. Otherwise if we fail to distinguish the persons in their dealings with one another we may end up with heretical modalism.

Of course this is analogous to the relationship between husband and wife. Both are created in God’s image, both are man(kind), but each has different roles especially as they relate to each other. The author goes on to admit this but then contests that “the relationship between God the Father and the incarnate humanity of the Son Jesus cannot be compared to the relationship between men and women” (page 101) because men and women are only human and do not have a divine nature. Yet as many orthodox theologians recognize, there is an analogy between God’s being and ours (hence being made *in* God’s image). Man reflects God in his being and action (though not perfectly). We should not be faulting the similarity between the subordinate relationship between the Father and the Son with that of a husband and wife because they are not perfectly synonymous anymore than one should take exception to Paul’s analogy of the relationship of the church to the God-Man when the former is merely flesh.

⁴ See WLC, Q.9 *How many persons are there in the Godhead?*

A. There be three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one true, eternal God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; although distinguished by their personal properties. 1 John 5:7; Matt. 3:16-17; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; John 10:30.

Q. 10. *What are the personal properties of the three persons in the Godhead?*

A. It is proper to the Father to beget the Son, and to the Son to be begotten of the Father, and to the Holy Ghost to proceed from the Father and the Son from all eternity.

Heb. 1:5-6, 8; John 1:14, 18; John 15:26; Gal. 4:6.

I think, at last, the author misunderstands the argument made by complementarian authors.⁵ The analogy serves the basic scriptural teaching of the relationship between a husband and wife as well as men and women in the church in general. It is not about a “hierarchy of authority with the Father at the apex” (page 102) but acknowledging how scripture can mutually teach equality (between Father, Son and Holy Spirit with respect to their divinity) but also teaching differentiation in roles (between the persons of the Trinity as distinct persons). A hierarchy of authority is, by its very nature, an imposed distinction (without reference to original being or willingness on the part of those who participate in the hierarchy) whereas the relationship between Father and Son in the economical sense is about the willingness of the Son to submit to His Father. Indeed, scripture speaks of the generation of the woman from the man in the very context of authority (1 Timothy 2:12-13) as well as in the context of the willingness of the women to submit to her husband’s authority (1 Peter 5:1-5).

- “the biblical usage of *submit* [is] voluntary, self-denying service to others, rather than obedience compelled by authority” (page 105)

Again, why else would we submit to God except that He be our authority (or possesses absolute authority)? True, we must love the Lord God with all our heart, soul and mind but that in no way undermines our obedience as obedience. In fact, to claim that one submits without obeying is, in and of itself, not obedience but rebellion *against* authority (2 Peter 2:10 & Jude 1:8).

Chapter 9

- The author claims that Christ is head over the church in a different way than He is head over all things as evidenced by Paul’s usage ‘head of the body’ (to describe the church) vs. ‘head over’ “to describe Christ’s relationship to everything.” She insists that despite their similarity, “they are not interchangeable.” (page 112)

The relationship between Christ as Head of the Church and the relationship between Christ and everything differs not in terms of the rule of Christ but the subjects over whom He rules. Clearly the bride of Christ is submissive to the Lord and thus is not subject to His wrath and judgment, whereas the spiritual forces and people of this world that refuse His reign will be ‘under’ Him as per His judgment. Adam and Eve were subjects of God in paradise and yet were also were friends of God (being loyal subjects in His kingdom and not presently alienated).

Paul uses similar language when He speaks of the law in the book of Galatians. Christians are no longer under the law which, in context, means it acts as a condemnatory agent that exposes sins and brings the penalty of disobedience. Reformed Christians have always insisted, however, that

⁵ This seems to be confirmed when she says: “The Father, Son and Holy Spirit do not maintain their oneness through a hierarchy of authority” (page 105). Of course not. Oneness is not a matter of authority itself. Authority is an expression of a relationship which does not imply that oneness cannot be achieved because of it or in spite of it. The oneness of the Trinity is both ontological and economical but that oneness is expressed in a different way in the former than in the latter according to their unique characteristics or description. Furthermore, can the author find one example of anyone who believes that the offices of the church should be restricted to men who would or has said such a thing?

Christians (and for that matter unbelievers) are ‘under the law’ in the sense that its contents are still a necessary guide for our conduct.

Indeed it should be clear that speaking of Christ as head of the Church vs. being head over all things is not contrasting a servant relationship vs. an authoritarian one because Paul uses the same term ‘head’ in both contexts.

Second, the term ‘head’ is clearly linked with the idea of submission (Ephesians 5:22-23), even if, as the author insists, it is in the context of serving. In fact, vs. 23 is explanatory “for” as Paul goes on to say, the husband has a similar relationship with his wife as Christ does with His church. Now, again, quite obviously this is not a matter of ‘ruling with a rod of iron’ (Psalm 2:9) but it is a rule or expression of authority nonetheless.

Chapter 10

- Mrs. Stegall believes that Peter’s address in Acts 1:16 is meant to include the women who are mentioned in vs. 14 (page 124).

Though she quotes Peter addressing the body as ‘brothers,’ which, as she rightly notes, can include women as Christian brethren, the text actually says ‘men and brethren.’ As far as I know, the Bible never uses the masculine ‘men’ to refer to women and, indeed, it would cause much confusion if it did.

This is significant since Peter is speaking to the issue of appointing another apostle to take the place of Judas. Although it appears that women are present in the gathering, Peter specifically addresses the men since it is their responsibility to take up this important matter of nominating church leaders.

- “Jesus wants his followers to be equal with each other before God and among each other” (page 125).

Perhaps this might seem to be ‘nitpicking’ but I would contest this point. Jesus does not want His followers *to be* equal but rather He teaches that they *are* equal with each other (as in the indicative “you *are* all brothers.”) This is not an indifferent matter, since as Mrs. Stegall argues throughout her book, the equality of men and women is not merely an ‘is’ but ‘ought to be’ (as in leaders need to repent and rectify this matter in the courts of the church). Yes, Jesus wants us to treat each other as brothers, but we can’t be more equal with each other more than we already are by Christ’s appointment. And none of that is negated by appointment to a divine office anymore than one brother having a particular gift lifts him above others who do not share that gift.

After all, the Christian walk is to be characterized by contentment with our circumstances, which would include our relationship to those who are in authority over us. Korah and his fellow rebels learned this truth the hard way (Jude 1:11) and we ought not to test God in this matter either.

Chapter 11

- “All members must submit to the service and gifts of others” (page 135)... “All the gifts have authority. Paul was willing to use the authority of his gift. He was also willing to submit to the authority of other gifts...” (page 138)

I am not entirely certain what this means but, nonetheless, it is a strange way to express the point. Submission belongs to people, not to things. We may recognize one another’s gifts and, in so doing, acknowledge God’s goodness to the person in their proper exercise of them, but the gift is not something to be submitted to.

Moreover, gifts do not have authority – people do. One may even have authority to exercise a gift but the gift itself is an inanimate thing and has no power or persuasion in and of itself.

Paul was not, as the author concludes, “willing to use the authority of his gift” in 2 Corinthians 13:10. Here he is warning sinners (vs. 2ff.) – that is not a gift. It is an expression of his authority – to rebuke, reclaim etc. (see Titus 2:15). That is why the ‘we’ ‘you’ dynamic is being used in the passage. The Corinthians are to submit to Paul because Paul has particular authority from Christ as an apostle (see Matthew 28:19ff.). Insofar as he represents Christ, Paul must be heeded (followed, yes even obeyed) as Christ Himself. Furthermore, the passages she cites that ‘prove’ that Paul submitted to other’s gifts teach nothing of the kind. The word submit is never used nor do any of the texts have that connotation.

- The author contends that the authority that Titus possesses (Titus 2:15) is not due to his position but his “oneness with the truth, with Christ himself. This authority is available to all believers.” (page 138)

It is at this point that I (internally) confirmed that the author does not merely seek to overturn scripture’s teaching on the role of men and women in the home and church but also to overturn Presbyterian doctrine regarding the role of office-bearers. Though the author is a member in the RPCNA she is radically redefining scripture’s teaching about the authority of elders over the members of the congregation.

The reader of the passage will see that it doesn’t say anything about Titus’ oneness with Christ. To be sure, the authority is from Christ, but not in the teaching or words alone. He has authority to teach and to teach “*with* all authority.” The prepositional statement clearly defines where his authority resides.

Nowhere does the scripture attribute this authority to all believers in the church. It resides exclusively in those who have been called to serve in the office. That is why there are qualifications for elders: they exist to uphold the integrity of the office because authority can be abused by the one exercising the authority *or* easily maligned by the members or outsiders. If those who desire the office comport themselves properly, they avoid bringing shame on that office and uphold the right use of authority.

