

Women and ‘teaching’

What is Paul prohibiting in 1 Timothy 2:12?

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From around the beginning of 2014, in Sydney we have seen some considerable energy invested in proving and disproving a particular view of the word ‘teaching’ (greek verb - *didaskô*) in Paul’s well known prohibition in 1 Timothy 2. John Dickson began the discussion with his ebook *Hearing Her Voice*, which then came out in print form. A book length response followed called *Women, Sermons and the Bible*. Throughout this time numerous blogs, Facebook postings, and assorted other discussions have carried on debate.

The task of determining the meaning of Scripture and in particular, the meaning of each word of Scripture, is exactly what evangelicals are to be about. Where ever and when ever the focus of this debate was on that issue it has been important and good. We need to commend John and the various authors of WSB for their desire to engage in this task.

Unfortunately however, at times, the way the debate has been conducted hasn’t always happened with the greatest of wisdom and more unfortunate still, the debate has carried with it a painful critique of Sydney Anglicans. They have too often been criticized as people so wedded to a particularly narrow conservative view that even good evidence will fail to budge them. This is unfortunate. In my experience these very same people are some of the most careful students of the word, very concerned to take seriously any careful engagement with the text of the Scriptures, and reform their practice against that same text. Of course change doesn’t happen immediately upon any new claimed reading. The wisdom of Proverbs 18:17 must apply. The first to speak often seems right. But with further information and reflection the truth is often arrived at. This takes time – time to weigh argument, counter argument, and time to consider how any new insights might be applied.

With this current controversy, there has now perhaps been enough time for settled positions to form so that a better analysis can take place.¹

In my view there are two major areas of consideration.

The first is the meaning of the word translated ‘teach’ in 1 Timothy 2:12 in our English Bibles (and elsewhere). It is the word *didaskô*. The second is the practical application of the conclusions of the first and the pastoral setting. I intend to deal with both. The first is of course foundational, and is worth taking the time to think through carefully. There is quite a bit of detail in this first section, but I have tried hard to keep the language as simple and non-technical as possible. The second might be an easier place to start. Feel free to jump there and come back to Part 1.

Part 1. The meaning of ‘didaskô’

a. The options

Determining the meaning of the word translated ‘teach’ is a relatively straightforward activity. It is the stuff of reading a text, and a fairly constrained set of texts at that. The level of expertise isn’t beyond the dedicated believer. It isn’t necessary to have doctorates in ancient history or Jewish religious practice – or even Greek. The word is used in a number of well-known texts that form for us the clear resources for determining meaning.

It is crucial however to understand the meanings of the options we are being asked to choose between. That is, four possible meanings of the word translated ‘teach’ are being offered. The task of assessing which is Paul’s meaning involves placing each option into the particular text and considering which best fits the context. But to understand whether the context supports a meaning or not it is necessary to know what exactly is the meaning we are being asked to test.

¹ In this I’m engaging with not only the printed edition of John’s book but much of his follow up material.

So what are the four meanings and how do they differ?

1. The first is the broadest possible meaning (or probably better, application) of the word we translate as 'teach'. This broadest meaning would leave us concluding that Paul is prohibiting a woman from any activity that might lead a person to learn something. This would therefore mean Paul was prohibiting a woman from engaging in almost any and every speech activity since any act of speaking will cause a person to learn something.

All parties in this debate agree that this meaning (or application) is not the one Paul has in view when he gives his prohibition in 1 Tim 2. This is because either 1. 'teach' is only one of a number of speech acts and it is only 'teach' that is prohibited, or 2. Paul's encouragement of these other speech acts necessarily involves the speaker in some form of instruction – even if only at what might be called a low level. That Paul can commend some speech acts that might involve some level of educative impact and yet forbid another suggests that act forbidden is different to merely anything that educates.

All agree that the meaning or sense of the word translated 'teach' in 1 Tim 2:12 is narrower than this broadest possible meaning. It's a particular *kind* of 'teaching' that is being referred to.

The next three possible meanings (one offered by one of the authors of *Women, Sermons and the Bible* – Claire Smith; the other two offered by John) might be thought of as ranging from narrow (Claire's) to more narrow, to most narrow (John's two). That is, it might be thought that Claire's includes the other two proposed meanings and is just somewhat broader. Now, although there is something of this going on (John's are narrower than Claire's), there is actually a profoundly important difference between Claire's meaning and John's two meanings. Appreciating this is critical to properly assessing which of the meanings best represents Paul's meaning at 1 Tim 2:12.

2. Take Claire's proposal first. Her suggestion is that the particular kind of 'teaching' in 1 Tim 2:12 is 'the authoritative, formal, ongoing instruction of God's people, in God's truth, from God's word' so that they learn from it. This meaning is not as broad as 'any activity that instructs' – it is 'formal' and 'authoritative'. But it still within the normal range of meaning that the word 'teach' conveys. That is, it insists that whatever Paul meant by the word translated 'teach' it is still an *educative* activity, and so, 'teach' is an entirely appropriate translation.

John offers two meanings of the word translated 'teach'. These are only different from each other in that one encompasses and is less narrow than the other.

3. The first definition is in the foreground of John's writing, and the less narrow of the two. It is that the word translated 'teach' refers to the 'passing on and delivery of the apostolic deposit'. It is, says John, a near synonym of the technical term 'delivered' (or 'pass on' or 'lay down' - gk, *paradidōmi* / *correlate paralambanō*) and is itself a technical term.²

Very important, and critical to John's position, is that the word isn't *educative*, at least not in essence. It doesn't include any kind of explaining – what we might think of as teaching someone something. It is delivering or handing on, where John means by those terms a narrow activity that is merely repeating a formally established set of words.³

For John, whatever the word translated 'teach' means it certainly isn't *explaining* a word that is already written down. This further narrowing is critically important. John pushes this point firmly - "'teaching' ...never means explaining and applying a Bible text".⁴ This more particular exclusion is essential to John's argument because if it could be shown that the word translated

² p49, 50. John concedes that "teach" is not an "exact synonym" for "delivered", but nevertheless claims that in the Pastoral Epistles the vocabulary of teaching "stands in its place" (i.e. stands in the place of "delivered"), thus making them near synonyms.

