

HOW CAN ONE GUY BE WRONG IN SO MANY WAYS?

A Reply to Matthias Media's *Women, Sermons and the Bible: Essays Interacting with John Dickson's Hearing Her Voice*

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Chapter 1

INITIAL REFLECTIONS

I remarked at the conclusion of *Hearing her Voice* that I hope to receive criticisms of my case for women giving sermons “cheerfully”. With the publication of Matthias Media’s *Women, Sermons and the Bible (WSB)* I was given the opportunity to test that sentiment. At one level, I read the book with gratitude. It is a compliment, in a roundabout way, to have six authors interact so directly with my argument.

But did the critique fill my life with good cheer? Not really. Of course, no criticism is pleasant. In this case, though, my dissatisfaction comes from knowing that *WSB* does not bring the clarity to this discussion that I hoped it would.

1. Some good arguments

This is not to say that there aren’t good insights in *WSB*, ones that give me pause and have clarified or challenged my thinking. I want to offer a few examples, before turning to what I regard as the clear deficiencies in the project.

The book starts well, with the kind of godly affection I would expect from Tony Payne, with whom I have had a long professional and personal association. Matthias Media was the only publisher back in 1991 who thought *Hanging in There*, my first book, had something salvageable in its pages.

Peter Tong's chapter is also surprisingly good. When I first saw that the book begins with a critique of social media, I feared this was going to be an example of ‘old media’ angst at the uncontrollable nature of ‘new media’. But Peter offers a thoughtful series of reflections, based on good evidence, about the limitations of Facebook, Twitter and blogs. It has caused me to rethink how I should best use social media, and it has given me fresh motivation to reclaim the medium, to the degree that it’s possible, for ‘the good’.

The book ends as well as it begins with a fair-minded chapter on the theology of complementarianism by Mark Thompson. It is an obvious weakness of mine that I rarely stop to think through matters in a systematic *theological* way. I am more comfortable with *biblical* and *historical* approaches to Christian thought. This chapter provides a framework I will consider further.

At the heart of *WSB* are three contributions from Dr. Claire Smith. One chapter confronts the meaning of *didaskō* (“teaching”), another argues that the old Testament certainly can be ‘taught’, and a third calls into question my claim that the New Testament’s “word of exhortation” is probably the closest equivalent to what we call a “sermon”. There are important insights in these chapters. For example, Claire is surely right to insist that “teaching” has an accepted meaning across Greek literature of the period: “an educational activity that causes people to learn”, is how she puts it in one place. As a keen linguist, she is correct in criticising me for saying that *didaskō* means “laying down the apostolic deposit”. If I were being more linguistically precise, I would have said that “teaching” *refers to* “laying down the apostolic deposit”. *Meaning* and *referent* are not the same thing. I happily accept this point of order.

At this point I want to acknowledge that some months ago I received a letter from Claire Smith in which she raised several concerns about my response to her work. Claire and I recently met to seek to resolve these issues. Upon reflection, I feel I was unfair to Claire in chapter 5 of my original rebuttal of *WSB* when I described her critique of the work of German scholar Klaus Wegenast as “mischievous” and an “attempt to discredit” him and me, expressions implying something underhanded on her part. These statements were understandably hurtful and offensive to Claire. I am genuinely sorry for that. I have apologised to Claire, which she has welcomed. In what follows, I have revised my reply by removing chapter 5 entirely and incorporating just a brief account of the Wegenast issue into the new chapter 5 (formerly chapter 6). I am glad for a lesson learnt and for the chance to make amends in a small way. Claire has asked me to add some words from her: “I am grateful for John’s attempts to restore fellowship and correct his mistakes. Needless to say, there remain significant differences of understanding between us. Indeed, I still believe that at numerous points he has misunderstood and misrepresented my arguments. Nevertheless, I welcome his apology and in the interests of peace, appeal to people not to enter into commentary about these latest developments, but to be grateful and prayerful for a brother and sister who, despite real and ongoing differences, are committed to pursuing reconciliation to the glory of God.” (16 February, 2015)

2. The decision to focus on the first edition

Some aspects of *Women, Sermons and the Bible* are disappointing. There are quibbles, naturally. Students of the Bible often come to different conclusions about the exact meaning of this or that verse. That’s fine. People will just have to read the respective arguments and come to their own judgements. Other aspects of *WSB*, however, tend to work against the goal of helping readers understand the respective arguments in their best light. In the remainder of this chapter, I will focus on one major flaw in *WSB*.

Matthias Media’s decision to “interact with the first edition” of *Hearing Her Voice* while only “noting along the way where modifications in the second edition are significant” is a deep disappointment to me as author and a great disservice to readers generally. The decision is defended in the introduction on the grounds that the first edition was thought (wrongly, as it turns out) to be the more widely available version. Thus, relegating discussions of the second edition to footnotes and an appendix seemed to the editors an appropriate way forward, especially since in their view the second edition was “not different in any substantial sense”. Again, this was a questionable editorial judgement.

On social media shortly before the release of the second edition I myself described it as, “just like the first, only 30% longer and harder to argue with!” When I made this quip I had no idea just how significant my modifications really were. I had gained helpful feedback on the first edition of the book between January and June 2013 (from friends and via social media). I changed my mind about a few things, and the second edition gave me a chance to update my argument, as well as clear up numerous potential misunderstandings. Only when I read *Women, Sermons and the Bible* did I realise just how significant my adjustments were. In fact, they leave the authors of *WSB* (half of them, anyway) shooting at targets that simply do not exist.

I can well understand how frustrating such a criticism must be for the editors of *WSB*. Matthias Media maintains that the book interacts fairly and accurately with both editions. But this is demonstrably untrue. A few examples will suffice.

On numerous occasions, *WSB* says I claim that “teaching no longer exists”, that “1 Tim 2:12 no longer applies”, and that the prohibition “became redundant”. Particularly striking is the bold assertion, “There’s nothing in the meaning of *didaskō* itself that suggests it has a use-by date (as there is with Dickson’s proposed revision of the word’s meaning). And there is no indication in the New Testament that the need for or responsibility of Christian leaders to instruct God’s people in God’s truth from God’s word would stop.” Indeed, not. I stopped counting at about 20 examples of this most unhelpful rendition of my argument. I don’t know how I could have made it clearer to readers that I certainly do believe “teaching” in the 1 Tim 2:12 sense continues today. Consider this statement from the conclusion of *HHV*, where I raise the viewpoint *WSB* says I hold, only to reject it:

Others may embrace my entire argument and conclude that no one “teaches” any more in the sense mentioned in 1 Timothy 2:12 and that, in any case, explaining and applying a Bible text is never called “teaching” in the New Testament. That activity is closer to “exhorting” (or “prophesying”). As a result, all sermons are open to suitable men and women. I think this is a plausible application of the biblical data. The only awkwardness that would remain is the one confronting those who think “prophesying” no longer exists: what do we do with the passages that read as though “teaching” will be an ongoing ministry of the church? I can think of several ways to respond, but it is a question to be faced.