- “An old argument from complementarians is that since Jesus chose only males into his inner circle of the twelve disciples, women should also be excluded from all church leadership. But Jesus also chose only Jews into that inner circle. Yet the male/female issue has exactly the same status as the Jew/Gentile issue, that is no status at all within the family of God, the church” (page 140).

Christ’s ministry did, in fact, single out Jewish people because, as He taught, ‘salvation comes from the Jews.’ Paul does, in fact, argue for a certain primacy of the Jew over the Gentile in Romans 1:20 & 2:16. And the promise is, particularly, that one day they will return to the Lord en masse (Romans 11:15ff.). So Paul’s statement in Galatians 3 cannot be taken absolutely (or at least not without some qualification).

So yes Jesus chose *Jewish* leaders but that was for redemptive historical reasons. In fact Jesus couldn’t have chosen Gentile men for the apostleship but he could have (conceptually) chosen women and yet he did not. The New Testament church was built on the foundation of the Old Testament but we see that as the church carried on the offices were opened up to Gentiles but to Gentile men only. This is because it is an expression of the way God created us as male and female. In other words, redemption or grace does not destroy nature but upholds it.

- The author claims that, “[t]he women’s issue has never been fully discussed and debated across a large spectrum of the church until recent years. Before that, it was only assumed” (page 143).

Actually, there were many times in church history when women were put forth for leadership positions. Montanists, Albigensians, Anabaptists and later Quakers brought the matter to the attention of orthodox Christianity. In recent centuries it has been discussed with the rise of Finneyism (postbellum revivalism) and more recently in the Pentecostal movement.

In modern times the issue has come to the fore through the rise of feminism but so also has the sexual revolution and a host of vicious attacks on the nature of men and women and the degradation of traditional structures.

- “The authority of the church is our oneness with Truth, that is, Jesus Christ our Lord... Even though the reformers saw this clearly concerning authority, they had a blind spot where women was concerned” (page 144).

The first statement is simply not true. The authority of the Church was given to her by Christ and to be exercised in the limits of the Word of God. This is what the Reformers taught. Neither did they teach that “all believers have the authority of the truth” (page 144). The Reformers taught that all believers possessed truth but did not have the authority of the truth. The Reformers upheld the teaching of scripture that the elders of the church ruled (with limited authority) over the members. They did not teach, as the author seems to imply, an ‘every member ministry.’

Why? The Reformation was a movement that returned to scripture. It was not a movement that sought to overturn every pillar of nature and scripture truth (that could only be attributed to the

Anabaptist movement). John Knox's "The First Trumpet Blast against the Monstrous Regiment of Women" demonstrates his grasp of scripture and natural law which clearly speak against the ministry and rule of women.

- "It is incongruent to believe that Christ has made women acceptable to sit with him in the heavenly realms with everything beneath our feet, if we are not found acceptable, as a gender, to sit in the councils of the church here on earth" (page 145).

The matter is not about acceptability. If it was no one would ever find favour with God because we are all, by our fallen nature, unacceptable. But God grants on the basis of His sovereign will, not our desire, or personal interest.

We all struggle with the notion of the sovereignty of God. Men oppose; God disposes. 'What if God'... that is the question. Joseph, Job and David all struggled with God's administration of His providential design. Believers, no matter what their station have resisted God's appointments. I understand how difficult it must be for a women to submit since it is, as Mrs. Stegall notes, everyone's duty to submit to God and being sinners this is difficult for us.

But there are many women who think it incongruent for a woman to believe that she should sit in the councils of the church. They know what redemption is. They are smart, refined, spirit-led women who are satisfied with their calling in the Lord. They resist all such attempts for men to leave their natural calling and hand it over to their help-meets. Are these women not acceptable to Mrs. Stegall?

Chapter 12

- "If Miriam led the congregation in worship, then it cannot be a rule that only men can lead in worship." (page 153)

Actually Exodus 15 tells us that Miriam led the *women* in the praise offered to God after the defeat of Pharaoh and his hosts in the sea (vs. 20).

- "If Deborah was a judge in Israel, then it cannot be a rule that women should not make decisions and govern" (page 153)

It was a rule as God had appointed only men to be kings, priest and elders in the Old Testament. And yes Deborah was a judge, but it was to shame the men (including Barak) who would not take up their calling at this time (Judges 4:6-7). We have to remember, after all, that the era of the Judges was an abnormality. Israel was not taking up arms as she should have been and Barak's hesitation is a sign of weakness in her midst, not strength.

- "If Hannah gave her child to the Lord, then it cannot be a rule that women should not make decisions and govern" (page 153).

Certainly a women should make decisions but as the nature of such vows fall under the purview of the head of the family (Numbers 30:3-8), we can either: 1) be assured that Elkanah approved of it ahead of time (though scripture does not say) or 2) she vowed a vow without his express approval but he did approve of it after the fact or 3) he simply neglected his duties in this matter.

But even assuming that it was her right to do such a thing does not establish that she was somehow not under the authority of her husband or that such an example is approved of by scripture when the Bible clearly tells us that the husband governs the home.

- “If Huldah prophesied, then it cannot be a rule that only men can relay God’s truth to others” (page 153).

I can’t speak for others but I don’t believe that only men can relay God’s truth. Clearly older women have a role, for example, to teach younger women “to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, [To be] discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.” Titus 2:4-5)

In terms of Huldah being a prophetess, we have many more examples of such women who were blessed with this gift and responsibility. It is only natural to assume, however, that it was expressed in such a way so as not to undermine the male leadership of the church. That is, if a women is not to have authority over a man (1 Timothy 2:12) then we must believe that either 1) these prophecies were not authoritative (in the sense of teaching and directing men), 2) these prophecies were only for women.

- “If Ruth, a Gentile and a woman, was included among the people of God as their equal through a kinsman-redeemer, a shadow of our brother, the Christ, then it cannot be a rule that women should not in included in the church as equals among all other believers.” (page 153)

Few, if any, would hold to such a teaching, that is, if by being equal we mean women are honoured as image bearers, believers and lovers of God.

However, Mrs. Stegall believes that unless women are admitted to every role or office in the church then men and women aren’t equal. But not all believers are equal, regardless of sex or any other type of distinction. Paul thought of others as pillars of the church (Galatians 2:9) and he an apostle born out of due time (1 Corinthians 15:8). Even John, seemed to be closer to the Lord than others (John 21:20). Some are more in the public eye, others work behind the scenes. The Lord will reward all in accordance with their effort and responsibility. Nothing will ever be equal in the church, ontologically or practically, even in a perfect(ed) world.

- “If Esther, shadowing and picturing Christ, sacrificially gave herself for a people doomed to death, proclaimed God’s truth to the world, and ruled with authority as she brought things into submission to God, then it cannot be a rule that God does not intend women to serve, teach, proclaim or rule.”

There seems to be some debate about the nobility of Esther's actions, but assuming that everything she did was approved by God, Esther clearly ruled under the authority and allowance of her husband (Esther 4:11 & 5:2). Seeing her as a typological foreshadowing of Christ without including the submission owed to her husband (yes even a pagan one) is irresponsible reading and/or exegesis.

And again, God does want women to serve, teach, proclaim and even rule as long as it does not usurp the primary role of men in those responsibilities.

- “If Mary spoke inspired words of praise to God that became Scripture, then it cannot be a rule that God speaks only through men” (page 153)

If we wish to be technical, Mary only spoke this to Elizabeth (their husbands were no present).

- “If Priscilla taught Apollos, then it cannot be a rule that only men can teach other men” (page 153).

First of all, she did so *with* her husband (Acts 18:26). Second of all, Paul's prescription (rule) is concerning about how men and women conduct themselves *in the church* (see 1 Timothy 2:8). This does not mean it is limited to such, but that is the purview of the passage, if not the entire book (3:15).

In summary, let us note that all of these examples are, by nature, exemplary. Thus how they contribute to the matter of 'women in office' are secondary and not primary. Since the author identifies her work as conforming to the ordinary hermeneutical standards of exegesis she should know that the preceptive takes precedence over the descriptive. Yet she says many times on this page, “then it cannot be a rule....” But that is exactly what scripture teaches: a rule or rules about the conduct and role of men and women in the church, family and culture.

Note that historical narrative may and does teach us, but the clearer passages of scripture are those that deal with direct commands and teaching. This is, as we already have identified, one of the fatal flaws of Mrs. Stegall's argument: specific teachings of scripture are cleared away to make room for sweeping statements from principles in scripture that only lean to her persuasion when removed from their context. And, as we have noted, this type of approach can prove anything.