³ In reference to two passages from Deuteronomy he says that "'teach' does not mean to *expound* or *explain*: it means to *transmit words intact*" (John's emphasis, p 31). He then identifies this as "exactly the authoritative activity Paul restricts to certain men." This firmly identifies what John believes 'teach' in 2 Tim 2:12 means. It is an activity that does not mean expound or explain.

⁴ p57

'teach' *does* mean or include *exposition* or *explanation* of a text then his central thesis vanishes – the modern sermon *can be* 'teaching'.⁵

John's definition of *didaskô* is quite narrow. It is helpful to note that this isn't the first time a definition with similar wording to this has been offered.⁶ However, the way he understands 'passing on' (that it doesn't include any sense of instruction or education) seems unique to John.⁷

4. Somewhat surprisingly John's book actually functions with another, different, more narrow definition of the word we translate 'teach'. In many places he says that 'teach' refers to passing on the *oral* traditions.⁸

This may not immediately appear to be a different definition especially when it is clear that the apostolic tradition began its life as a spoken word (and so for a long time the two definitions corresponded). But John uses his first definition (defn 3) as a catch all for not only the oral stage of *passing on* but also the written stage. It is a broader definition. This becomes obvious in section 3.3 of his book.⁹ The whole of this section makes the point that written material forms a proper part of the apostolic tradition. And by the end of the book it is clear that the apostolic traditions he keeps referring to are the written NT documents.

So when he makes these two statements in his book – "Teaching' in 1 Tim 2:12 refers to the preserving and laying down of the body of oral traditions first handed over by the apostles" and then says some pages later that "'teaching' in 1 Tim 2:12 refers to the preserving and laying down of the traditions of the apostles..." – he is really offering two different meanings of the word 'teach' in 1 Tim 2:12. One definition is very narrow (refers to oral only).¹⁰ The other is less narrow (oral and written).

Noting this is important.

It explains some of the confusion in engaging with John's material – the confusion is in his work itself. And it explains some of the difficulty in critiquing his work. The definition keeps shifting as any critique is offered.

⁵ However, there is some confusion here, certainly in my mind, but possibly in John's as well? On page 35 he says that "teaching is not explaining a Bible text". This is of a piece with earlier statements that say that 'teach' does not mean to "*expound* or *explain*" (p31). But then after saying it is not explaining a Bible text, he says "it can involve both these things ['explain' and 'apply']!" (p35). This is puzzling. Especially given the weight of his argumentation which clearly lands on the concept that the word we translate as 'teach' does *not* include explanation, exposition, application, or even comment (91). "Exposition and application", says John, are "ancillary activities" that "are more appropriately described as exhorting and prophesying..." (p90). They are not 'teaching'.

This paper will operate with the position he states a number of times and pushes conceptually – that 'teach' doesn't mean or include explanation, and certainly not explanation of a written text, or even "comment on..." that text (p91).

⁶ So the author's of the Doctrine Commission report – a report put out by the Sydney Diocese some years ago. And Klaus Wegenast in *NIDNTT*.

⁷ The Doctrine Commission states that *didaskô* includes 'teaching' (where it is impossible to avoid the assumption that the authors of the report use the word 'teaching' with its usual English meaning: i.e., causing someone to learn something by various explanatory activities) and certainly applies to a written text, so also this in Sect 4.7 – "Teaching, however, is often an exposition or application of Scripture (Acts 15:35; 18:11, 25; Rom. 2:20, 21; Col. 3:16; Heb. 5:12) or an explanation and reiteration of apostolic injunctions (1 Cor. 4:17; Rom. 16:17; 2 Thess. 2:15; 2 Timothy 2:2; 3:10)." – contrary to John. And Wegenast includes in 'teaching' the concepts of explaining and educating – concepts clearly part of the meaning of the word in other contexts. It is just that he notes that in the Pastorals this broader meaning is focused on the deposit being kept intact, and (Paul's words) 'mastered' (Wegenast's word). What seems clear is that Wegenast hasn't gone as far as John in being adamant that the word can't include explaining or educating. As regards other noted scholars it is the case that a number recognise the connection between 'teach' and 'pass on'. However, none that I've so far seen share his very narrow definition which firmly excludes from the activity of 'teaching' any sense of explaining.

⁸ "Paul's word for this process (preserving...oral tradition) is...'teaching'" (47). "Teaching' in 1 Tim 2:12 refers to the preserving and laying down of the body of oral traditions first handed over by the apostles" (p49). And, "teachers were to act as the 'congregation's repository of oral tradition" (48), and "there was a large body of rehearsed oral traditions referred to as 'teaching(s)'...this is what Paul meant by 'teaching'" (52).

⁹ p74

¹⁰ p49 and 88

Although I want to provide most of the critique for a later section it is worth noting that there are profound and necessary implications that follow if this very narrow definition is correct. If John is right that the word we translate 'teach' in 1 Tim 2:12 refers to passing on the *oral* tradition then the first edition of his book is right when it notes that no one 'teaches' today. What then follows is that Paul's prohibition no longer has relevance. That is, since no one is 'teaching' today then there is no modern speech act that corresponds with what Paul means by 'teach' and so the modern sermon is equally open to both men and women.

Now, John insists this isn't his position. And he responds with some frustration when people assume it *is* his position. But sympathy must go with these people because not only does John focus a great deal of attention on proving that 'teach' refers to the oral phase (the whole of chapter 2), he states that 'teach' in 1 Tim 2:12 refers to the oral phase, and he also wholeheartedly agrees with Packer when he makes the point that 'teaching' in 1 Tim 2:12 is a different activity to modern 'teaching' precisely because the apostolic 'teaching' was "codified in the canon of Scripture".¹¹

In summary -

There are effectively three definitions being offered – one by Claire, two by John.