I can imagine a third response (closer to my own current thinking). Some may conclude that, although the modern sermon cannot always be equated with what Paul calls “teaching” in 1 Timothy 2:12, some sermons today may be close analogies to the careful transmission of the apostolic deposit. On this view, sermons are seen on a spectrum: some are more like prophesying and exhorting and aim to urge obedience to Scripture or encourage confidence in God’s truth; others function more as a focused mandating of apostolic doctrine ... I continue to think Paul expected preaching itself to reflect the complementarity of the sexes. Adam was charged with being the protector of the first divine deposit (so I think Paul’s logic runs in 1 Tim. 2:12-13) and so male elder-teachers are charged with preserving the last divine deposit. Packer preserves this complementarity by restricting the priesthood to men (in his Anglican context). However, some will want to say that Paul wanted congregational preaching, not just congregational structures, to embody God’s complementary design for male-female relationships. Hence, sermons at the ‘mandating-of-apostolic-doctrine’ end of the spectrum—which I believe is not the typical Sunday sermon—ought to be preached by the (male) Senior Minister. It will perhaps be frustrating to some that I don’t intend to offer any examples of what such sermons involve. This is partly because my own thoughts are not fully formed and partly because I don’t want to be overly prescriptive (*Hearing Her Voice*. Zondervan, 2014, pages 83-84, see also 11, 77, 78 [103-105; see also 3, 94, 96 in the Australian print edition]).

I should point out that the appendix of *WSB* does acknowledge that I say teaching continues today—something those who only read the body of the book would never have imagined. But instead of reframing the whole approach of *WSB*, as it should have, this point is mocked for its seeming incoherence. In a particularly galling passage, *WSB* latches onto the opening statement from the above conclusion: “some may embrace my entire argument and conclude that no one “teaches” any more in the sense mentioned in 1 Timothy 2:12.” Since I say “my entire argument”, *WSB* imagines this might include the view that “no one teaches anymore”. This is a simple misunderstanding turned into an absurdity. The words “entire argument” *of course* refer to the biblical and historical lines of reasoning leading up to the conclusion. In other words, it's a reference to the case argued

throughout *HHV* that “teaching” refers to laying down the apostolic deposit, a deposit now fixed in the pages of the New Testament. Here at the conclusion of the book I am raising two different ways of *applying* this argument. One is to say that there is no more teaching, a view I raise and distance myself from. The other is to say that some sermons today, from the male elder, will function as a focused mandating of the apostolic deposit. This is the view I plainly hold, even if, as I say, “I don’t want to be overly prescriptive.” I think a more patient approach to my book would have produced a more accurate rendition of its content.

Just as unhelpful are the repeated assertions in *WSB* that I believe “teaching *excludes* Scripture and its exposition” or that “the Old Testament was *decisively excluded* from ‘teaching’.” Again, I stopped counting the references to this claim. It is true that I argue Paul’s usage of ‘teaching’ does not refer, *as its defining feature*, to expounding the Old Testament, but, as I say quite clearly in *HHV*, the Old Testament has an important role in teaching:

I would not dispute that ancient teachers were involved in something like exposition (of the Old Testament as well as the memorised or written apostolic traditions). I can well imagine that their teaching—i.e., their transmission of the apostolic deposit—was frequently augmented with *explanations* and *exhortations* on the basis of the traditions. However, that should not distract us from observing that the constitutive purpose of teaching, as distinct from explanation, prophesying, exhorting, and preaching, was, as I hope I have demonstrated already, to pass on the memories, rulings, and insights of the apostles (*HHV*. 101, [136-137 in the Australian print edition]).

And again:

For Paul, the Old Testament provides a supportive role for the task of laying down the apostolic “teaching.” That role is the one I have already mentioned in connection with 1 Timothy 4:13. The apostolic traditions are full of demonstrations that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. Studying the Jewish Scriptures, then, is hugely beneficial for Timothy’s task of laying down for his churches what the apostles have said (i.e., teaching). But this does not mean that teaching is expounding a Bible passage—as vital as exposition is for the health of the church (*HHV*. 101, [pages 61-62 in the Australian print edition]).

The jump from *HHV*’s argument that teaching is not *defined* by explaining Old Testament Scripture to *WSB*’s repeated claim that I “exclude” Scripture and its exposition from my account of teaching is not justified.

The same can be said for *WSB*’s persistent claim that my argument depends on “the arrival and greater availability of the completed canon” or that teaching “was only needed in the early church until all the books of the New Testament were written and made available as a ‘collection’.” Apparently, I argue that “since this activity [‘teaching’] has now ceased (with the closing of the New Testament canon), the prohibition on women doing this activity does not apply to our modern-day sermons.” (NB. The bit in round brackets within this quotation is part of the quotation). This version of my argument is a principal focus of *WSB*, but I openly reject this line of reasoning in *Hearing Her Voice*. For example:

It could be argued that there is something weird and inappropriate about using the production of the New Testament canon as a reason not to obey the clear command of a New Testament text (1 Tim. 2:12). But that would be to

misunderstand my argument. The key point is not that we don't need to prevent women from expounding God's truth now that we have the truth in a safe written form. What I am saying is that "teaching" in 1 Timothy 2:12 never referred to "expounding God's truth." It only ever meant preserving and laying down what the apostles had declared about the new covenant (*HHV*. 74 [90 in the Australian print edition]).

And then again more simply, "The point, therefore, is not that women can now "teach" because we have a fixed New Testament. Rather, it is that teaching never involved the many and varied things we do in a sermon" (*HHV*. 75 [91 in the Australian print edition]).

Many other, less significant, examples could be offered. For example, chapter 2 of *WSB* repeatedly makes the blanket claim that I say, "Women in complementarian churches are being prohibited not only from giving sermons but *also* from 'offering any extended speech in church', 'all forms of public speaking in church', and ultimately 'pretty much every type of speaking in church'." Not only do these partial citations of my words drop crucial modifiers like "sometimes" and "some", they leave readers unaware of the happy acknowledgement I make: "some may decide (afresh) to find ways to give women more of a voice in the church service, inviting them to give "talks," whatever we call them, designed to strengthen the faith of those present. I would be delighted with such a response and am glad to report that, independent of this book, some churches in my own Sydney Anglican context are doing just this" (*HHV*. 83 [103 in the Australian print edition]).

Readers of *Women, Sermons and the Bible* have a right to ask how well they have been served by this book. Matthias Media requested and received a copy of the revised version of *HHV* at the beginning of August 2013, a month before it was available to the public, nine months before *WSB* was published.

The original request from Matthias Media in July 2013 stated, reasonably enough, "I know you're keen for robust discussion and for serious and thoughtful responses to your argument, so in the spirit of all that I'm wondering whether you'd be willing to send us an advance PDF of your second edition? Just so that those who are writing are interacting with the most recent version and with your latest thoughts, rather than with outdated material." That made sense, so I agreed, and I sent the revision as soon as it was finished (5 August 2013). I don't think my question is unfair: How is it that those who were writing their responses to the first edition between January–July 2013 could not thoroughly revise their material in light of the second edition between August 2013 and April 2014? We are all busy people, but this debate deserves better.

I cannot see how the authors of *WSB* can claim to have defeated my argument—as they do often enough throughout the book—when I do not recognise my argument in their work? Independently of me, evangelical bishop-scholar Dr Tim Harris has noted the same thing: "I am disturbed that John Dickson really doesn't seem to have been portrayed in reasonable terms" and "I suspect Dickson would be most unsatisfied with how he has been represented (I would be!)."