- “These women are the exceptions that prove the rule.” (page 154)

Here is the rub. Expanding on my previous thoughts, the author has cited no such rule from scripture because there is none. If there is no rule to prove the inclusion of women in the offices of the church, then these examples prove nothing about the inclusion of women in the offices of the church.

Furthermore, most of her objections are 'rules' that none who hold to the traditional view of men and women in the church uphold. These are 'straw men.' So if the rule being opposed is

non-existent, and the rule being supported is non-existent, one must come to the conclusion that nothing of substance or weight is being argued.

- “These women are exceptions only because their activities were a departure from the prevalent pattern.” (page 156)

But this is what is actually being contested.⁶ It is *not* a pattern but a rule. The exception of David eating the showbread (which she cites earlier) does nothing to help her argument either because it is an exception to a clearly established rule (not pattern). Certainly if David had, on any ordinary day, taken liking to the showbread, he would have been judged for spiting God (as was Uzziah for taking the censer). It was only because his life was threatened as he was being hunted that he was have permitted to take it the bread.

Even if the Pharisees should have figured this out (and they should have) it was a temporary allowance due to the exigencies of the situation. If this is to be the pattern (rule?) for women in office, then the only way women could serve in office is *under extraordinary situations*. Certainly the time of the Judges fits that pattern when God used a women to subdue the enemy (Judges 4:9 – though note, not Deborah but Jael) because the men were not taking up their responsibility but then God can ‘overrule’ His own rule: something that men cannot or may not do.

- “If using women to lead his people, do his work, and carry his message is wickedness to God, certainly the trifling matter of no willing or able men could not make him resort to using a woman rather than a man” (page 157).

I would not concede that any of the examples mentioned by the author have proved her point but, that aside, how does she know what God would do or not do? Miracles were not performed in certain areas where Jesus ministered because of unbelief. Paul was sent to Macedonia and was forbidden to preach the word in Asia. Couldn’t God overcome the unbelief of the locals? Couldn’t God have sent another preacher to Asia at that time if He was concerned about Macedonia?

God will do as He wills (all His pleasure). Could He have instructed Moses to appoint women as judges, priests and queens? Could Christ have chosen women to be apostles? Could the men of the church have nominated a woman to take the place of Judas? Could Paul not have told Timothy that women can fulfill the office of the ministry? Yes, yes, yes and yes. I don’t mean to insult Mrs. Stegall but the answers are rather obvious and indeed the examples could be multiplied. God could do all of those things but didn’t. He uses men and women to do wonderful things, including acts of faith and good works. But He doesn’t want women to be in authority over a man. The world shows us ample evidence of the chaos that results from such a thing. That is the authority structure from the beginning, even before the fall.

So what do we do with all that? Do we fight it; try to find a way around it? Or do we submit to it? Note that is not just women that have to submit to it. Men do too; the responsibility is great and we

⁶ And is only asserted here, not proven.

are more than happy (naturally speaking) to shirk our duty. But we have to do His will not our own.

- “God used a woman as the agent for his son’s incarnation. The living Word of God came to the world through a woman” (page 157).

True enough. And, as I have noted by way of an e-mail conversation, *only* women have that honour and many more besides when it comes to the way of childbearing (1 Corinthians 11:12 & 1 Timothy 2:15). One might wonder, using the author’s argument, if this is fair. Does this impinge on the equality of believers in Christ? Is it right that women have this honour? No, it is not fair. And no it doesn’t affect my equality (contrived or otherwise). And yes it is right because God is right and fair in all that He does. Praise Him!

- “It was a woman who first preached to others that Jesus was the Christ” (page 157).

Strictly speaking she did not ‘preach’ but witnessed (“reported”). Preaching is reserved for ministers of the Word: those officially called to proclaim the gospel of Christ as ambassadors of the gospel. All Christians, however, are called to witness.

- “Women were leaders in the church” (page 158).

The scripture references are: Acts 16:14-15,40; Romans 16:7; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15. I am not sure how these passages prove anything of the kind. The church met in women’s homes and Lydia is an example of faith, but that doesn’t mean they were leaders.

Chapter 13

- “Of all the passages of Scripture that various people have considered relative to the status and role of women in the church, there are only two passages, really only four verses, which are difficult as they have been traditionally interpreted” (page 166). She claims that the difficulty arises due to the fact that they “are in direct conflict with the clear message of Scripture, that women are created in God’s image equally with men, the masculine and feminine of man” (page 166).

I would contest this as I believe there are more than a few passages that clearly address the issue of “the status and role of women in the church.” Nevertheless, as the author does not tire in pulling out the same arguments, I will not tire in pressing the point that these have little or nothing to do with the matter of the role of women in the *offices* of the church.

- “Anything that would change or limit this status for women must be considered difficult” (page 166).

Difficult for whom? Assuming that this status has only arisen or been made clear in the last century,⁷ now the student of scripture must be made to believe that previous generations have changed or limited this status since the fall. She must also believe that it hasn't occurred under the influence of a heavily secularized worldview which is in a full-tilt rebellion against creation norms, let alone biblical injunctions. This requires the suspension of all logic and rational thought, let alone a sober view of church history.

- In this chapter, the author presents her interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. She claims that the traditional interpretation is in jeopardy because it “is in conflict with the context.” (page 167) She notes that Paul addresses all believers with instructions about public worship *as brothers*. It is obvious that Paul cannot mean that women must always be silent in church since he tells them to use their gifts in the context of worship, some of which include a form of public speaking.

First of all, one of the texts which she cites is being misrepresented. She renders vs. 26 as “everyone” should have “a hymn, or a word of instruction....” (page 168). However Paul is not encouraging this behaviour: rather he says “every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue...” The language is such that he is stating a fact, not a command. He is not telling them what they should (all) do, but what they do. The Corinthians are, in fact, very chaotic when it comes to worship which is clearly not commendable.

Second she cites vs. 31 & 39 which read as follows: “For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.” “Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues.” Mrs. Stegall notes the inclusive language: “all” and brethren (page 169) which implies that women too may speak in the worship service, contrary to the traditional interpretation.

Now one may grant that this is the case but note that we are not *required* to receive it this way. The simple fact of the matter is that though Paul uses inclusive language, the very fact that he encourages ‘all’ to prophesy is a tacit acknowledgment that not all do. He states as much in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 (where he is distinguishing between the gifts) that to one is given one gift and to another ‘another’ gift. Similarly, in Roman 12 he teaches that the gifts (including prophecy) the Spirit gives ‘differ’ from one another. In fact, Paul’s desire for the Corinthian congregation is given out of concern for the abuse of spiritual gifts. Some evidently believed that speaking in tongues was superior to all other gifts but in chapter 14 Paul shows that it is inferior to prophecy.

So it is clear, even from these verses, that not all are expected (read: will) to prophesy. This, of course, would also include some of the men who had not been blessed with this gift.

- The author claims that Paul’s statement “as in all churches of the saints” is not to be bound with the statement about women remaining silent in the churches as if it was a practice that every church held to (page 169).

⁷ Which the author grants (page 143).

Certainly, as she notes, some of the different English translations of scripture uphold that interpretation. However, it should be noted that Paul emphasizes the point about the churches doing all things in decency and good order by repeating it again at the end of the chapter (vs. 40). Note too that this is not a mere suggestion or acceptance of a prevailing situation. It is a requirement for divine worship: that is it must be conducted in an orderly fashion. Paul is teaching that women speaking in church is something that ought not to be done. It is, in fact, a rule that the churches must practice in order to uphold the rule that all things be decently and in good order. This much is clear since he says: “but [*they are commanded*] to be under obedience, as also saith the law” (vs. 34 –note that this phrase is parallel to vs. 37 “commandment”). It is the law (not a peculiar situation) that requires this standard. This law is also reinforced in 1 Timothy 2:11-12, demonstrating that it is the same in ‘all the churches.’

This interpretation is not, as Mrs. Stegall claims, contradicted by the verses that come later because Paul says ‘do not forbid speaking in tongues’ (vs. 39), not simply any kind of speaking. In other words, some kind of speaking is encouraged and other kinds are not.

- Mrs. Stegall notes that Paul himself says that women prophesy (1 Corinthians 11:5). Clearly Paul did not mean that women should always be silent in church because he earlier said they could (page 169).

It may seem as if I am belabouring this point, nevertheless, as in previous occurrences, Paul is not commanding something to take place: he is simply describing what is (possibly) happening. If this – then this (vs. 4) & if this – then this (vs. 5). This is important because Paul’s prohibition of something has much stronger connotations than his description of something. Mrs. Stegall would rather have it read the other way: the description or exemplary is foundational and then the imperative must give way to it. But this is contrary to the way scripture (and language in general) speaks.