The first given by Claire is that the word translated 'teach' refers to a specific type of educational activity: 'the authoritative, formal, ongoing instruction of God's people, in God's truth, from God's word', so that they learn from it. The other two definitions given by John are about 'passing on traditions' – definitions that do not convey a sense of causing someone to learn – and where the definition of passing on excludes those activities that cause people to learn such as explanation, instruction or exposition (especially of a written text). One of these two is very much more narrow than the other – it is passing on the traditions where those traditions are oral.

It is important to note, as we analyse these three options, the similarities and differences between them. One similarity; two differences.

The similarity – both are concerned with the movement of content – from one person to another.

The first difference – **the content being passed on is different.**

Claire's content is broader than John's. It includes John's (that the apostolic deposit is the core content of the teaching) but also allows that the word translated 'teach' will involve communicating content from the OT as well.

The second difference - **they differ with respect to *how* that content moves from person to person.**

For Claire, the content of God's word (broader content) moves from one person to another by an educative process. The content is *taught*. It may include repetition (as per John) but also acknowledges and expects explanation and instruction as a constitutive element. The purpose (and intended result) is that the hearers *learn* the content.

John's two definitions (one more narrow than the other) confine themselves to a process that is by (only and exclusively) repetition of a fixed body of information, where the purpose is the preservation of the content. He explicitly states that the activity referred to by the word translated 'teach' does *not* include explanation as a constitutive element – certainly not of an existing written text, but probably also not of a spoken word. To 'teach' for John is simply to lay down by saying and then repeating a body of words, where the purpose is the preservation of the content, not that the hearers *learn* the content. It is effectively identical in meaning to the term we translate 'delivered' (or 'pass on' or 'lay down' *paradidōmi*) and relates directly to what's called its correlate (the response you have to what has been 'delivered') – 'receive' (*paralambanō*).

With this groundwork in place, it is possible to more readily test each meaning.

¹¹ p80 "teaching is therefore a 'different exercise today [ie, not the kind of exercise prohibited by Paul]'. John then says "...I wholeheartedly agree..."

b. Looking at the Evidence

What follows is a consideration of *didaskô* in a number of its biblical contexts. This is only a small selection of evidence.

Perhaps the easiest place to start is in what is possibly Paul's earliest letter – Galatians.

In Gal 1:12 Paul speaks about the source of the content of his gospel, and insists he didn't get it from any man. He says he did not 'receive it (cf. *paralambanô*), nor was he taught it (cf. *didaskô*)'.

This is a significant reference because Paul clearly differentiates between the two possible ways he might have 'got' the content. One way was by 'receiving it'. The other way was by being 'taught' it. These are clearly different ways of getting the gospel. The context and connective (the word 'nor') makes this very plain.

John deals with this verse and uses it to *identify* 'being taught' with 'receiving'. Here, he says, is evidence that the two words are near synonyms.¹² This is however a strange conclusion – given his reasoning elsewhere and given the context and the connective. John elsewhere makes much of the *differences* between words when they are used in close proximity. So 'teaching' is different from 'exhort' is different from 'prophecy'. This is because, argues John, Paul uses them next to each other and so he is distinguishing different speech acts. But when John comes to Galatians 1:12 he uses the proximity of these two words to make the opposite point. He says these two acts are almost identical. His own logic makes this conclusion odd.

No doubt it is entirely valid to note the relationship between these two words, as a number of commentators have done. Their close proximity, especially in the context of the transference of the gospel deposit, makes it clear that 'teaching' can be used in the highly technical realm of guarding and protecting a set body of words.¹³ Absolutely. And helpful to see so that the first century culture better informs our reading. But, noting this relationship is not the same as requiring that the two words are near synonyms. I can help an American see that bacon and eggs are connected in the Australian psyche as twin elements of an ideal breakfast. But that isn't the same as saying they are near synonyms.

Two things make it plain that although the two words belong together in this particular context as part of a transferring of a 'set deposit' process, they are clearly different activities.

The first thing is the context of Galatians 1:12.

Paul is making an effort to draw attention to the difference between these two ways of getting an authoritative message. He wants his readers to appreciate that there was no way in which he got the gospel from men. He didn't get it one way (the 'passing on' way), and he didn't get it the other way (the 'teaching' way). He is working hard to exclude the widest possible ways of getting the gospel from a human. That is the context.

The second thing reinforces this point by connecting the two words with 'nor'. This is a word that is used to connect two *different* things.¹⁴ He didn't receive it, *nor* was he taught it. The word is actually used because of the *difference* between these two activities.

This clear purpose of Paul is entirely lost if either of John's two definitions is used. Paul would end up saying something effectively tautologous and far narrower than he intends.¹⁵

¹² p50 commenting on Gal 1:12 John says "For Paul, then, to be 'taught' is a perfectly apt alternative term for 'receiving' the traditions about Jesus".

¹³ So John's blog post at sect 2.1 - <http://www.johndickson.org/blog/women-sermons-bible7>

¹⁴ See e.g. Matt 6:20, James 3:12, Rev 5:3, etc.

¹⁵ It is very odd in John's recent writings that he offers something that seems to contradict his own thinking in his book on this verse. That is, he now says that 'handing over' isn't a way of giving a message. It is now a broader umbrella term under which either evangelizing or teaching sits (sect 2.3 at <http://www.johndickson.org/blog/women-sermons-bible7>).

The word we translate 'teach' *isn't* as narrow as John insists. It is certainly concerned with the same *content* as the 'pass on'/'receive' words. It is concerned with transferring the tradition of the gospel (as so many scholars note). But it is differentiated from the 'pass on'/'receive' language by the way that content is moved from one person to another.

Paul didn't have the content told to him by way of repetition ('delivered' – the way a Pharisee might have passed on traditions). And he didn't have it communicated to him by way of explanation or instruction (taught). He didn't receive the gospel by either way.