In the next section I want to summarise the argument of *Hearing Her Voice*, before turning to engage directly with some of *WSB*'s key criticisms of my work.

Chapter 2

A SPECTATOR'S GUIDE TO WOMEN GIVING SERMONS: A summary of my argument

In my first chapter, I expressed some appreciation for the good things in *Women, Sermons and the Bible*, before criticising the editors' decision to base their critique on the first edition of *Hearing Her Voice*. *WSB* gives readers several wrong impressions about my thinking. Contrary to numerous statements in *WSB*: I *do* believe authoritative teaching continues today; I *do* believe the OT Scriptures have an important part in Paul's idea of "teaching"; I do *not* think 1 Tim 2:12 is redundant; my case for women preaching is *not* based on the fact that we have a closed canon of Scripture; and I certainly do *not* say complementarian churches have a blanket ban on women speaking in church. The fact that most of these points are conceded (or half-conceded) *only in the footnotes and an appendix* in *WSB* makes things doubly problematic. Matthias Media had access to my most recent thinking on these issues but did not let that shape the body of their critique.

Yet, as promised, I know I have to stop whinging about intellectual 'foul play' and will begin to respond to Matthias Media's more direct criticisms of my argument. In this chapter I begin with a simple restatement of my case as outlined in *Hearing Her Voice*. This will set the proper context for several significant things I want to say in reply to the arguments of *Women, Sermons and the Bible*.

The core of my argument for women giving sermons in church can be put in a single sentence:

Women may give at least *some* sermons in church because the activity Paul forbids to women in 1 Tim 2:12, called "teaching", is a special, authoritative form of speaking that cannot be equated with *all* sermons.

Whatever changes-of-mind and clarifications I offered in the second edition of *Hearing Her Voice*, this has been the centre of my argument from the beginning. Consider this important statement at the close of chapter 1 of *HHV* (edition 1 and 2):

If I invite my Women's Pastor to stand up after the Bible reading and in the power of the Spirit *exhort* my congregation for twenty minutes to heed and apply God's Word, how does this breach Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 2:12? She has given a "word of exhortation." Paul only forbids her to "teach." They are not the same thing. I will develop these ideas further, but I want to indicate at this point that this is close to the heart of my argument. If sermons were always only "teaching," I would have no problem excluding women from the pulpit. (That is precisely what I believed for the first decade of my ministry.) However, if sermons—even just *some* sermons—are closer to "exhortation" than they are to "teaching," what biblical grounds remain for excluding women entirely from this ministry? (*Hearing Her Voice*. Zondervan, 2014, §1.5, page 27, [§1.5, pages 24-25 in the Australian print edition]).

(NB. This statement appears *as is* in both editions of *HHV*, only with the words “in the power of the Spirit” added to the second edition)

Let me unpack the argument in four simple parts.

1. “Teaching” is different from “prophesying” and “exhorting”

My argument is that the activity Paul forbids to women in 1 Tim 2:12 (“teaching”, *didaskō*) is just one of a number of different types of speaking the apostle envisaged in churches. In Romans 12:4-8 he explicitly says that “prophecy”, “exhortation”, and “teaching” are three “different” functions in the body of Christ. There must be overlap between the activities, but there is enough of a difference—in authority, or content, or purpose—for the apostle to happily say they are “different” (*diaphoros*).

Once we acknowledge this point, it is striking that Paul plainly expects women to do *some* kinds of speaking, while plainly forbidding them from doing *one* kind of speaking. In 1 Corinthians 11:5 he talks happily of women “praying” and “prophesying” in church. In 1 Tim 2:12 he insists that women are not permitted to “teach” men.

This simple observation is the springboard for asking: What is “teaching”, and how does it differ from the other types of speaking? And, further, what correspondence is there between the modern “sermon” and the New Testament activities called “teaching,” “prophesying,” and “exhorting”?

2. “Teaching” is a specific activity in a specific context

We all agree that “teaching” cannot refer to *any* educational activity that causes people to learn (otherwise, we would frown on female university lecturers or management consultants). We all accept that Paul is referring to *teaching the truths of God*. In other words, it has a specific content. *WSB* goes further, arguing that Paul isn’t banning women from doing *all* teaching of God’s truth to men, but only the teaching that goes on *in the context of congregational worship*.

The upshot of this is that a word which usually has the general meaning of *transmitting knowledge from the learned to the learner*, is said to be employed in 1 Tim 2:12 in a more *specific* way to refer to teaching with a particular *content* (God’s truth) and in a particular *context* (the church service). This is why a woman can happily teach me in her *writings* but would not (sadly) accept my invitation to deliver material, even the same material, on a Sunday morning at my church.

As an aside, I am not so sure that Paul is talking specifically about the church service in 1 Tim 2:12. I used to think the reference in v.8 to “lifting holy hands in prayer” suggested that the apostle is describing a congregational context. But, of course, “lifting hands” to address God was the normal Jewish way of addressing God, whether corporately or individually (Psalm 28:2; 63:4). More to the point, the verses immediately before the prohibition on women teaching men are about the way women are to dress (vv.9-10). Does this, too, refer to gathered worship? Is Paul saying that women should dress modestly *only for church services*? I am more inclined to think that the injunction “I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man” is a blanket ban on women performing the role of the formal teacher in any setting—in church, in print, in small groups, or whatever. At one level, then, I guess that makes me more conservative on this issue than the authors of *WSB*.

The real point I want to make here is that *WSB* and I agree that 1 Tim 2:12 refers to a particular kind of “teaching”—a specific *content* in a specific *context*. Where we differ is that I have a *more specific idea* of the content of “teaching” and a *broader sense* of the context of “teaching”. Let me explain.

3. “Teaching” refers to transmitting the traditions of the apostles

Throughout *Hearing Her Voice* I have tried to show that Paul’s references to “teacher” (*didaskalos*), “teach” (*didaskō*), and “teaching” (*didaskalia / didachē*) have a special focus on *transmitting the apostles’ memories and rulings about Jesus and the new covenant* in a period when hardly any of it was written down. The noun “teaching” refers to the *content* of the apostolic traditions, the verb “teach” refers to the *activity* of instructing people in these traditions, and the noun “teacher” refers to the *personnel* set apart in the church to perform this authoritative duty (in Paul’s context this was the “elder”; in my Anglican context it is the “priest”). My outline of Paul’s usage—in *Hearing Her Voice* pages 64-85—seeks to establish this point, and I stand by it.

I described “teaching” throughout *Hearing Her Voice* as “laying down the apostolic deposit.” Teachers in Paul’s day—a time when there were no Gospels to read, and very few apostolic letters—were charged with making sure people learned this crucial body of material. This “deposit” (2 Tim 1:14; 2:2) formed the fundamental structures of the Christian faith.

In all of this, Paul’s background as a Pharisee shines through. Here’s where the history helps. We know beyond doubting that Pharisees had an ever-increasing body of teaching, separate from any instruction they gave about the Old Testament, called the “traditions of the fathers” (Paul explicitly refers to it in Gal 1:14, as does Jesus in Mark 7:4-9). Writing in *The Cambridge History of Judaism* (vol.3, p.409), Joachim Schaper, a specialist in ancient Judaism, describes the transmission of these non-written traditions as “the single most distinctive feature of Pharisaism.”

