

Hearing Her Voice: A Biblical Invitation for Women to Preach. Revised Edition. By John Dickson. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014. 104 pages. Paperback, \$7.99.

Anglican scholar John Dickson, PhD, who labels himself a “broad complementarian” [p. 88, endnote 1], Senior Research Fellow of the Department of Ancient History, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, and Senior Minister at St. Andrew’s Roseville has written a useful, informative, and brief treatise wherein he argues his case for women giving sermons. Early in the text he reports that his own mind had changed on the subject [p. 11]. His thesis is echoed repeatedly throughout the essay and can be summarized as follows: “the specific activity Paul disallows women in 1 Timothy 2:12 does not refer to a general type of speaking based on Scripture. Rather, it refers to a specific activity found throughout the pages of the New Testament, namely *preserving and laying down the traditions handed on by the apostles*” [p. 12].

While Dickson must be commended for tracing the use of the word “teach,” he plainly builds his case mostly on semantics regarding the nature of the teaching in what appears to be a deliberate attempt to restrict, greatly, the *content* of what is taught, limiting it only and exclusively to *apostolic doctrine*, although he does admit that, “There are some uses of ‘teaching’ terminology in Paul that do not fit the pattern I have outlined” [p. 98, endnote 39] and, “It is plausible that broader meanings can be found than the one I have insisted for 1 Tim. 2:12” [p. 103, endnote 49]. By severely narrowing the scope of the content expressed by the word “teach,” the author hopes, in turn, also to narrow the scope of what the Bible disallows women to do, leaving virtually every other form of public communication in bounds for females, especially prophesying [p. 16] and exhorting [pp. 23, 49], which he believes are better descriptions of modern sermons than “teaching” is and only teaching, he says, is restricted to men [p. 17]. Yet, strangely, he admits that the three are not “strictly separate or that there is no significant overlap of content and function” [p. 24].

Moreover, his examples of women speaking in the New Testament and Old Testament are ineffective and consist of conjecture which intentionally exaggerates importance [Miriam was a leader *alongside* Moses and Aaron, p. 18]. Also, he conveniently skips over certain masculine words in Scripture he cites, eschewing inclusion in his exposition [“*brothers*” in Acts 13:15, p. 24 and “entrust to faithful *men*” in 2 Tim. 2:1-2 cited on p. 57], betraying at least traces of myopic vision. Further, he wrongly restricts the scope of a woman not exercising authority over a man in 1 Tim. 2:12 to “authority to teach” [p. 33] and does not appear to want to wrestle much with 1 Tim. 2:11.

Dickson’s principal apologetic is both [1] to limit the definition of “teach” and [2] that if the Bible does not expressly forbid a woman to preach or prophesy to men, or exhort men, then these are all allowed. By this logic, if the Bible does not specifically forbid consumption of tequila, whiskey, or cocaine they must all be allowable, for generic limitations in principle simply will not suffice, which is obviously a less than hermeneutically faithful conclusion.

Even if complementarians were to accept Dickson's primary thesis, it would be impossible to separate out teaching completely from preaching and exhorting, and he says as much when he writes, "I also think that *some* transmission of the apostolic deposit still goes on in every decent sermon" [p. 79]. So, if Dickson takes teaching to be banned for women speaking to men, yet admits some apostolic deposit finds its way into every modern sermon, he invalidates his own argument by confessing that the restrictive condition [no teaching] cannot be met. It simply is not possible to adopt such a rigidly provisional definition of "teach."

Lastly, while Dickson's book is helpful in familiarizing readers with a "broad complementarian" or "egalitarian" perspective, it demonstrates, albeit unconsciously, the impossibility of discarding or dismantling the plain sense of 1 Tim. 2:12 without *also* [1] significantly deconstructing word meanings [ala Jacques Derrida] in order to reconstruct definitions more favorable to the argument and without [2] neglecting to take seriously the masculine nouns and participles inspirationally utilized in the various biblical texts which are germane to the discussion of women preaching to men and/or exercising leadership over men.

Michael A. Cox, B.A., M.Div.B.L., D.Min.
Senior Pastor
First Baptist Church
Pryor, Oklahoma