This is a significant reference because as Galatians is possibly Paul's earliest letter and the one closest to his previous life as a pharisaical Jew, if there was ever a time in Paul's writing where 'teach' might be used in the sense proposed by John which is that it is effectively the same as 'pass on' (*paradidōmi*) then this was it – especially given John links his definition to rabbinical practice.

Other NT references make John's definitions hard to maintain. There are many occasions more broadly where the word translated 'teach' is used clearly in the context of instruction that *educates* the learner and cannot be reduced to merely repeating a set form or words. It is certainly the case in the gospels. Jesus 'taught' on numerous occasions (ie – Mark 12:35; same word used by Paul in 1 Tim 2). His teaching was full of explanations, illustrations and applications. He even used Bible text for his teaching. It is fair to say that our word 'teach' is a perfect expression of the greek work *didaskō* at these points. The word is about instructing the learner by various means. When you come to Paul it is clear that on numerous occasions he uses the word in a similar way. He speaks of the need for all believers to "teach and counsel one another" (Col 3:16). He describes the things the readers of Ephesians learnt concerning how to behave as having been "*taught* with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self" (Eph 4:21-22). In Romans 2 he critiques the ones who "'teach' others" but don't "'teach' themselves" immediately connecting this with "preaching against stealing", and telling people not to "commit adultery" (2:21). Each of these indicates that the word we translate 'teach' in Paul isn't 'passing on a fixed tradition without explanation' (John's definition). Add to this 1 Cor 11:14 – "doesn't the very nature of things 'teach' you that if a man has long hair it is a disgrace to him?". Can it really be that 'teach' in this context means 'repeating a fixed tradition'? Doesn't it rather make better sense to say the word 'teach' has the more normal meaning - instruct someone so they learn.

Demonstrating this more natural meaning of *didaskō* doesn't demand that there might not be a specialized use in some particular context – say in the Pastorals, or that the word can't have a narrower *application*. But it does shift the burden of proof from assuming that it must only refer to John's very narrow definitions. When we come to Paul's very particular command in 1 Tim 2:12 we do it aware that the word *didaskō* had a very well attested natural meaning in the first century – which was very much like our word 'teach' – although it certainly applied strongly with a very special content that was to be guarded, secured and protected.

Is there evidence in the Pastorals that the word *didaskō* continues to be used in its natural meaning – transfer information in ways that include instruction and explanation – although applied to specialized content?

There are a number, but to see that this is so a word of explanation is required.

What happens if the word 'teach' has as its object a written text? That is, what if the thing being taught was something written down?

This would diminish the validity and relevance of 'teaching' as John defines it. And reduce it to an activity we have another word for.

John is offering a thought experiment. He is trying to get us to enter the first century world and see a state of life we find hard to sense – a world without Bibles, where access to the authoritative tradition is only via a person's memory of that tradition. How do I know the words of Jesus? Or his apostles? The authorized receptacle of them (the 'teacher') can share them with

The problem with this is that Paul doesn't seem to think so. He says you can receive or be taught a tradition. That is, there are different ways you can transfer a 'tradition' – via 'handing it on' or 'teaching'. But this doesn't make the two ways near synonyms, as John keeps trying to insist.

me. That person's function is profoundly and uniquely important, and authoritative. He speaks the words he has been given. And when he does this he is 'teaching'.

What happens though when the authoritative deposit is written down? And people have access to it? The role of the teacher (as John defines it) diminishes and then necessarily disappears. It is obvious why this must be so. If 'teaching' is as narrow as John suggests then when its object is a readily available written text the activity of teaching is nothing more than repeating that set of words. We have a word for that activity – it is reading.

Reading is good, especially when the thing being read is the word of God. But Paul makes it very clear that reading is a different activity to 'teaching' when he distinguishes them in 1 Tim 4:13. And John himself says that teaching can't "be equated with reading".¹⁶

Now, the vast weight of John's material is focused on seeing how teaching might operate in a non-Bible context, in the oral phase of church history. The weight of his work is there because it is only there that his definition for 'teach' has legs. As soon as the tradition is written and that written deposit is spread, the role of the teacher (as John defines 'teaching') becomes largely equivalent to reading. The teacher is now very much less than the authorized receptacle John's definition for 'teaching' defined him to be. In fact, that dimension of his authority has gone entirely. That authority now resides in the written deposit, and the relevance of Paul prohibition in 1 Tim 2:12 disappears entirely. The logic is inescapable – as J.I.Packer notes (with John's eager approval).

But if it could be shown that the content being 'taught' is a written text, *and that Paul saw it that way*, then it is very hard to maintain that Paul meant by 'teach' what John says he meant. Paul would be saying that a 'teacher' merely reads or quotes a text – and this is the thing he doesn't permit a woman to do! John in fact ends up saying that our contemporary 'teacher' is teaches when "the NT is read or quoted".¹⁷ This is a necessary conclusion given his definitions but one that fits very awkwardly in the first century setting where Paul clearly distinguishes reading from teaching.

This fact hasn't escaped John which is why (I dare say) he works hard to show that the following two references in the pastorals don't really read the way we might naturally read them.¹⁸

Start in Paul's second letter to Timothy – 2 Tim 3:16.

On the basis of the Scriptures being 'God breathed' Paul tells us that they are therefore 'useful' for a series of activities – activities that include 'teaching'. A plain reading of this text will naturally lead someone to imagine that the object of 'teaching' is a written text – the OT certainly and very likely a series of early NT letters. It seems obvious that because these documents are God's very words they are useful as the content that would be taught by the one who 'teaches'.

If this plain reading is correct then, on the basis of the logic above, the pastorals themselves indicate John's definitions don't work.

This problem is obvious to John, who works to remove any sense that the object of 'teaching' is the words of a written set of scriptures. The way he does this is by insisting that the word 'useful' doesn't mean 'used for'. He says that Paul wasn't suggesting the written texts were to be used as the *content* of the teaching, but rather were 'useful' in developing an ability to do a separate activity, related to a separate body of material. According to John the written text of the OT is

¹⁶ p64.