The early Christians were a bit like Pharisees in this regard. They had the written Old Testament, of course, but they also had loads of stories, instructions, creeds, and rulings from the apostles. How was this body of traditions, this “deposit”, maintained by Christians before the Gospels and epistles were written? It was transmitted by teachers, whose core role was to establish this “teaching” in the hearts and minds of believers. That is uncontroversial, and it is all you need to know of the history in order to see clearly what Paul is talking about when he says to Timothy, “the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust (verb “to deposit”) to reliable people who will also be qualified to *teach* others” (2 Tim 2:2). This is Paul’s special sense, his basic sense, of the task of “teaching”.

“Teaching” isn’t everything a Christian speaker might want to say to edify the church; it is the particular task of fixing these founding traditions in the minds of believers. This point has been made repeatedly for decades by leading New Testament specialists, including F. F. Bruce, James Dunn, Richard Bauckham, and even Tom Schreiner, just to name a few. In other words, seeing “teachers” principally as *custodians and transmitters of the apostolic traditions* is very widely accepted. If readers of *WSB* came away thinking it was a novel Dickson-construct, it is perhaps because the authors of the book have not sufficiently clarified these very important matters.

Now back to my argument.

4. Not every sermon is “teaching”

My case for women giving sermons is as simple as noting that “teaching”, understood this way, is only *one* of several different kinds of sermons you are likely to hear in the pulpit today. Not every sermon, in other words, is a focused transmission of the apostolic traditions. Other sermons will be more like “prophecy” or “exhortation”. My point—stated plainly in *Hearing Her Voice*—is that sermons today lie on a spectrum between “exhortation/prophecy”, on the one hand, and “teaching”, on the other. Since Paul only forbids women to “teach” men, it seems obvious to me (now) that sermons at the “teaching” end of the spectrum should be done by male elders, but sermons at the “exhortation/prophecy” end of the spectrum can be done by trusted men and women alike.

No doubt there is significant overlap between these activities. I say throughout *Hearing Her Voice* that “exhortation” will be *derived from*, or *based on*, the apostolic deposit, just as “teaching” will contain elements of exhortation. But this overlap does not make these activities the *same*. It is Paul himself who says that “teaching”, “prophecy”, and “exhortation” are “different” (Romans 12:4-8). It is Paul himself who freely expects women to do some kinds of speaking to men (1 Cor 11:5), while only forbidding women to do *one* kind of speaking to men (1 Tim 2:12).

“Teaching” *does* continue today. 1 Tim 2:12 *does* apply to modern sermons. I am just saying that 1 Tim 2:12 was never intended as a blanket ban on women offering sermons, for the simple reason that not all sermons are *focused acts of transmission of the apostolic deposit*. Many sermons function as *reflections* on that deposit for the purpose of inspiring trust or obedience to the Lord. These are more like “prophecy/exhortation” in Paul’s language, and women can and should be doing them.

With this brief statement of my argument in place, in the next chapter I will start by explaining why I feel *WSB*’s argument against “teaching as laying down the apostolic deposit” does not succeed. I will begin with one of the most powerful sounding criticisms in the book, repeated earnestly throughout: *Dickson is offering a new definition of didaskō, “teaching”, that cannot be found anywhere in ancient Greek literature or in the modern technical dictionaries*. I believe this line of argument highlights an unhelpful tendency in the whole approach of *Women, Sermons and the Bible*.

Chapter 3

MY OWN PRIVATE SEMANTIC REVOLUTION

In chapter 3 of *Women, Sermons and the Bible* we find several important criticisms of my argument. We are told that, taken together, these “effectively disprove Dickson’s whole theory”. In a later chapter (7) one of the editors enthusiastically agrees: “Dickson’s evidence for this proposal is vanishingly thin”, followed by his own personal judgement: “I confess I lack the courage to absolve myself from obedience to God’s word on a basis as insubstantial as this.”

This ‘victory’ language is misplaced. Whether or not I can convince readers that women should be able to give sermons in church, I think I can demonstrate that several of the seemingly most powerful critiques in *WSB* involve significant misunderstandings. The rest of this chapter will tease out one very significant example.

1. A new dictionary definition?

One of my strangest experiences reading *Women, Sermons and the Bible* was learning that my little book was trying to establish a new definition for the Greek word *didaskō* or “teach.” No longer did I accept the definition found everywhere in Greek literature and the scholarly dictionaries; I was apparently a trailblazer trying to start my own private semantic revolution. I stopped counting all of the references to Dickson’s “new”, “novel”, or “unattested” definition of the word. Consider these quotations from *WSB*:

John’s argument proposes a significant change to the way Christians, and students of ancient Greek, have historically understood the meaning of the word translated ‘teach’ in our New Testaments” (*WSB* chapter 3)

Hearing Her Voice effectively removes 1 Timothy 2:12 from the discussion of who should give sermons today on the basis of a new proposed meaning of the word ‘teach’ and its reference to a time-limited activity (*WSB* chapter 3)

Leaving aside that I do *not* think “teaching” is a “time-limited activity”, *WSB*’s key criticism of me here is that ancient Greek literature, including the New Testament, and the modern academic dictionaries do not attest a definition of “teaching” as “laying down the apostolic deposit.” Thousands of words are spent proving this in excruciating detail. The author concludes in a long passage worth absorbing for its self-assured tone:

This definition is at the heart of the book’s argument. In fact the language of ‘laying down and preserving’ occurs some 60 times. While it lacks clarity, and is put to various uses throughout the book, what is clear is that this meaning of ‘laying down and preserving’ is different from the accepted meanings of *didaskō* that we saw above in the history of the word and its use in the first century ... In fact, if generations past had understood *didaskō* to mean what Dickson claims it means, the consistent decision of translators in various languages to translate this Greek word as ‘teach’ is at best mystifying, since ‘teach’ and ‘laying down and preserving’ are in no way synonymous.

What Dickson is proposing is a *new meaning* of the word, one that is otherwise unattested in writings outside the New Testament or in translations of the Bible. His proposal marks a significant shift in the meaning of the word, so that it no longer refers to an educational activity that causes people to learn, but to an activity that preserves and lays down content. In short, his new definition focuses on the effect of the activity on the *content*, not on the interaction between teacher and student with resulting effect on the *one who is learning*" (*WSB* chapter 3 §3)

WSB is playing a high-stakes game here. From my perspective, the authors have made an obvious mistake and then heralded their misunderstanding as an argument. The fact that they give so much space to this particular line of reasoning has left me puzzled. Let me explain.

I said in chapter 1 that *WSB* is correct on the technical linguistic point that 'meaning' and 'referent' are not the same thing. If I had written *Hearing Her Voice* for scholars or the linguistically literate, I probably would have repeated a cumbersome expression like "the referent of *didaskō* in the Pastoral Epistles and elsewhere is instruction in the apostolic deposit with the result that it is laid down in the minds of learners." But in a popular book, such an arcane distinction would be a distraction. It is much clearer to say, as I repeatedly do say, that "by teaching Paul means laying down the apostolic deposit." The length to which *WSB* goes in order to demonstrate that Dickson's *new definition* can't be found anywhere in Greek literature or contemporary scholarship amounts to a enormous waste of mental energy (for the authors and their readers).