But how do we make sense of Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 11:5 when compared to 1 Corinthians 14:34-36? Various attempts have been made to harmonize the text. Some have thought that Paul simply cites a practice that may have been customary in Corinth (namely that women pray and prophesy) but later condemns it in chapter 14. Others believe that prophesy in this chapter actually refers to singing (singing the Psalms in particular –see 1 Corinthians 14:26).

Personally I think the explanation is rather simple: women may pray with the congregation and prophesy (whatever that means –and with the ceasing of the extraordinary gifts it also ceases to be a problem) with the congregation but *speaking in the church* is what Paul clearly has in mind in the contested text.

Now one might say: but isn’t praying and prophesying forms of speaking? Well yes they are but they are also done communally. By these actions the woman does not put herself in a position of authority over a man nor does a man submit to her in partaking in the same action. But speaking, that is of herself and with presumed authority, is forbidden.

- The author balks at this position because, as she claims, this would cause division in the church when “half of the group is required to be silent and the other half is not. How can the Corinthians ‘be perfectly united in mind and thought’ if none of the women are allowed to voice their thoughts? (pages 170-171)

Division in the church, as Paul earlier explains, was due to some of the congregation following the teaching of one man over another. It has nothing to do with the fact that some have a responsibility to do one thing that others do not. Divisions of the kind that Paul speaks exist because we seek to glorify men over Christ. If doing as God requires (that is, in this case, forbidding women to speak) is a matter of causing division, so is casting out the sexual immoral so that he might be restored to the fellowship of the church. In this way, anything, even those matters not contested by Mrs. Stegall could become matters of division.

Furthermore the silence of women applies to “in the church.” Certainly women may speak their mind to their husbands at home, as Paul notes, but the worship service is to be conducted in decency and good order. In fact, not even all of the men (in our Presbyterian churches) are allowed to voice their thoughts, nor would they even all want to. This is not a matter of choosing which sex has which privilege but of following the rule laid down in scripture.

- The author claims that Paul’s statement in vss. 34-36 is, in fact, not Paul’s statement but “an idea created by some who wanted to gain power in the church through ruling over the women” (page 171). She notes that the rhetorical questions that follow indicate a common Pauline practice “to demonstrate the falseness of an idea” (ibid). The particle used to introduce this section (ἐ) indicates an expression of disbelief as in the rendering of the KJV: “What?” or, in her own words, “You must be joking!” (page 172)

Undoubtedly these are rhetorical questions. Yet I do not see that Paul is feigning disbelief at a practice he does not countenance. Even so if it has that connotation than it would have to be determined by context. Certainly it does not *have* to mean that when one sees how it used in other contexts without any sort of mock disbelief.

This seems to be clear from the parallel example that the author provides. In 1 Corinthians 1 Paul speaks about the division in the church but there he states ‘one of you says’ which supplies the statement that is being quoted. No such introduction is given in 1 Corinthians 14.

Furthermore, it is, unquestionably, out of place for Paul to place such a large quotation in the midst of his letter. When he cites an author, scripture etc. it is usually a few words or a phrase (as in 1 Corinthians 1 “I follow Paul...”). Rarely, if ever, is it as long as two whole sentences.

- “Paul rejects and refutes the idea that women must be silent in the church because their participation is disgraceful.” (page 174)

This interpretation interjects an unnatural sense in the midst of the text even as Paul has already addressed the matter of silence in vs. 28. Are we to believe that, here too, Paul does not have in mind an actual practice that must be followed but a custom that he is condemning?

Indeed the Corinthian services were chaotic and out of line with God's principles in worship. The whole chapter is, if one were to reduce it to a sentence, about the proper conduct of God's people in worship. It appears that more than a few women were speaking in the service and that Paul is addressing that chaotic element even as he addresses others. For Paul to suddenly now quote the Corinthians (as to their own convictions or practices) would be contradictory to their current practice which was to allow pretty much anyone to do anything they liked. It is unreasonable to assume that a church which is associated with leniency and irreverence happened to be one of the few (only) congregations with a regressive view of women.⁸ In fact the author herself notes that the submission of women was a given due to the precarious situation they found themselves in during that time (see her discussion on 1 Peter 3 in Chapter 4).

Furthermore, the phrase 'the law' is used throughout the Pauline literature (and the rest of scripture) to refer to an authoritative source for his reasoning. For example, the exact same phrase is used in Romans 3:19 to the law of God which condemns all men who must face a holy God. And, as we noted, the same sense is given by Paul in 1 Timothy 2, which cannot possibly be referring to a custom of the churches.

Thus the rhetorical questioning of Paul is about the commands that he is giving. He is commanding that the women be silent because this is the law. On the contrary, the Corinthians are noted as those who have contested Paul's leadership. He is not denying their practice of disallowing the women to speak but affirming his authority to teach and enforce that law because he has the authority to do so as an apostle (vs. 37).

- "The fact that the command for woman to be silent is based on the law, but no such law can be found in the Old Testament is interesting." (page 176)

As John Gill points out (along with Jamieson and Matthew Poole), it is probably a reference to Genesis 3:16. The word law does not necessarily mean 'Mosaic laws (or statutes)' but is a static reference to the first five books of the Bible (as in the 'law and the prophets'). Strictly speaking the phrase 'saith the law' is immediately joined with 'under obedience.' Paul is not arguing that the law says (by way of quotation) that women should be silent but that women are to be under obedience to their husbands. Being silent in the churches naturally follows from that.

- "Paul told Timothy that the law is no longer the standard for the believer... we are no longer bound by the requirements of the law." (page 177)

Perhaps I have misunderstood the author but it appears that she takes an antinomian position on the law, in express violation of the standards of our churches (see WCF Chapter 19). This is a whole other matter but is all the more troubling when coupled with her radical view of ministry (contra Presbyterianism) and women in ministry in particular. Should we reject the scripture's teaching on the law so we can make room for such a practice?

⁸ The opposite appears to be the case when one reads 1 Corinthians 11:16.

- The author lists a series of rhetorical questions challenging the traditional interpretation or rather, traditional interpreters, as to how the “Corinthian readers” would have understood Paul (page 182), especially in light of the qualifications one would have to make to harmonize this interpretation with other passages.

Certainly one can point out the difficulties in an interpretation by noting how incompatible it may have been with the original audience’s expectations. But this cuts both ways. As noted above, the author’s presentation of the text is fraught with difficulties.

More importantly, Paul does not address all the assumptions or objections that the Corinthians might have about a practice, anymore than he speaks to those that 21 century Christians might have. Undoubtedly much of what Paul says was troubling to them precisely because it did run counter to the prevailing winds of the day (think, for example, of his prohibitions against sexual immorality and the like which people of our time also resist).

Chapter 14

- The author entertains two possibilities for the meaning of 1 Timothy 2:12. She states that it could mean that God requires: 1) a man to have authority over a woman, or 2) a man and a woman to be equal in authority (page 190)

As elsewhere, unless one has adopted the author’s peculiar hermeneutic of scripture, view of equality etc. this interpretation won’t be persuasive.

Yet even if we suppose that 1 Timothy 2:12 could mean either of the two options above, the subordination of women to men is taught throughout scripture.

Consider Genesis 1:15-17. Before God created the woman He commanded the man (only) to take care of the garden and, particularly, to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam has a responsibility that he alone has been given. God, in His wisdom, created Eve so that man might not be alone. The woman was created to help man in his calling but it is the man’s responsibility to see that the command is kept.

This is also seen in that Satan approaches the woman first (reversing the natural order of headship⁹) and brings her into submission who then, in turn, brings the man to submission. God, however, subverts this order of Satan, by coming to Adam first and asking him where *he* is and why *he* eat of the tree (Genesis 3:9-11). He speaks in the singular even though Eve was the first one to eat and the one who, in part, led Adam into temptation.

- The author, continuing on the previous point, notes that Paul’s instructions in 1 Timothy 2 are specifically for males and females but do not exclude the other sex in the instructions to each sex (page 193ff). So, when Paul tells men to pray without anger or doubting, it is

⁹ See Genesis 3:16, Exodus 22:17, 1 Corinthians 11:3&7, Ephesians 5:22, Colossians 3:18, 1 Timothy 3:4&12, Titus 2:4-5 & 1 Peter 3:1&5.

because the men were given to this but it does not imply that women were not to pray. Likewise women were called to dress modestly but it does not imply that men were not to do this.