¹⁷ p78

¹⁸ John appears to try to avoid the conclusion that 'teaching' ceases once the deposit is written by rejecting the notion that transmitting the deposit requires a 'verbatim' hand over. For him it need not be exactly word for word. But this qualification is a distinction without a difference. (3.2 <http://www.johndickson.org/blog/women-sermons-bible7>).

Whether exactly word for word or largely the exact words, in its best expression this activity would aim to pass on the words as exactly as possible. And if the 'teacher' were able to remember exactly the words he received he would necessarily pass them on verbatim. These words were and are after all the very words of God – down to the tense and number– Galatians 3; Mark 12).

useful in that it helps Timothy know how to pass on another body of truths - the apostolic deposit.¹⁹ This is at best a strained reading.

What makes it clear that it is strained beyond reason is the connection between 'useful' and the other activities Paul lists. The point here is that whatever connection exists between 'useful' and 'teaching', that same connection must also apply in the same way to each of the other activities.

Take 'correct' for instance. Is it the case that the OT (and very likely a number of NT documents) is only useful for 'correcting' in that it helps you know how to do it, rather than being the *content* that is used for correcting? This seems not only an odd conclusion but counter to the examples we have in the NT. That is, we have a number of occasions where Jesus corrects people, and he does it by using the OT. Some immediate examples come to mind - he quotes Exodus 3:6 to correct the Sadducees in Mark 12:18f. He quotes Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 in Mark 10 to correct the Pharisees. Again in Mark 12:35 he uses Psalm 110:1 to offer a correction to simplistic notions of the Messiah current at his time.²⁰ On these occasions he takes a verse from the OT and uses it to correct his opponents.

It is important to note too that on these occasions he uses the language of 'Scripture' - "you do not know the Scriptures..." (Mk 12:34), and also includes the fact that these words used for correction are inspired by the Holy Spirit - 'David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared...' (Mk 12:36).

Paul in 2 Tim 3:16 then uses this same language, the language of 'Scripture' and the concept of divine inspiration to ground the usefulness of the word of God for correction. And of this means this connection most naturally fits a situation where Paul intends that the God breathed Scriptures are actually used for correction, just as Jesus used them, rather than that they help people know *how* to be able to correct - using some other content, like the apostolic deposit.

It fits best to see the material that is identified as God's breathed words as being the content *used* not only in 'correction' but also therefore in 'teaching'. It is *this* content that is the object of the teaching activity - because it is God's very word.

If 'teaching' is fundamentally nothing more than passing on the deposit of words - without addition, subtraction or explanation - then the 'teacher' of these written documents is merely getting up before everyone and 'reading or quoting' these documents. In John's words they 'teach' "whenever the NT is read and quoted".²¹ This is clearly *not* what Paul had in mind.

Further, this breaks the hard distinction John has established between 'teach' and 'expound'. If the above analysis of 2 Tim 3:16 is correct then it is simply wrong to insist that 'teaching' cannot include, as a constitutive element, explaining a text. It may not be all that Paul means when he uses the word in 1 Tim 2. But it is simply wrong to exclude the possibility that 'teach' involves explaining what a written text means when Paul expects that a written text (the OT and other letters) will be the content used in 'teaching' (2 Tim 3:16).

Consider another reference in the Pastorals - 1 Tim 4:11.

Paul says, 'command and teach these things'. What things? The things that Paul has written and perhaps even his whole letter. Timothy is to 'teach' these things as well as command them. If this is to be a different activity than 'reading' Timothy must do far more than John's narrow definitions allow. That is, he must not only say what Paul said, but also explain its meaning - instruct people so that they not only understand what Paul said to Timothy, but also 'master' it and so be in a position where they can understand the commands that follow.

John certainly engages with this text. His understanding of it is that the written text being 'taught' was a private letter that only Timothy had - hence it could be said that Timothy was truly the 'authorised repository' of the deposit Paul had given him - no one but Timothy had it.²² He would suggest that Timothy's 'teaching' was far from simply reading something everyone had sitting in

¹⁹ p61, 62

²⁰ Note too that this is described as 'teaching'. Here an OT text isn't merely repeated but it is surrounded with explanation and instruction.

²¹ p78

²² "...this piece of personal correspondence...". p76

their laps. Timothy had it stored up in his mind to bring out accurately where needed. He could 'teach' it – pass it on intact. And this wasn't simply 'reading' because only Timothy had these words.

The difficulty for this is the fact that we have clear evidence that not only did Paul's letters end up publicly available but he planned and expected that they would end up read out in churches. Colossians 4:16 says exactly this – 'when this letter has been *read* among you...'. That is, when he wanted them to pass on the words he had given them in written form, he says 'read' them. There is evidence in the Pastorals themselves that this common expectation for Paul's other letters, and something that Paul saw regularly happen with his letters, was Paul's expectation for these particular letters. Of particular note here is the use of a plural 'you' at the end of Titus (3:15). Paul's final greeting assumed a broader audience than just Titus. For John's proposed definitions to stand it needs to be the case that these letters *weren't* to be spread more broadly than the first recipients, and that Paul assumed they wouldn't be. This is a very big call.

John seems to have a way around this kind of conclusion. He appeals to what he calls the constituent element of meaning and other non-constituent activities. That is, he says the constituent element of 'teach' is 'passing on' without explanation or exposition. But then acknowledges that 'teach' may also include explaining without it suggesting his narrow meaning is wrong. This allows him to deal with uses of 'teach' that must be more than his narrow meaning allows, whilst still insisting that Paul in 1 Tim 2 only excluded John's very narrow understanding of 'teach'. But at what point does the fact that 'teach' regularly includes explanation of a written text force you to own that its constituent meaning must actually be broader than you've said it is?!

It seems clear that the word we translate 'teach' was applied by Paul to already received written texts and yet he clearly wasn't suggesting they just read those texts. This must obviously mean Paul's understanding of 'teach' was very different from merely reading. 'Teach' for Paul no doubt included 'passing on' the traditions that were written – repeating them, restating them, speaking them from memory. It was an activity that aimed to achieve something of what *paradidōmi* sought to achieve (transference of content). But it couldn't have been as tightly narrow as John insists (transferring content without explanation).