2. Special usage does not mean a new definition

Let me state it plainly: it never entered my mind that I was proposing (or that anyone would imagine I was proposing) a new *meaning* of the Greek word *didaskō*, "teach." I tried to make it plain near the beginning of *Hearing Her Voice* that all I was doing was outlining how Paul uses the word "teaching" in a particular way throughout his letters. Here is my best effort in *HHV* to head off the very misunderstanding into which *WSB* has fallen:

'Teaching' in the Bible can be used in a variety of ways. Its root or broad idea is the *transmission of truth from the learned to the learner*. But this does not mean that every instance of the term only has this broad sense, any more than 'tackle' only ever has its root sense. We have to be sensitive to how words are used in their particular context. Otherwise, we are leaving words way up the ladder of abstraction, devoid of practical substance. "Teaching" in the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus), and elsewhere in Paul's letters, usually has a technical or specific sense. It never leaves behind the abstract idea of transmitting truth (just as 'tackle' in Rugby does not contradict the broad meaning of the word) but it does focus that idea: "teaching" in the Pastoral Epistles refers to transmitting intact the new covenant words of the apostles (*Hearing Her Voice*. Zondervan, 2014, §1.5, page 31, [30 in the Australian print edition]).

I had really hoped that it was obvious from this paragraph that—however frequently I say "teaching means passing on the apostolic deposit"—I really just 'mean' that Paul is *using the word "teaching" in a specific way* throughout the Pastoral Epistles and elsewhere, and that we should pay attention to this, lest we miss exactly what he intends to forbid women to do in 1 Tim 2:12. This has nothing to do with dictionary definitions or semantic rules.

"Teaching" is, of course, *fundamentally an educational activity*: it is the process by which the learned (i.e., the "teacher") transmits the apostolic deposit to the learner. The

metaphor of “laying down” used throughout *Hearing her Voice* is simply a helpful (I thought helpful) picture of how important this activity was for Paul: without a teacher transmitting the apostles’ traditions in churches, the gospel would not be laid down effectively, and Christians would have nothing on which to take their stand. This concern is everywhere in Paul, but especially in the Pastoral Epistles:

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the *teaching* you have learned (Rom 16:7).

So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the *teachings* we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter (2 Thess 2:15).

[For this gospel] I was appointed a preacher and apostle and *teacher*, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have *heard* from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good *deposit* entrusted to you. (2 Tim 1:11–14).

And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to *teach* others also (2 Tim 2:2).

He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as *taught*, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound *teaching* and also to rebuke those who contradict it (Titus 1:9).

To point out the special force of the word “teaching” in Paul is not to attempt to rewrite the dictionaries, or to get Bible translators to stop using the English word “teaching” (I myself happily use the word “teaching” throughout the book). It is what every student of the Bible is doing all the time: noting carefully how biblical authors use words to convey their sense. When Paul uses the word “teaching”, he usually has the sense of transmitting the apostles’ traditions from the learned to the learner or, in the metaphor I still rather like, laying down the apostolic deposit. To point out that this “definition” is not found in the dictionaries is inconsequential, and it is baffling to me—and somewhat troubling—that *WSB* makes it a cornerstone of its argument.

3. Three witnesses in my defence

I have three expert witnesses to put forward in my defence.

First, with some awkwardness I need to point out that the revered master of ancient languages, whom the authors of *WSB* and I have all greatly esteemed for decades, refers to the “meaning of teaching” *on the back cover of Hearing Her Voice itself*. Professor Edwin Judge, arguably Australia’s most widely acclaimed classicist and historian, kindly read the manuscript of my second edition, offered helpful corrections and suggestions, and then wrote the following commendation for the book:

Paul, of course, has women “praying” and “prophesying” in the meeting. So, why not also “teaching”? Must one downplay or discard this ban? In this book, however, we learn that we have been missing the special force of that word anyway. With John Dickson, a careful researcher into the context and setting of the New Testament, we uncover its history. This is no mere “battle over words”. Apart from instinct and the bare data, all meaningful knowledge (i.e., “science”) is revealed through enquiry (i.e., “history”). The testimony of this gifted expositor convincingly

discloses the lost meaning of Paul’s “teaching”.
(Edwin Judge, Emeritus Professor of History, Macquarie University).

Do the authors of *WSB* imagine that Edwin Judge thought I was trying to launch my own private semantic revolution in Greek studies—redefining *didaskō*? Of course not. It is obvious that when he speaks of the “meaning” of teaching, he—*like me*—simply means “the special force of that word” in the context of the Pastoral Epistles. And when Prof Judge says that my book discloses the “lost” meaning of teaching, he doesn’t mean lost to scholars, only to the general public.

My point isn’t that Professor Judge happens to agree with my analysis of Paul’s use of the word “teaching”. I am simply pushing back to the authors of *WSB* with the observation that a world-authority on classical philology can himself happily speak of the “*meaning of Paul’s teaching*” without ever imagining someone would write thousands of words proving (to quote *WSB* again) that “this meaning of ‘laying down and preserving’ is different from the accepted meanings of *didaskō* that we saw above in the history of the word and its use in the first century” (*WSB* chapter 3 §3). This entire line of criticism is misguided.

Craig Blomberg of Denver Seminary likewise offered helpful corrections for the second edition of *Hearing Her Voice* and then wrote the following blurb:

Dickson has recognized the very limited, technical sense of "teaching" in many ancient religious contexts, including Christian ones, especially Paul, and consistently in the Pastoral Epistles. Applying this recognition to 1 Timothy 2:12, he has convincingly demonstrated that even a conservative complementarian has no exegetically based grounds for preventing women from delivering sermons.
(Craig Blomberg, Distinguished Professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary)

Again, my point is not that Blomberg agrees with my argument. This is not an attempt to pit J.I. Packer, Edwin Judge, and Craig Blomberg against Claire Smith, Tony Payne, and Peter Bolt. I am just trying to emphasize that these world renowned specialists, who possess all of the linguistic skills of the authors of *Women, Sermons and the Bible*, had no difficulty comprehending that *Hearing Her Voice* was making *no* claim to offer a new definition for *didaskō*. It was simply recognising, as Blomberg puts it, “the very limited, technical sense of "teaching" in many ancient religious contexts, including Christian ones, especially Paul, and consistently in the Pastoral Epistles.” My account of “teaching” is old—standard—even if its application to the debate about women’s ministry seems new.

Independently of all this, the evangelical scholar-bishop Tim Harris has also noted how puzzling *WSB*’s preoccupation with all this is. In his own review of *WSB*, he writes:

What at first appears as a significant response undermining Dickson’s argument is in large measure because [Claire] Smith has redrawn the playing field and relocated the goal posts. The cornerstone of Smith’s analysis is the claim that Dickson has proposed a novel and otherwise unattested ‘meaning’ for *didaskō* as ‘laying down and preserving’, and opens the way for a detailed discussion of semantic meaning and lexical domains (Smith, 91). I have argued that Smith is mistaken in framing the debate in this way, and that Dickson appears to be using ‘meaning’ in a looser sense than strict semantic analysis.