Certainly, the commandments that Paul gives to each sex contain some crossover. But the author must admit that this works against her presupposition that men and women are equal. Why *does* Paul address the men and women separately? Does it just so happen that they are dealing with different issues as sexes or is this the way that God made them? Not equal in every respect because they are different. In fact Paul is explicit about this: in 1 Timothy 2:10 “But (*which becometh* women professing godliness) with good works.” He is, indeed, highlighting specific requirements for each sex which is appropriate to that sex which would *not be* appropriate for the other.

- “Is Paul saying that only the women should learn ‘in quietness and full submission’? No. Everyone must learn that way. No one can learn while busy talking. No one can learn while having an attitude of knowing more than the teacher. A learning attitude is one of quiet submission, just as Paul says.” (page 195)

Rather yes because as Paul notes he is giving instructions to the women. Why would it be necessary for Paul say to “only the women” if he wanted us to understand the traditional reading of the text? This would be a tautological statement since he has spoken to the men and is now speaking to the women.

And why indeed did Paul *not* tell the men to learn in his fashion? His silence here is deafening. But he does address the men elsewhere in these terms when he tells them to exercise their authority in such a way that they not abuse that authority (Ephesians 5:25ff.; see also 1 Peter 3:1-5). But here Paul does nothing of the kind. He tells women that they don’t have authority over a man but Paul never tells men that they don’t have authority and, in fact, clearly tells them that they do.

- “So then why is Paul directing this admonition to the women? The only possibility we are left with is that the women were falling into the problem of not listening when they were being taught, and perhaps thinking that either they didn’t need to learn from others or that they were knew more than others.” (page 195)

Paul doesn’t say and, in fact, his commands are generalizations and do not necessarily address a specific situation. Certainly what follows are principled arguments for or from theological and historical grounds. And the author overlooks the plainest reason why Paul would make such a statement to the women: Genesis 3:16.

- Referring to 1 Timothy 2:13 “For Adam was first formed, then Eve” the author writes: “Is Paul saying that Adam was somehow more deserving of privilege, or better equipped to handle responsibility, or just plain better because God created him first? Is Paul saying that since Adam was made first, a man should have authority over a woman?” (page 198) Mrs. Stegall answers no, as the examples of Jacob and Esau, David having been chosen as king

over his elder brothers and Jesus teaching that the first shall be last and the last shall be first. She concludes that “God does not choose by the world’s standards.” (page 199)

Certainly it is true that God chose Jacob over Esau and David over his brothers. But that is God’s prerogative, not man’s. That is the whole point: God disposes all things, including the relationship between men and women. Had he chosen women could have been in authority over men and, for that matter, the lion could have been lord of all created things. But that is not the way that God arranged for things to be.

Furthermore, even the Israelites were commanded to respect the rights of the firstborn as we see in Deuteronomy 21:15-17 and Reuben was told he forfeited his rights as a firstborn because he committed a lewd act. That is to say being first is not automatically a right to preferential treatment but God did allow His own people to live that way whenever He, in His sovereignty, did not overrule it.

Furthermore we have to remember that man’s creation happened in a pre-fall world where favoritism was not a concern. God’s purpose in choosing Jacob over Esau was a redemptive act, as the author herself notes with reference to Romans 9. David was chosen over his brothers because of what was in his heart but this too would not have been an issue before the fall (where all men who would have been born into the world would have been right with God). The same holds true with the principle that our Lord teaches. The author states as much when she states that “[b]eing made first is not a reason for one *believer* to be ranked above and put in authority over another *believer*.” (emphasis mine - page 199)

The author muddies the waters by insinuating that Adam would be more deserving of privilege or better equipped to handling authority if the traditional reading held true. The truth of the matter is that, according to the traditional reading, neither of these would be true. Scripture says that Adam was created first, not first *better*. He was not equipped to do anything besides what God created him to be. This is not a matter of favoritism because God determined it before Adam was created: he didn’t desire anything because he wasn’t alive yet. And he didn’t want to be first because he wasn’t yet created. God willed it to be so. Who are we to differ?

- “Paul gives Adam’s firstness as a reason to say that a man should be equal to a women.” (page 199)

This makes Adam’s ‘firstness’ irrelevant. Men and women aren’t equal *because* Adam was created first. It doesn’t fit the author’s main argument in the book either since she holds to our redemptive equality in Christ (as believers in Him) but, as I noted, that was not a factor before the fall.

- Referring to 1 Timothy 2:14 “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” the argue states: “Is Paul saying that since Eve ate the forbidden fruit before Adam did that Adam was in some sense less guilty or superior to Eve? Does Paul mean that since Eve sinned first, she must have a man in authority over her as a punishment, or a necessity because of her sin? Or does the fact that Eve was deceived

mean that a woman is too stupid or ignorant or even foolish to manage her own life? Does a woman lack the proper faculties for being responsible for herself?” (page 200) She argues that this cannot be because all have sinned, and all sin leads to death. And since all people are “vulnerable to Satan’s deceptions” it cannot be that women are exceptionally gullible.

No, Paul does not argue that Adam was less guilty than Eve and, in fact, as I argue elsewhere, Adam was *more* responsible as the head who was supposed to ‘keep’ the garden (since the command was given to him alone). But note what Paul says: “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.” They both transgressed but only the woman was deceived. Adam was not (directly) spoken to by the serpent. Adam followed the example or leading of his wife but only Eve was deceived. Paul grounds the women’s submission to her husband to the extent to which or manner in which the woman was responsible for the fall (as per Genesis 3:16). Yes it is true that all sin is worthy of death, but only Adam’s sin was imputed to us (not Eve’s – even as Jesus is the second Adam and His righteousness is imputed to us - see Romans 5).

Furthermore, no one ever sinned as Eve did. If Eve had not had fallen into temptation and led her husband into sin, then the world would not be subject to death and suffering. Besides which scripture itself teaches gradation in the punishment that God metes out to sinners indicating that though every sin may result in the same punishment (death), some sin merits more punishment in eternal death (Luke 10:14).

- “Or does the fact that Eve was deceived mean that a woman is too stupid or ignorant or even foolish to manage her own life? Does a woman lack the proper faculties for being responsible for herself?”

Certainly not, but Eve was being foolish and ignorant and her sin has resulted in terrible results for women in particular (which is, in part, Paul’s point).

- “If Paul does not mean that women are inferior, less able, less deserving, or more guilty because Eve was deceived and sinned first, then what does he mean? The only possibility we have left is that Paul was reminding women again that they are not superior to men in any way. Paul is once again giving a reason for the women to realize that the men are equal to them before God and in the church too.” (page 201)

This is where the argument of the author falls apart. According to her vs. 12 teaches that women (along with men) are to learn in submission. In other words, this verse teaches *nothing* for women that it does not imply for men. And the reason why this is so is because: 1) Adam was formed first and 2) Eve was deceived. Note in both cases, however, Paul distinguishes between the creation (and actions of) women from men. So men and women are to behave the same way but here are some reasons why women should behave in a particular way?

The author conjectures that the reason for this is because the women were acting haughty about their new found freedom in Christ. But nothing from the text indicates that at all. There is no “reprimand” (page 202) in the text. Remember, after all, that though the book addresses men and women of the church as the subject matter, the person that Paul is writing *to* is Timothy, not the men or the women. Timothy is to see that men and women conduct themselves in a manner that is suitable to their distinct callings. We have no reason to think that Paul is telling the women (in the middle of the letter), “now don’t be haughty.”

As elsewhere, the author has had to create a problem where there is none and given us a solution that doesn’t make sense all in the name of radical equality even though Paul’s reasons for stating what he does in vs. 12 undermines the very idea of equality altogether!

- “The complementarian view... make’s Eve creation status and guilt seem to be beyond the cover of Christ’s reconciling and purifying blood.” (page 201)

I am certain that Eve’s creation status did not need to be atoned for. Creational norms like the Sabbath, marriage and the command to subdue all things did not need to be blood bought by Christ because there was nothing inherently wrong or sinful with them or acting out on them. Eve’s guilt, on the other hand, was indeed covered by Christ’s blood as we see, by way of a figure, in the animal sacrifice necessary to provide her and Adam with coverings.

Actually I don’t see how the complementarian view entails that as the author implies, but that is not Paul’s point either. He is not (in 1 Timothy 2) primarily speaking about redemption but about conduct in the church.

- “For women, this ‘good news, but....’ leads to false feelings of inferiority and guilt because these reasons [ed. offered in the complementarian interpretation of the text] force them to look at who they are, in and of themselves, and at what they have done, rather than at who Jesus is and what he has done. This point of view can only lead to deep humiliation and depression.” (page 201)

The author should have written “For *some* women...” My experience is that godly women who hold to traditional views (many of whom, it should be noted, did not grow up with these teachings) do not feel inferior, guilty or excessively introspective because of this interpretation. Rather they are relieved because they don’t have to be someone they can’t be and can serve God in a way that pleases Him instead of themselves (and this would also be true of men who have served themselves instead of the needs of their wives and children).