Now we finally come to 1 Tim 2.

John offers this statement – "there is nothing around these verses that requires that 'teach' means anything other than 'laying down...'"²³ Remember here that for John the concept of 'laying down' cannot include 'explanation' as a constitutive element.

But there is something around these verses that at the very least suggests a different meaning for 'teach' than 'lay down' and certainly most naturally fits with Claire's more inclusive definition. This is obvious if it is clearly understood that the difference between John's proposed meaning/s and Claire's is the *outcome* of the speech act. That is, if John's proposed meaning is a 'repeating' activity, if it is purely laying down a set of words, a technical term for 'passing on a tradition' (nearly synonymous with *paradidōmi*), then the outcome won't be that someone 'learns' but rather that they 'receive' what is spoken. This is a very well accepted pattern in the Bible. When someone 'passes on' a tradition the activity that correlates with 'pass on' is 'receive'. Conversely, the proper response to 'teaching', or the thing that correlates with it, is 'learning'. This is because 'teach' at root is an educational activity (which may also include repetition). Indeed, in recent writings John reaffirms this very well known pattern.²⁴

²³ p70, or 'deliver'/'pass on'.

²⁴ John notes this a number of times in recent writing - "The word "learn" (*manthanō*) is, as WSB also notes, the usual correlate of "teach" (*didaskō*); "The word "learn" (*manthanō*) is...the usual correlate of "teach", just as "receive" is the typical correlate of "hand over"." (<http://www.johndickson.org/blog/women-sermons-bible7>).

John repeatedly notes this whilst trying to demonstrate that 'learn' can also be used in the context of traditioning activities – such as 'hand over', etc. However, all he demonstrates is that a tradition can be taught and so learnt. He doesn't demonstrate that 'passing on' (as he understands that activity) will mean a person 'learns'. And so again, the burden of proof rests with John's position. If he is right in saying the usual correlate to 'hand over' is 'receive' (everyone agrees) then the fact that 'learn' corresponds to 'teach' in 1 Tim 2:12 remains a very powerful testimony to the kind of activity 'teach' is. It is far from as narrow as John proposes.

When you come to 1 Tim 2 Paul makes clear that the outcome of the activity we translate as 'teach', which only properly appointed men are to do, is 'learn'.

This fits most naturally with Claire's proposed meaning.²⁵

'Teach' in 1 Timothy 2 may not be as broad as any activity that leads to another learning something. But neither is it a completely different activity with a focus on the content rather than on the learner.²⁶

When a number of the other key texts are considered in Paul's writings it becomes difficult (I think impossible) to hold that Paul meant the narrow definition John insists Paul meant in 1 Tim 2 (or elsewhere). John's presentation appears to build towards his conclusion, until each part is considered with some care. Then it becomes obvious that the conclusion isn't warranted by the pieces.

The word translated 'teach' simply doesn't sit very well when John's very narrow definition is imposed on it. It certainly can't *mean* 'passing on the oral tradition' although it no doubt included attention to the oral deposit for many years. And it can't *mean* 'passing on the apostolic deposit' if what is meant by 'passing on' is an activity that had no room for educative processes at its core. Besides, if it was as narrow as John suggests then once the apostolic word is written down 'teach' becomes synonymous with 'reading', something Paul himself clearly distinguished from 'teaching'.

Despite the fact that John's definitions fail to fit in key contexts, understanding the similarities between Claire's meaning and John's two meanings explains why John's meaning seems to fit in some texts – and it undeniably does. This is because the word translated 'teach' is often used in the context of communicating the apostolic deposit (though not only or exclusively – one point of dispute) and so John's meaning appears to fit those contexts where the focus *is* on the apostolic deposit. However, it doesn't fit all and every context because the word 'teach' operates with a broader content (God's word, not just the apostolic word) and more importantly in a different way (educative, not just repeating). Hence it would be wrong to say that the activity prohibited by Paul in 1 Tim 2 only relates to the 'passing on of the apostolic deposit' - where 'passing on' only and purely means giving the words verbatim 'without explanation ...'.

Part 2. Secondary pastoral issues

a. More teaching. Not less

Much of the driver of this discussion has been the desire to identify where the contemporary sermon sits within the framework of the Bible's teaching. Where does it sit? Is it 'teaching'? Or is it some other speech act, which all godly and gifted people can properly share in – both men and women?

Posing the question like this unhelpfully skews the discussion in many ways. It begins with our contemporary activity called 'a sermon' (actually, no, it begins with a particular person's experience and perception of this activity called 'a sermon') and seeks to place this activity (or at least this person's perception of the sermon) within the Biblical framework.

²⁵ Claire spends considerable time on this exact issue in her chapter 'Unchanged "teaching"' – sect 4(b). She notes particularly the parallelism that exists between vs11 and 12. That is, there is a corresponding negative in v12 for each positive of v11. A woman must 'learn' is paralleled with not 'teach', and she must learn in 'quiet and full submission', is paralleled with the corresponding prohibition on 'authority'. Noting this strengthens the point considerably. Whatever 'teach' is, it clearly results in learning, not merely receiving.

²⁶ In addition to this is of course Paul's related command in 1 Tim 2. Paul prohibits a woman exercising 'authority' over a man. Yes, there is debate over whether this part of the command is additional to the prohibition on teaching or whether it defines 'teaching'. John lands on one side but notes that for him the arguments are not conclusive, and could go either way (he draws attention to this to make the point that his view works for either conclusion). However, that it can at least be noted the argument is inconclusive is I believe profoundly important for the pastoral application of this command of God.

A far more appropriate way to proceed is to work from first principles – *biblical* first principles. Put aside the contemporary practice we call ‘a sermon’, and ask the more fundamental question – what speech acts do we want or need when God’s people gather week by week?

Christians ought to be gathering far more often than once a week, of course. But if we are limited to only that one meeting each week, what speech acts do we want to ensure happen?