A simple test can be applied, which substantially undermines her critique. In Part 2 of Dickson’s book (*HHV-R*), Dickson continues to use the standard gloss for *didaskō*, ‘to teach’ (26, and throughout this section). Dickson does not appear to be

proposing a different ‘meaning’ for *didaskō* at all, but arguing for a *specific type of teaching* understood in this context, at this time. If Dickson is rejecting ‘to teach’ as the semantic meaning, he would surely have stopped using it as his gloss. In other words, contrary to Smith, the debate is not a matter of *semantic meaning*, but contextual interpretation regarding the *specific type of teaching* in view in 1 Tim. 2:12. (<http://newanglicanism.tumblr.com/post/87881438705/part-3-a-critique-of-women-sermons-and-the-bible>)

Harris puts my point perfectly and, yet, the authors of *WSB* pursue the point relentlessly: *Dickson proposes a new, unattested definition of teaching*, they say. I do not, and their point does not become more forceful through mere repetition.

4. A curious case

This particular criticism arrives at a curious point in a long section in chapter 3 of *WSB*, in which the author criticises my use of the work of the German classical philologist and Pauline scholar Klaus Wegenast. I will say more about *WSB*’s criticisms of Wegenast in chapter 5. For now I just want to note that having conceded this scholar provides some apparent support for my case, the author then suggests that, unlike Wegenast, Dickson is trying to change the semantic *meaning* of “teaching”:

It is also worth noting that Wegenast does not say that *didaskō* means ‘laying down and preserving the apostolic deposit’ (as Dickson says it does). Wegenast claims that in the Pastorals and 2 Thessalonians, in particular, *didaskō* means “*to teach* in the sense of handing down a fixed body of doctrine *that must be mastered* and then preserved intact. That is, unlike Dickson, Wegenast recognises that *didaskō* still means “teach”, and that the content was to be “mastered” or learned (*WSB*, chapter 3 §4).

But Wegenast is saying precisely what I am saying (which is why I quoted him). It is exactly what Professors Judge, Packer, and Blomberg knew perfectly well I was saying: yes, *didaskō* is an educational term with the basic meaning, *to transmit truth from the learned to the learner*, but when Paul uses it in the Pastoral Epistles (and elsewhere) he employs it with the special sense of “handing down a fixed body of doctrine,” as Wegenast puts it, “that must be mastered and preserved intact.” When Paul forbids women to “teach” men (1 Tim 2:12), he is not preventing them from offering biblical exhortations (or prophecies) derived from the apostolic deposit. He is insisting that only certain men (male elders) are authorized to ensure that believers master and preserve intact the fixed body of apostolic traditions. Since that is *not* the purpose of every Sunday sermon, it seems obvious to me that there is a strong case for inviting women to give (at least some) sermons in church.

The way the authors of *WSB* fixate on “meaning”, and then use this to demonstrate that my alleged new linguistic definition of “teaching” fails, is a highly implausible and unproductive strategy. Yet, it lies at the heart of their argument.

Chapter 4

MY ‘HIGHLY MISLEADING’ USE OF JOSEPHUS

One of Matthias Media’s recurring criticisms of my *Hearing Her Voice: a Case for Women Giving Sermons* is that I artificially inflate the appearance of academic support for my various arguments. In this regard, I am frequently described as *misleading* (x 8), a word that is difficult to read in contemporary English in a morally neutral way.

In this chapter I want to examine one such case—my use of the ancient Jewish writer Flavius Josephus. It is an example close to my heart, because the Jewish background of the New Testament has been my principal academic focus for the last 15 years, from my doctoral research on Paul in Second Temple Judaism to my most recent academic article on “Gentiles in the New Testament” (*Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*, edited by Dale C. Allison, vol.10. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015). So you can imagine my alarm when I learned that I might have been “highly misleading” in my discussion of one of the most important sources for first-century Judaism.

1. The offending paragraph (in the first edition of my book)

Early in my argument that “teaching” for Paul is intimately connected with preserving and passing on the oral traditions of the apostles, I quote the first-century Jewish writer Flavius Josephus to illustrate the Jewish context of Paul’s concept of the role of the “teacher”. Out of this one paragraph (which, incidentally, only appears in the *first* edition of *Hearing Her Voice*), Matthias Media is able to make two pages of serious criticisms. Here’s what I originally wrote:

The first Christians inherited this practice of oral tradition from their Jewish environment. Jewish “teachers” in the period were charged with memorizing and repeating the rulings of the previous rabbis. The first-century Jewish historian and Pharisee Josephus tells us that “the Pharisees had passed on to the people certain regulations handed down by former generations and not recorded in the Laws of Moses.” This was the heart of Jewish “teaching” in the New Testament period: preserving and repeating the memorised traditions of the most important rabbis (*HHV*, first edition, 2.3)

On the basis of this quotation, *WSB* offers two very striking criticisms of me (they actually offer four criticisms but I regard two of them as redundant in light of my third chapter).

(1) First, *WSB* insists (apparently contra Dickson) that Josephus is not offering a “detailed description of a universal practice of the Jews in the first century.” He is simply highlighting the difference between Pharisees (who valued oral tradition) and Sadducees (who valued only written Scripture). This, we are told, is “a very different point from the one Dickson is making” (*WSB*, chapter 3, §A1). In other words, I supposedly claim Josephus was describing the *universal Jewish practice* when in context it is clear he is only describing a Pharisaic distinctive.

This first criticism is off target, and I can offer a brief reply before detailing and replying to the second criticism.

It should be clear to readers of *Hearing Her Voice* that I am talking about the context of *Paul's* concept of “teaching” as a former Pharisee. If that’s the case, all that readers really needed to know was that Josephus said that a defining feature of Pharisaism was *passing on fixed oral traditions*. This is a thoroughly uncontroversial observation, and the text I quote (Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.297) is one of several well-known pieces of evidence. To suggest that I was trying to pass this off as the “universal practice of the Jews” seems contrived, and it is surely beside the point. My line of reasoning is plain: Pharisees passed on oral tradition; Paul was a former Pharisee; his notion of “teaching” probably reflected Pharisaic practices. I am pretty sure this is clear even in the brief “offending paragraph” of the first edition (it is doubly so in light of the second edition, as I’ll explain later).

(2) The second criticism sounds much more serious. *WSB* claims that my inverted commas around “teachers” and “teaching” in the paragraph containing the Josephus quotation are improper. Why? Because the Greek term *didaskō* (“teaching”) does not in fact appear in Josephus’ original quotation. Thus, “it is highly misleading that *Hearing Her Voice* has ‘teachers’ and ‘teaching’ in quotation marks as if Josephus had used *didaskō* for this activity of passing on traditions.” For at least two reasons, I find this a disappointing criticism for *WSB* to make.

2. On the use of “inverted commas”

I had to read the second criticism several times to make sure I wasn’t imagining things or being overly sensitive. *WSB* asks us to imagine that I used inverted commas around “teaching” in the paragraph citing Josephus in order to make my readers think Josephus used the Greek term *didaskō* in his quotation.

Do I really need to point out that inverted commas have three standard uses, according to the Oxford English Dictionary and common practice?

(1) to mark a quotation;

(2) to indicate the beginning and end of the title of a work;

(3) to indicate special or jargon words that are under discussion (such as when I refer to “oral tradition”, “technical term”, “Torah”, or “teaching”).