Besides, this could be said of any text that speaks to our sin and rebellion against God and thus could be a pretext for rejecting any biblical teaching. Maybe we shouldn’t tell drunkards about their sin because, after all, they might feel inferior, guilty or excessively introspective because of their sin. Perhaps Paul shouldn’t have written about Adam’s sin being imputed to mankind since that makes men feel especially guilty for the fall of humanity.

- “For men, these two arguments [ed. of the complementarian view] lead to false feelings of superiority and self-righteousness because they are based on who the men are and what they have done, rather than on who Jesus is and what he has done. This leads to pride and arrogance.” (page 201)

One could argue that anything any person is and has done could lead to those feelings (including good things that both I and Mrs. Stegall would agree on, such as being a believer or performing good works). That is human nature after all (and is not limited to one sex).

Does, however, the traditional view naturally lead to such things? Not really, since Paul is not arguing that men are superior to women because of who they are and because of Eve’s transgression. He is arguing about roles in the church and is, specifically, addressing women *not* men. Of course the author believes these very distinctions are, by their very nature, wrong but we must also see that Paul tempers what he says by adding that women can be saved in childbirth if they practice certain virtues.

Does, however, this perspective somehow cause men and women to take their eyes off of who Jesus is and what He has done? Only if they forget their callings in light of His redemptive work as Paul argues elsewhere (see Ephesians 5). But maturity in faith assumes that one does not need to be constantly reminded of that, even as the RPCNA and other Presbyterian churches do not feel a need to sing songs ‘about’ Jesus or with His name when we are singing the songs that Jesus gave us (namely the Psalms).

- “Nothing we are or do has any influence on God as to how he will treat us, what status he will assign us, or what gifts he will give us.” (page 201)

If Mrs. Stegall is speaking to our justified status in Christ then certainly I would agree. This would not be true if she is referring to our sanctification in Christ which admits degrees of rewards.

But is God really treating women badly or in an inferior way to men if he assigns them a different role in the church and home? I know that this analogy will win me no favour with the other side but certainly creatures are below mankind are they not? God created them that way – under man’s control and lordship. And even man, in certain respects, is lower than the angels (Psalm 8:5). And amongst men (unless Mrs. Stegall resists this too) some are higher than others and some are lower than others (at least with respect to earthly authority). Why murmur against where God has placed us? Is not contentment itself akin to the gospel of Christ (1 Timothy 6:6)?

- The author contends that childbearing has no “effect on our salvation.” (page 203)

Again, though certainly this is true with respect to a woman’s justification before God. But it is not true with respect to her sanctification. The words ‘save’ or ‘salvation’ have a wider meaning than just ‘redeemed in the blood of Christ’ or righteous before God by faith alone (see, for example, Philippians 2:12).

Furthermore, Paul does not say, as the author asserts, that women will be saved through faith but through childbearing. Faith, love and holiness are the attributes which make it possible to be saved through childbearing. Neither does Paul say that the women will be saved in spite of childbearing (which is what the author implies about the preposition 'through'). Childbearing is the means by which the woman is saved, as long as faith, love and holiness accompany that childbearing. In other words, childbearing alone will not save a woman (for many ungodly women have had children) but doing so in a Christian way will bring 'salvation' to the woman.

It is instructive, to say the least, that a women's sanctification is somewhat different in kind (or manner) than that of the man. A man cannot be saved through childbearing but a woman can. This is a privilege that men will never have and it makes them unequal in the sight of God. But no man contends that this makes women better than men or superior or the like.

Chapter 15

- The author claims that the word 'helper' (in Genesis 2:18-20) has a wider or different meaning than those who oppose woman's ordination understand it to have. It does not, according to her, have the connotations of authority, but "one in the stronger position of power and ability... a rescuer, deliverer, one who saves. The one being helped is in a position of need" (page 215).

It should be noted that the term helper does not prove, as far as this reviewer is concerned, the traditional view, nor do I think it was intended to do so. The woman was made for man insofar as he was lacking in himself. The author rightly reminds us that man (in the masculine sense) is always dependent on God (i.e. not self-sufficient).

However, as the author has taken pains to 'distance' the relationship of Christ to His Father as symbolic or exemplary of the relationship of women to men, it is important to emphasize that we are talking about a husband's relationship to his wife and vice versa (not man's relationship to God). Hence the scripture says that the helper is *made* 'meet for him.' She is a created helper, not the Creator helper. Was she made for him in the sense of only for that purpose? No, as Genesis 1 teaches she too must fulfill her role as being made in God's image and subdue the earth with her counterpart. But certainly the role of women, even as helper, is subordinate to her husband as having been created by God after him (1 Timothy 2:13).

The author later concludes "[that] God did not create man to be in authority over the woman. The term *helper* has nothing to do with authority structures. It has to do with going from 'not good' to 'very good,' from being 'alone' to being 'one flesh,' from being 'the man' to being 'man,' the human race" (page 216).

But as I have pointed out in an e-mail conversation with the author:

[In Genesis 1:15-17] You will see that before God created the woman He commanded the man (only) to take care of the garden and, particularly, to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam has a responsibility that he alone has been given. As

you correctly note God, in His wisdom, created Eve so that man might not be alone. The woman was created to help man in his calling but it is the man's responsibility to see that the command is kept. I agree that men and women together are to rule over creation: in this they are one unit or two persons with the same responsibility. But when it comes to their relationship to one another, it is Adam that must ensure that certain things are done and other certain things are not done.

This is seen in that Satan approaches the woman first (reversing the natural order of headship) and brings her to submission who then, in turn, brings the man to submission. God, however, subverts this order of Satan, by coming to Adam first and asking him where he is and why he eat of the tree (Genesis 3:9-11). He speaks in the singular even though Eve was the first one to eat and the one who, in part, led Adam into temptation.

This is also seen in the assigning of the name 'woman' to Eve by Adam, even as He did with the animals (again the latter before Eve was created, that is without her assistance or contribution).

- The author contends that the subordination of women is a result of the curse. And just as we seek to mitigate other parts of the curse through medical help and the like, so too is our responsibility to "eradicate the subordination of women where possible, in the church and in the Christian family" (page 215).

We must distinguish between the effects of the curse on the creation (or created order) and the creation itself. Is the subordination of women something that is only a result of the curse or rather something subject to sinful abuse? If, as we have established, the authority structure existed before the fall, then certainly its sinful abuse does not negate its reality, anymore than abuse in marriage or a legalistic understanding of the Sabbath negate these creation institutions.

It certainly is right for men and women to seek to eradicate the abuse of authority in the church and home. This means protecting women and children from abusive husbands as well as all of us from tyrannical elders and teachers. But, as we have seen time and time again, it is not authority itself that can be blamed nor even a certain hierarchy in nature (consider Psalm 8:5 & man in contrast to the animals). Clearly this curse is 'active' as opposed to the passive 'pain in childbirth.' It is not something merely experienced as a result of the fall but something actively done by the women in response to the fall. Thus it can only be mitigated when the women stops desiring her husband.

That a women 'desires' her husband is, seemingly, a desire to usurp her husband's authority (even as commentators notice the parallel to Genesis 4:7). One of the effects of the fall is that women seek to rule over their husbands. Nevertheless, he will rule over her. That is precisely why the apostles instruct men to rule in such a way as to be loving and exhort women to obey their husbands because both sexes are liable to abuse or neglect their callings.

- Mrs. Stegall asks: "What would be the purpose or use of a hierarchy of authority in a perfect world?" (page 216)

Indeed. What would be the purpose of God's ruling over all of creation if all of creation was submissive to Him? Or why should man subdue creation if creation is not subject to the fall? And why was the earth without 'form and void' if it was not under the effects of man's rebellion and rejection of God's rule?

The answer is simple: The world reflects God's nature. It wasn't perfect in the sense of being 'fully formed' or having achieved its final or ultimate purpose, but it reveals the Creator's Godhead and power (Romans 1:20). The author simply cannot conceive of authority amongst man as having any moral goodness associated with it but that is not the worldview of scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:5 "[Love] Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil." Love does not seek to establish itself but seeks to do the will of God.

- The author notes incongruities between complementarianism and various scripture texts such as the Great Commission. She notes that some will take this verse to refer to the church in general but not to women particularly. Mrs. Stegall then notes that, if taken consistently, the statement about Christ's assurance of His constant presence cannot be for women then either (page 218).