Would we want the thing Paul calls ‘teaching’ to happen every week? Or would we be content that it only happened sometimes – say two or three times a month, or perhaps *less*? Perhaps for the purpose of giving room to having a speech act that a woman can perform? Would we be content, as John is, to assert that “teaching” is emphatically “*not* the typical Sunday sermon”?²⁷

The way these questions are answered might actually reveal a person’s judgment of the relative importance of two possibly competing values. On one hand there is the value of hearing the word of God taught by formally appointed teachers. On the other hand there is the value of giving the central speech act to a woman.

I can easily imagine a group of people deciding that the value of balancing the gender voice is of such importance that they would forego a ‘teaching’ spot regularly to ensure that the woman’s voice is heard.

I would argue this is a great mistake and fails to value what is of utmost importance – hearing God’s word authoritatively taught. I would further suggest that this fails to appreciate that it doesn’t need to be an either/or.

The first thing to note is that the word, authoritatively taught, is too important an activity not to have happen at least every week when believers gather. Clearly this activity stood as an activity of immense importance given its prominence in the NT and the Pastorals. The only skill required of an elder is the ability to ‘teach’ (1 Tim 3). Timothy is to ‘command and teach these things’ (1 Tim 4). He is to ‘devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching’ (1 Tim 4). He is to entrust what he has heard to ‘faithful men who will be able to teach others also’ (2 Tim 2), etc.

If we were to build our services from the ground up, we would surely see the importance of making room every week for the activity of teaching.

It might be that our contemporary sermons are falling far short of being ‘teaching’ – and might really be better characterised as exhortation. But we don’t then conclude that women can and should be doing more of them. Rather, we conclude that we need to lift the quality of this speech act so that it fulfills its proper purpose in our limited time together! We should resolve that this weekly speech act *does* exercise an authoritative role in our midst, the role of not only passing on the apostolic deposit so that it is mastered but instructing us carefully and powerfully in that word (and all God’s word) and laying God’s word on our consciences so we might learn to honour, trust and obey our Father. This is the very thing we see ‘teaching’ to be in Paul’s writings and it isn’t limited to the pre canonical era. It is a blessing and requirement for every generation.

The second thing to note is the very obvious point that our times together don’t have to be limited to only this activity. And in fact the Scriptures envisage a number of other activities as we gather.

I share John’s concern to bring to bear the gifts of men *and* women in our life together. We have many wonderfully gifted women who have much to offer in strengthening the life of God’s people. At EV we have experienced profound times of edification as women have shared and encouraged, in numerous ways.

My point here though is that we don’t need to choose, and ought not choose, between “hearing her voice” and ‘teaching’ every week.

Fundamental to our life together is the word read, proclaimed, taught. We need to ensure this happens every week. Doing this necessarily means that godly, gifted and properly appointed *men* will step up and take responsibility for this activity. But there is also room to also give

²⁷ p105.

opportunity for other gifted and godly voices to be heard – in exhortation, testimony, prayer, etc. These activities provide room for her voice and so the rich and proper diversity of God’s people serving one another.

Not less but more teaching; Every week without fail.

b. The pastoral setting within which we operate

This discussion isn’t happening in a vacuum.

We live at a time when there is vast and deep confusion over what it is to be a man and a woman. The value of equality has morphed into ‘equivalence’. For the vast majority of people in the western world, equality must mean equivalence if there is to be equality.

Into this context the biblical portrayal of men and women as equal but different has become more than just confusing to our culture, it has become offensive. Speaking from the standpoint of 25 years pastoring people it is now more difficult than ever to speak a word that suggests there are distinctive differences between men and women. And even more difficult is the suggestion that men and women might have different roles, only and purely on the basis of their God-given gender. In today’s culture, I’m a hero if I say men and women can do the same things, and a villain if I ever even hint there might be differences in what we can do.

The consequences of confusion over this fundamental issue are vast. We have yet to see their full impact.

As pastors and leaders of churches we have a very great responsibility to help church communities hold clearly to our differences within the context of equality – for their good, but above all for the honour of God.

The fact is, our gender differences are clearly of great moment to God. It is right there in the beginning when God creates us ‘male and female’ in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27), and through his apostles, he gives numerous instructions about the need to make these differences evident.

Whatever you make of the meaning of the word translated ‘teach’ in 1 Tim 2:12, it is clear the apostle wanted to ensure the differences between men and women were expressed within the life of the Christian community – or at least not ironed out as far as possible, which can easily become our agenda (especially as the pressure from our society to do so increases).

The teaching of 1 Cor 11 reinforces this point. Although Paul assumes that women will share in speaking in the public assembly they were to do it with clear evidence that they did it as a woman and not as a man – hence the need for the veil. Whatever you make of the significance of the veil it is clear God expects the truth of gender difference to be expressed in public gathering – not ironed over and minimized as far as possible. 1 Cor 14 and the command about the silence of the woman in the weighing of prophecy adds to this point.

God clearly cares about gender distinctives and expects them to be evident within the public assembly.

This truth stands in stark tension to the community movement firmly *away* from the expression of any gender differences. It has become offensive even to affirm differences that are simple matters of fact. This is one area where God’s word and our community’s values are diverging massively.

How do we best serve our world in this area? By engaging in any discussion around this area with care to this larger social perspective.

I do share John’s concern to bring to bear the gifts of men *and* women in our life together, and to think carefully about our understanding of God’s word in this area and how it applies (as does every person I’ve met within Sydney Diocese). However, it would be very foolish to engage in this discussion without taking great care to the wider cultural setting within which it happens.

For instance, if my desire to see the Bible read accurately causes me to take issue with a group's overly restrictive reading of Scripture with regard to say alcohol, I would be very foolish indeed to do this without also taking into account the current social problems around alcohol abuse, especially among the young. In my passion for a particular exegetical insight I could inadvertently stir an inappropriate license with regard to alcohol abuse. This isn't to say it is wrong to pursue a greater accuracy with respect to our understanding of Scripture, or wrong to correct our errors. Getting the Bible right is the core to everything. However, pastoral wisdom demands that I do this aware of the larger issues socially. If I did it in the context of a youth group, or a community that were prone to alcoholism, I would take great care to strengthen the case of mature and godly use of alcohol, *as* I also pursued an agenda to correct people's Bible reading.