Surely it is obvious that my inverted commas around “teachers” and “teaching” in the offending paragraph are used in this third sense! A glance through *Hearing Her Voice* makes plain that I use “teaching/teach/teachers” with inverted commas on most pages of the book. For the authors of *WSB* to misunderstand all this, and then describe me as “highly misleading” (as if I were tricking readers into thinking Josephus used *didaskō*), seems neither reasonable nor fair. I admit to being mildly offended that a fellow Christian scholar and long-term friend would so readily jump to a most uncharitable, and utterly implausible, interpretation of my words.

3. On the use of the first edition (again)

All of this is made worse by the fact that my heavily criticised paragraph *does not even appear in the second edition of Hearing Her Voice*.

In the second edition of my book, I significantly enlarge the discussion of Josephus and the Pharisees—making *WSB*'s first criticism described above seem petty and irrelevant. One result of my changes is that those “highly misleading” inverted commas around “teaching” don't appear at all in the paragraph containing the quotation from Josephus. (This isn't because I thought better of it; it never entered my mind that someone would imagine I could use inverted commas deceptively. It's just that I don't happen to use the jargon word “teaching” in those few sentences.)

Let me quote the relevant portion of *Hearing Her Voice* (second edition). Not only does it make plain(er) that I am talking *specifically about Pharisees* (not the *universal* Jewish practice: *WSB*'s first criticism), it also shows several examples of my frequent use of inverted commas to indicate jargon words (like “customs”, “stories”, “sayings”, and “teaching”):

The first Christians inherited the practice of “passing on” and “receiving” traditions from their Jewish environment. Jewish “teachers” in the period were charged with carefully transmitting the practices, prayers and rulings of the previous rabbis. Some of these traditions were simple “customs”, such as how to wash your hands before a meal. Others mandated ritual or liturgical elements, like the correct time and way to say the *shema* (the central creed of Judaism). Still other traditions involved recalling important “sayings” or “stories” of the great sages of Judaism, some of which are reminiscent of episodes in the Gospels, and which usually had some legal implication. Take the following vignette about Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa who was a direct contemporary of the apostle Paul: “When he would pray for the sick he would say “This one shall live” or “This one shall die.” They said to him, “How do you know?” he said to them, “If my prayer is fluent, then I know that it is accepted and the person will live. But if not, I know that it is rejected and the person will die.”

The main custodians of these Jewish traditions were the Pharisees. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus, a Pharisee himself, makes this plain, using an important term the New Testament also employs for both *Jewish* and *Christian* oral transmission: “The Pharisees passed on (*paradidōmi*) to the people certain regulations handed down by a succession of fathers and not recorded in the Laws of Moses, for which reason they are rejected by the Sadducean group, who hold that only those regulations should be considered valid which were written down, and that those derived from the traditions (*paradoseis*) of the fathers need not be observed. And concerning these matters the two parties came to have controversies and serious differences.”

Passing on the oral “traditions of the fathers” not contained in the writings of Moses was “the single most distinctive feature of Pharisaism,” writes Joachim Schaper in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, and it was through the synagogues, he points out, that these traditions gained wide influence, for “the synagogue was a thoroughly Pharisaic institution” (*Hearing Her Voice*. Zondervan, 2014, pages 38-39 [40-41 of the Australian print edition]).

Given that the authors of *WSB* had the manuscript of the second edition of my book before other readers, nine months before their own book came out, their entire string of criticisms at this point is a very unhappy example of the problem I have mentioned before. The criticism of the *first* edition was already unfair and implausible; to retain the criticism so long after the release of the second edition seems all the more so. And it is only

compounded by the fact that *WSB* acknowledges my changes to the second edition in the footnotes and the appendix of *WSB*. This is not a normal mode of argument.

4. Why my use of Josephus should not seem odd

Finally, it is worth noting that the precise line of argument I offer in *Hearing Her Voice* is also commended by Professor Richard Bauckham in his acclaimed *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*. In the following quotation, the British New Testament specialist describes the role of “teachers” in Paul’s letters (citing the very passages where “*didaskalos/teacher*” appears) as similar to the Pharisaic practice of “passing on tradition”, as outlined by Josephus. In a section of his book headed “Pauline Evidence for Formal Transmission”, Bauckham writes:

[W]e know that there were persons expressly designated as teachers in the Pauline churches (Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28-29; Gal 6:6; Eph 4:11), as in other parts of the early Christian movement (Acts 13:1; Heb 5:12; Jas 3:1; Didache 15:1-2). James Dunn, in spite of his adoption of Bailey’s model, stresses their role as, so to speak, local storehouses of the traditions. Did Paul’s transmission of tradition ignore the special role of designated teachers within the community?

A parallel in what Josephus says about the Pharisees is illuminating: “I want to explain here that the Pharisees passed on (*paredosan*) to the people (*tō demo*) certain ordinances from a succession of fathers (*ek paterōn diadochēs*), which are not written down in the laws of Moses ...” [Bauckham gives the long form of the quotation, as I do above].

In the light of Josephus’s general usage, Steve Mason argues that he has borrowed the phrase “from a succession of fathers” from the Pharisees’ own usage. The term “succession” (*diadochē*) was commonly used with reference to the Hellenistic schools of philosophy ... It is clear that “the fathers” from whom the Pharisees received their traditions were not the people in general, but a chain of individual teachers. We should imagine something like the chain of succession later defined in Pirqu ’Avot: “Moses received the Law from Sinai and committed it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets committed it to the men of the Great Synagogue,” after which follows a list of individual sages (Simeon the Just, Antigonus of Soko, et al.) who transmitted it from the men of the Great Synagogue down to Hillel and Shammai (m. ’Avot 1:2-12).

[In passing I want to note that I, too, in *Hearing Her Voice* cite the parallel of Mishnah ’Avot in precisely the way Bauckham does above. I get criticised for this as well in chapter 6 of *WSB*, where the author—someone well acquainted with New Testament scholarship—calls any analogy between first-century Pharisaic/Pauline notions of tradition and that of the Mishnah a “blind alley” of out-of-date scholarship, a point repeated with great effect throughout the chapter. I will simply reply that Richard Bauckham is widely regarded as a central figure in today’s scholarly discussion of oral tradition in early Christianity. Moreover, precisely the same connections between Paul’s concern for traditions and the concern for traditions in Mishnah ’Avot are made by my own New Testament teacher Peter O’Brien (*Colossians-Philemon. Word Biblical Commentary*. Thomas Nelson, 1982, 105). But back to the Bauckham quotation. He continues ...]

The important point for our purposes is that Josephus uses the language of “passing on” tradition both for the transmission from one teacher to another and also for the transmission from the Pharisees to the people. The fact that the

Pharisees taught the traditions to the people in general is entirely consistent with the fact that Pharisaic teachers received the traditions from earlier teachers and taught them to pupils who in turn became part of the chain of transmission. Similarly, the fact that, in one sense, Paul transmitted traditions to each Christian community as a whole and expected the whole community to recall them when he alludes to them is quite consistent with the probability the he also transmitted the traditions to a few designated persons in each community, people with the skills and gifts necessary for preserving the traditions and for being a resource for the traditions that belonged to the community as a whole. Thus, even within the Pauline communities, we should reckon with the role of specially authorized guarantors of the traditions (Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*. Eerdmans, 2006, 269-70).