Certainly it is reasonable to understand this verse as a command to the church as a whole but, even then, not all can participate. For example, children cannot directly obey this command and neither can the infirmed.

Indeed the message is for all the church but not pertinent to everyone in exactly the same way. It is surprising to see that Mrs. Stegall disagrees with this since her interpretation is not at all consistent with historic Presbyterianism (which she adheres to) or even Christianity in general. Her interpretation is more in line with historic Anabaptist views (e.g. Quakers etc.).

As I have written elsewhere:

Every member in the church has a responsibility to bring the gospel to the world. However we should distinguish between the Great Commission being fulfilled by the various parts of the body of Christ who are commissioned for/to particular tasks & the Great Commission being given to the Church as a whole body. As Paul explains, some are teachers, some are preachers but not all (Romans 12:4ff.; Ephesians 4:11ff.). Only some are stewards of the mysteries of the gospel (1Corinthians 4:1ff.) and should administer the sacraments. That is, not every believer can or should try to fulfill every particular aspect of the Great Commission because they are not called or gifted to do so.

The church fulfills the Great Commission as a whole by supporting in prayer, finances and love those who are commissioned for the work of the gospel (Ephesians 6:19-20; 1 Corinthians 9:14; 16:14-16). The church is also responsible for calling (sending) the missionaries and evangelists (see Acts 13:1-3; Galatians 2:9). Finally, as a body, the church supports the Great Commission by living a life worthy of the gospel that is proclaimed within the midst (Philippians 1:27). That is, every believer can and should try

to see that the Great Commission is fulfilled by contributing to its fulfillment through the lawful means God has granted to them.

In this way we can maintain the promise of Christ's presence for all members without being forced into absurdities of requiring that every member fulfill every portion of the Great Commission personally when they have been neither called or gifted to do so.

The same is true with respect to the pastoral epistles which Mrs. Stegall also cites (1 Timothy 4:12 – page 218). Indeed there is general application to all people in the moral injunctions that Paul commands Timothy. But is not possible for every command to have direct application to all members for the simple fact that not all are office-bearers. One hardly has to spend time reading the epistle to see that it is addressed to Timothy (1:1) unlike many other epistles which are written to the churches.

Indeed her complaint runs aground on the very verse she cites. Paul reasons that no one should despise Timothy “because you are young.” Could not the aged among us say: how is this verse applicable to me (as an older person)? Well, it is not, or at least not in the same way it is applicable to a younger man like Timothy. Examine the verses that address Paul speaks to Timothy about women:

1 Timothy 2:15 “Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.”

Shouldn't Timothy treat everyone the same? Why does Paul say something about women he couldn't say about men? As Mrs. Stegall asks of me, so I restate for her: “Is it improper of me to think these verses can be applied to myself? If it is improper, on what grounds?” (page 218)

And how does this verse apply to women who can't have children? Or what about Paul's commands to husbands and wives to those who aren't married? We could go on, but this requirement doesn't make any sense. The only demand that is made of the text is being made by the author, not the text itself. We need not feel angst over the fact that never every text is immediately applicable to every member lest someone (by age, sex or any other distinction) feel left out.

- “I ask, ‘How do we know that ‘women should remain silent’ is a universal command applicable to all women? What about those scriptures that command us to teach, preach, baptize?’... The final answer comes back. ‘Those scriptures don't apply to women because women are to be silent.’” (page 219)

One wonders if this is simply a straw man argument as there is no source cited to establish this as a position actually taken by anyone who opposes the ordination of women to office. Nevertheless I can personally say (in reference to my argument above) that all of those scriptures apply to women in some way as members of the church but not directly even as they cannot and do not apply to every member (regardless of sex).

Furthermore, this argument ignores the fact that Paul has already narrowed the field to ‘women’ whereas it is not immediately apparent that Jesus’ command to ‘go and preach’ is addressed to men only (although, as a point of fact, it was originally addressed to men only as Jesus only appointed men to be apostles).

- The dilemma that Mrs. Stegall sets up for the so-called complementarian view is not credible. She has the complementarian arguing that women cannot be overseers in the church because women are not to have authority over men but the egalitarian says that ‘Paul commends ‘anyone’ who desires to be an overseer.’” (page 219)

First of all, where Paul says “if a man desires the office of bishop” (KJV- 1 Timothy 3:1) man is rendered from context (husband of one wife) as well as the sex of the pronoun which is male. If the former is not determinative or restrictive then one wonders which women are being included who are the husband of a wife. Mrs. Stegall goes on to note that the same phrase is used to describe deacons and that we know Phoebe was a deacon. The latter is contested but even if it is not, as the author knows, this is not a matter of women holding authority over men (as far as the RPCNA is concerned). The issue before us is not whether women may serve, even in an official distinctive capacity, but whether she may have authority over a man.

The author tells us that “most churches interpret this phrase to mean, ‘having not more than one spouse.’” (page 220) That is all well and good for those churches that do but the original means wife, as in women, referring exclusively to the female sex regardless of exegetical gymnastics. Perhaps, with respect, the author knows of a ‘sexless’ meaning somewhere applied to the word elsewhere in scripture but I don’t.

It is rather simple really: women may not have authority over a man so they cannot be included in the ‘anyone,’ any more than Paul meant to include children (vs. 4) or young converts (vs. 6). Why, I wonder, is that circular or somehow meaningless? And how could or would have Paul had made it clearer? ‘By the way, even though I just said that women cannot have authority over a man, just to be on the safe side, ‘only men who desire the office of bishop’ desire a good thing.’ Evidently chapter divisions sometimes serve to confuse matters than to elucidate them.

- Mrs. Stegall remarks that scripture does, in fact, tells her to teach: Colossians 3:16, after all, says “teach and admonish one another with all wisdom...” (page 220).

Now again, I must insist that Mrs. Stegall follows her own rules of interpretation. Does this apply to the mute? Or the child in the congregation who cannot yet verbalize the Psalms? No. And no one would point out an inconsistency here because that would be silly.

The issue addressed here is in the public singing of the word of God. In this sense women do teach and I am happy to acknowledge it. But Paul’s concern in 1 Timothy 2, as he clarifies, is about authority. And he defends it through various ways and means as the text unfolds. I don’t see a contradiction but I do someone laboring to find one.

One statement has clear boundaries: ‘women don’t teach and by doing so having authority over a man.’ The sexes are divided; one is given a responsibility that the other is not. In Colossians Paul does not labor to make such a distinction because he is addressing the body as body (not men as men and women as women where each have clearly defined roles).

- “Leadership and authority are not the same. The words are not interchangeable” (page 225).

Indeed, they are not. One may be a leader and have a following and yet have no authority to do so (such as a cult leader or false teacher). Another may have authority but no leadership because they are tyrannical (such as a dictator). The scriptures ascribe both, however, to true shepherds. God never condemns shepherds for the exercising of authority but for doing so in a way that does not provide and care for the sheep (see Ezekiel 34). Indeed God requires certain things from them (Ezekiel 34:10) because they have not exercised the authority that God gave them. Under-shepherds ‘take oversight’ only because they have been given the authority by God (1 Peter 5:4).

- On page 226, the author implies that complementarians are similar to legalists and Pharisees in the manner in which they apply “dividing life into various little cubicles, or boxes...”

These boxes that the author complains about have been kicked against, collapsed or otherwise assaulted in the history of the church. The author knows this because elsewhere she contests anti-Trinitarian interpretations of scripture and a false gospel of works. The holistic Christian life, as the author speaks of it, is one that excludes those who preach another God and another gospel. For those on the outside looking in (and thus looking on the author as well) they might find our boxes to be too restricting and dogmatic and thus seek to redefine these traditional, biblical categories. But we can’t (and shouldn’t) do much about that.

But we all know that we must find a way to harmonize scripture passages that seem to contradict each other. The irony is that I find no contradiction between clear statements about the differing roles of men and women in the church, family and society. I do see that the author resists these categories and thus undermines them by looking at other passages that do not directly address these issues and then reads these assumptions back into these other texts.

- The author rightly addresses the concern raised that her understanding of scripture would naturally allow the inclusion of those who practice same sex relations into the church (228ff.). I say rightly because others who hold to the same position of women in office have either: 1) defended themselves against this accusation or 2) have indeed allowed for it.

The author may reply that this is a canard or a straw man, but I have no qualms in making this argument. I have maintained (in an e-mail conversation with the author) that her understanding of scripture relative to the roles of men and women in the church requires an amorphous understanding of gender and gender roles. This is (was) the seedbed of the acceptance of homosexual desire & behaviour in the culture at large and in the church in particular.