My guess is that John sees himself doing something perfectly analogous to the above illustration. He and others clearly believe some groups are overly restrictive in their understanding and application of certain biblical commands. Allowing that that is the motive I am simply urging them (and us) to see that this activity needs to be done with a great awareness of the cultural setting we find ourselves within at present. I am actually arguing that the cultural setting we are in means that the greater and more serious issue is whether or not we can ever say a man and a woman is different and actually have different roles and responsibilities – based purely on their gender. This is especially important because the fact is the vast majority of unbelievers, *and believers* don't want there to be any evidence of difference at all.

This is the reality of our context.

We may have areas where we have been too restrictive (though I think John is wrong on the preaching issue). But if we ignore the wider context and engage in this discussion as if *the great* problem is that we are too narrow in our application of gender distinctives we will miss-step very badly.

Three observations that flow –

1. We must work hard at not continuing to embrace practices that owe more to cultural baggage than proper exegesis. It doesn't help our cause when we are unbiblically restrictive in our thinking or practice. In this regard I applaud John's desire to think biblically about our practices with regard to our speech acts. This process can of course be painful for conservative people. It is possible to inappropriately lock ourselves into certain practices that we assume to be the mark of evangelical purity when in fact they owe more to our parent's or grandparent's culture (I don't think this is the case with Claire et al). We need to constantly reform. Which means we need people to function as reformers. Reformers can be annoying. But that is good. They can also be wrong – as I think is the case here.

2. However, we mustn't pursue reform imagining that if we can only minimize the public display of gender distinctives the world will love us and respect us and flock to hear us. I fear that this is often the motive of many (although I am not saying it is necessarily the motive of John). The question seems to be more about what will help us look more acceptable to our community and less 'off putting' rather than what will make us pleasing to the God who speaks so clearly to us in his word about the roles of men and women. We will often need to be about calling the world and our people to repentance rather than comfort.

3. We mustn't pursue this 'reforming against Scripture' process in a way that inadvertently makes it harder to fight other, greater biblical battles. If we are wrong about *didaskô* then we must wrestle over it. But as we do that we must take great care that we don't foster hostility towards a gender distinctive position, or even foster hostility towards godly Christian brethren that may appear to us to be more cautious and conservative. This is because *these* brethren are often the ones who are the only ones ready and willing to stand for critically important counter cultural positions – and have often have been for a long time. Honour them. Don't fuel hostility towards them

Creating greater hostility towards a gender distinctive position and towards brethren standing *for* this critical truth will only make it harder to deal with what is really a far greater issue in 20years time.

Some might suggest that winning the case for women preaching occasionally in church is so important that it is worth this collateral damage – greater hostility towards the gender difference view and greater hostility towards our more conservative brethren. I firmly disagree.

It is possible to win a battle but lose the war. Or – so to go about seeking to win a battle that we end up losing not only the battle but make it very much harder to fight the war (a more apt expression in this case).

I am for wrestling over the meaning of the words of Scripture and then working hard on thinking about our contemporary practices. Amen. But I am concerned that we must do this aware that the far greater issue today is persuading our people of the truth of what true equality looks like. And so, I want to speak of this smaller issue – how narrowly do we understand the word ‘teach’ – constantly working hard to strengthen the hand of any and all who are speaking with clarity about true equality.

I fear far too little attention has been given to this and we will reap terrible consequences in 20 years time.

Conclusion

After reviewing the definitions being offered for the word we translate ‘teach’ in 1 Tim 2:12 it is clear that it means ‘the authoritative, formal, ongoing instruction of God’s people, in God’s truth, from God’s word’. This is the only meaning that fits properly the immediate context and also the wider use in Paul and the NT. John’s two suggested meanings simply do not fit when considered carefully.

This therefore means that ‘teaching’ is an activity that can, does and ought to happen today. We aren’t confined to only being able to do something that is a close approximation to the first century practice or even a close analogy (John’s words). We are able to do the same thing they did – instruct people in the truths of God’s word so that the truth of it might be preserved and people might learn it, master it, and live it. Therefore Paul’s prohibition applies today as it did then.

And given the importance of ‘teaching’ to the life of the Christian community, we need more of this happening, not less. We ought to aim to have ‘teaching’ at least every week when God’s people gather. It is a great concern that churches might consider doing less ‘teaching’ so that a place can be given for “hearing her voice”.

Yes, we ought also see the importance of ‘hearing her voice’. I firmly agree with John on this (but I haven’t met anyone who differs with him—certainly the authors of WSB don’t). At our church we seek to find ways to bring to bear the gifts of all God’s people – men and women alike. And encourage women to participate equally in the speaking ministries – where appropriate and in line with the boundaries set by God’s word.²⁸

But we do this very conscious that the *great* pastoral need today is the countercultural presentation of the complementarity of men and women. Helping people appreciate *this* truth is so important that we are grateful for the biblical imperative that personifies it for us week by week in the fact that we only have men ‘teach’. It means our people can’t fudge or avoid. In this God has graciously provided us with a constant reminder of the need to come to terms with what it actually means to enjoy being equal but different – which is his perfect plan and design.

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²⁸ In our context we have also had godly and gifted women occasionally lead our services. I must say I do this cautiously and wouldn’t boldly assert that it is horrendous that other churches won’t have it. I say this because of the concern of the ‘authority’ side of Paul’s prohibition. It is at least very likely (I think certain) that Paul’s prohibition included authority as a separate though related concern. In that realm of uncertainty we are cautious in having women lead services and ensure they do it with some care. Grace doesn’t mean, in uncertainty, we step boldly forward and assume the least restrictive possible practice. Better to be back from the line than trying all the time to get as close as possible. I want to model care and caution. And instruct on cultural differences.