This book was originally written in 1993. The disastrous results of such a hermeneutic are evident to us all in 2015. The very blind can see it. Another author I know wrote a book defending the ordination of women to all offices in the 90s as well, including a defense of how this hermeneutic does not lead to the acceptance of homosexual behaviour. Why would he write such a thing? Only because some hardhearted opponents meanly accused him of it? Hardly.

- “If women are recognized as equal members of the church beside men, will homosexuality follow next?” (page 228)

Not at all, since who would oppose such the first statement? But equality of members does not make for equality of call, office, gifts or any such other thing that is God’s alone to give to whom He wills (as the author repeatedly grants). Though I do not mean to insult the intelligence of the author (indeed it appears she has been gifted in abundance) this is not an intelligent reply. Again, in the history of the church, when has anyone ever made such an argument?

- The author, however, distinguishes between role distinctions (which she supports) and rank distinctions (which she denies – page 228). Please note here that the author has her own little boxes which she compartmentalizes for her own purposes. Of course I do not begrudge her the right to do so when she, as far as she claims, is attempting to make distinctions that scripture make. But I wish she would grant the rest of us the right to do so without accusing us of belonging to the tribe of Saul. Furthermore, do the scriptures actually speak of a distinction between roles and ranks?

Regardless, if one’s role in the church is to not to be an elder (say someone who does not and never desires the office of bishop) is there a rank implied at all? I will grant no such thing. The one who is not a bishop has no authority to be bishop because they haven’t been called to office. Rank sounds like we are dealing with a military organization. It has no place in the discussion of church life of Presbyterians as we believe in the parity of office bearers.

Roles or ranks aside, if one sex has a role that the other does not have, there is a distinction between the sexes insofar as that role is concerned. The ordination of women depends on erasing any such distinction in terms of the offices (remember the author’s interpretation of Paul’s use of ‘anyone’ in 1 Timothy 3:1).

- “If we believe that Scripture teaches the equality of women with men, must we also accept homosexuality? Do the passages that apply to one apply to the other?” (page 230)

No, not at all. As long as we acknowledge that God created each sex, male and female, with distinct roles that are not to be blurred or otherwise confused. I happen to, here and elsewhere, oppose the definition of equality that the author espouses and yes, that taught consistently, would definitely open the door to moral confusion with respect to sexual purity and, indeed, in many if not all aspects of life.

- The author notes that homosexuality is “characteristic of the total depravity and wickedness of mankind apart from God” whereas “Women are not a characteristic of separation from God” (page 230).

Not if they are women considered as women but they would be if women were acting as men. Or even women historically in Eve for that matter (1 Timothy 2:14). Even the author makes a distinction between women as women (who are not redeemed) and women “who have been ‘born of... the Spirit.’

And, for that matter, many women who oppose the ordination of women to the eldership would say that women who support the ordination of women are characteristic of separating themselves from God’s teaching on the role of women and are trying to act like men.

- “When I say our differences do not make a difference, I mean that the ways in which we are different have no effect whatsoever on the ways in which we are the same” (page 232).

Quite the opposite in fact. Men and women are believers and yet as believers we treat each other differently. That is men, as believers, treat men in the church differently than women, including women, as believers, treat men in the church differently than women.¹⁰

- The author claims that the belief that women should be excluded from the offices of the church would or has led to looking at the opposite sex as being useful only for sex (page 234). This, in her argumentation, “is only a short step to the acceptance of homosexual behaviour as a sensible option for those who prefer it.”

Here the author descends into absurdity while trying to turn the tables on her objectors. Really, can she demonstrate that a traditional view of the offices and the relationship between men and women leads or has led to such thinking? The history of the church, including that of its earliest, post-ascension days, has the leaders of the church including Peter affirming traditional roles between men and women (which she openly admits). But why would he do such a thing if it might lead to conduct that is elsewhere condemned?

- Mrs. Stegall calls the submission of some and the authority of others to be a burden and “not freedom” (page 238).

We must see through the lens of scripture. Not being called to do things that one is not equipped or called to do is, in fact, freedom, and a great relief to the troubled conscience. For example, the believer need not be bothered or coerced by some who claim that the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues is for every believer. We can rest in what God has given us and not in what others believe we should be or do. Not every Christian is going to desire the ministry (1 Timothy 3:1) nor should they feel a burden to preach the gospel because they haven’t been called to do so.

¹⁰ For example 1 Timothy 5:1-2: “Rebuke not an elder, but intreat [him] as a father; [and] the younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.”

Furthermore, to be under authority means that one is not as responsible as the other (see James 3:1). It is an incredible weight lifted off the shoulders of every Christian that they need not be or become someone they are not meant to be. Sometimes the greatest service, as Mrs. Stegall herself notes, is those who serve in the church without any reference to an office or public authority. And yet their service is accepted by the Lord of the church.

Indeed, true freedom, is to be under the authority of Christ (John 8:31-32). So too the freedom of the man or woman who serves in the church under the supervision of the elders is free to do so without fear of being led astray by their own imagination or leading.

- “It is true that Christian church has practiced the subordination of women for the majority of its history. But the complete equality of men and women in the family and the church has the highest standard of proof in Christendom. It conforms to the gospel of Jesus Christ” (page 239).

The gospel does not teach any kind of equality but rather brings us the good news of Christ. As such the message comes to all people, regardless of sex, race or any other division but it does not *bring* equality (at least in the sense that Mrs. Stegall speaks of it).

Consider Titus 2:1-5: “But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.” Here we see that the gospel or sound doctrine teaches us about the submissiveness of wives to their husbands due to a particular calling and honour that they alone possess. It also teaches men to love their wives as Christ loves the church. I am thankful that it does both.

Chapter 16

- “For complementarians... the gospel that Paul has so clearly enunciated here for the Galatians only speaks for women’s spiritual standing before God... this good news does not apply to our standing in the church. ‘You are all sons’ does not mean that we are all of equal rank in the church. It does not mean that God intends our sonship and equality to be practiced in this life... only in the next” (page 250).

Again I cannot speak for complementarians but to take this passage in the most literal sense, complementarians would not only be accused of opposing women’s equality but of advocating Gnosticism as well. Indeed a woman’s standing before God is very much a physical matter as she is a physical creature. Her soul *and* body are redeemed by a flesh and blood Saviour (true man). Sometimes we throw around the word ‘spiritual’ haphazardly, not considering that it can be construed to mean ‘against the physical.’

In any case, the submission of women to men is not purely an ontological matter (i.e. the essence

of women entails submission) but a role assigned to her by God. The redemption of the woman is the same as the man insofar as they are both children of Adam who are in desperate need of the second Adam to save them. However it is telling that Paul applies this redemption to the women differently with respect to her calling before God (1 Timothy 2:15). Whatever meaning we assign to the word ‘save’ Paul contrasts the blessing upon women with that of men even after the adoption of sons. In other words, salvation does not destroy the God assigned roles of men and women but exalts it.

The author, however, cannot “accept this” (page 250) because it implies a hierarchy of authority. We have addressed this matter above but as here she states that, in the understanding of the complementarian, “[e]ven though we are ‘all sons,’ some of us are to be over some of the rest of us” (ibid) one must wonder: would this apply, too, to the relationship between servants and masters, the magistrate and the populace and parents to children? If both a parent and child are part of the household of God, does the parent now violate the child’s equality before God by telling them what to do?

God never intended that grace destroy nature but perfects it. Even in the fully redeemed life, some receive greater rewards than others (Luke 19:16ff.); even some are nearer the throne than others (Revelation 4). The office of elder, to which not every member is called (irrespective of sex), holds out a special reward for faithfulness which no non-elder will ever achieve (1 Peter 5:4). The reason for these things is that the master does what he wants with his own (Matthew 20:1-16). Failure to understand that principle and properly live that out in the context of the church is not an attempt to bring the gospel’s teaching to highlight the equality of members but a betrayal of the master’s rule of His Church.

Chapter 17

- “men and women, all brothers, are equal as to worth, privilege, service, status, rank, freedom, and authority” (Matthew 23:8-12) (page 263)

The teaching of Christ in this passage certainly lays waste to the idea of an episcopacy in the church or any other form of church government that places elders over each other in priority or power. It should be plain that it is Jesus’ intent to speak to ‘ecclesiology’ since He contrasts His messengers with the scribes and Pharisees (vs. 2ff.). Ironically, however, Jesus acknowledges their authority, even over His own disciples because they “sit in Moses seat” and thus His disciples must “whatsoever they bid you observe, observe and do” (vs. 3). Clearly then, this passage cannot be used to teach equality of privilege, service, status, rank and authority since not all in the kingdom of Christ possess these characteristics or responsibilities.