The authors of *Women, Sermons and the Bible* are, of course, entitled to see things differently, to believe that there is no genuine connection between the activity of Paul's "teachers" and the Pharisees' "handing on of tradition", as described by Josephus. The point of quoting Bauckham at length—and I could have quoted many others—is simply to highlight that my line of argument is far from unusual. And it certainly isn't misleading.

Women, Sermons and the Bible introduces its criticisms of my use of Josephus with the words, "this is misleading in several respects", and it concludes with, "instead of supporting Dickson's argument, the evidence from Josephus goes against it." I believe an analysis of the criticisms found between these two strident remarks reveals that *WSB* has engaged in poor quality arguments and poor *modes* of arguing.

Chapter 5
MY 'VANISHING' SUPPORT:
How my scholarly supporters
are made to disappear

In this chapter I want to highlight what I regard as the unusual way *Women, Sermons and the Bible* (WSB) attempts to undermine my use of some leading scholars whose work, in varying degrees, provides support for my case: Professors Klaus Wegenast, James Dunn, Howard Marshall, Edwin Judge, and the former Archbishop of Sydney Donald Robinson. *WSB* claims that I have relied on unreliable scholarship in the case of Wegenast, or that I have misrepresented the views of these luminaries. Indeed, apparently, some of these experts “contradict” what I say. As if by magic, then, *WSB* makes my supporters vanish one-by-one.

But I am confident I can show that these claims are mistaken. Indeed, two of the scholars in question (Dunn and Marshall) have described *WSB*'s statements about me as “surprising” and “misguided”.

WSB is not a reliable guide in these important matters, and frequently overreaches. The zero-sum, all-or-nothing strategy adopted throughout the book does not serve the debate well and, ultimately, undermines the *WSB* project itself. Those who were hoping for a genuine argument about women, sermons, and the Bible are given something less satisfactory.

But first, a general comment about the interesting stance *WSB* adopts in its discussion of my scholarly supporters.

1. Platform mentality

There is what you might call a ‘platform mentality’ evident throughout *WSB*, especially in the sections responding to my claims of scholarly support. We often see platform thinking in church circles, where, for example, inviting a guest speaker onto your platform is seen as a wholesale endorsement of the speaker’s viewpoint or as evidence that the speaker himself wholly endorses the platform. This mode of thought has a place in Christian ministry (sometimes *too much* place), but it is entirely inappropriate in scholarship and critical thinking generally, where arguments, not platforms, ought to be the focus.

If Scholar A makes one or two points that support what Scholar B says, Scholar B is perfectly free to rely on Scholar A to the extent that the arguments are supportive. It doesn’t matter at all if Scholar A has a third point that doesn’t agree with Scholar B. That would only become relevant if the third point formally contradicted Scholar B’s use of Scholar A, or if Scholar B quoted Scholar A misleadingly, out of context. Put more simply: Bob should be able to cite Jane on their one or two points of agreement without some overly anxious third party chiming in with the observation that Jane disagrees with Bob on some other aspect of the argument, as if this undermined Bob’s case. That would be ‘platform thinking’.

WSB thinks it is significant that certain scholars have views or emphases that do not support my case, but this way of thinking has no place in such arguments. I can happily concede, for instance, that Donald Robinson believed “teaching” included exposition of OT Scripture, without it diminishing my reliance on his fundamental insight that “teaching” in the New Testament is focused on transmitting and defending the apostolic “deposit of the faith”. Again, James Dunn may argue that ancient “teachers” *extrapolated* and *applied* the Jesus traditions to fit the circumstances—not just transmitted them—but this doesn’t mean I should not draw on his *principal* insight that the main role of the “teacher” in the first century was to be a “walking reference library” of the stories and teachings of Jesus. This is normal scholarly practice, and platform thinking has no place in it.

All of that said, *WSB* sometimes inaccurately describes the differences between my views and those I cite for support. In the cases of James Dunn and Howard Marshall, these scholars have offered their own judgements below on whether I have misrepresented their views and whether their views contradict mine, as *WSB* claims.

The first example of *WSB*’s critique of my scholarly support is in some ways the most dramatic and the easiest to refute.

2. Klaus Wegenast

WSB chapter 3, §A [iv], discusses my reliance on Professor Klaus Wegenast, a German philologist and Pauline scholar who wrote several entries on key Greek terms for “teaching” in one of the standard academic dictionaries, the four volume *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)*. All students of theology know and consult this classic, and it has just now been given a new lease of life in a comprehensive revision (Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vols.1-5. Zondervan, Nov 2014). In his entry on the Greek word *didaskō* (“teach”), Klaus Wegenast says that in the Pastoral Epistles the term “teaching” frequently refers to “handing down a fixed body of doctrine that must be mastered and then preserved intact” (*NIDNTT* vol.3, 759-765). This is pretty much what I argue throughout *Hearing Her Voice*.

WSB makes three claims about Klaus Wegenast: **(1)** that he reads the evidence of the Pastoral Epistles *through the “lens” of a “liberal construct”* (that Paul did not write these epistles); **(2)** that the editor of this major theological dictionary (Colin Brown) took the “unusual step” of “inserting an editorial comment” to alert readers to the allegedly questionable nature of Wegenast’s views; and **(3)** that the editor even points readers to another article (written by Colin Brown himself) which *WSB* claims “rejects the construct behind Wegenast’s views” (thus contradicting Dickson’s work).

I don’t think any of these claims is valid. Those who want to verify the facts will need to read Wegenast’s entries for themselves. There is no other way to resolve such a *he-said-she-said* sort of argument.

Concerning Wegenast’s liberal construct, *WSB* says:

Wegenast, like Dunn, is among those who accept this liberal construct, and so he is disposed to see a particular concern for ‘tradition’ and its preservation in the Pastorals, whether it is there or not. It is, of course, a circular argument. It begins with the dictum that the Pastorals are particularly concerned with handing down and preserving tradition, and then reads the letters in that light, and, as might be expected, finds the evidence to support the original dictum (*WSB*, chapter 3, §A [iv]).

Though he does not argue so in these entries, it wouldn't be surprising if Wegenast did think someone other than Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles (sadly, that's the majority view). But to say that this is what leads him to see evidence of an increased concern for handing on tradition is to get things entirely the wrong way around (it is because scholars notice this evidence that they doubt Pauline authorship, not vice-versa). *WSB* aside, I don't know any scholarship that doubts there is a heightened emphasis in these epistles on the 'fixed body' of teaching. The evidence for this is "undeniable", argues Thomas Schreiner, Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (*Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*. IVP, 2006, 388-91). Evangelicals don't usually deny this evidence; nor do they accuse liberals of 'circular reasoning' or 'liberal constructs'. They just provide better explanations of the evidence (as Schreiner does): for example, that the Pastorals show a greater interest in the 'fixed body' of teaching because Paul is nearing the end of his life, or because he was writing to a colleague entrusted with this body of traditions. To dismiss Wegenast's account of the evidence as the mere result of a "liberal construct" is baseless and, I think, inappropriate.

WSB's second criticism of Wegenast's work appears dramatic: "In fact, Wegenast's views are so questionable that in a later part of the same article, the editor of the dictionary takes the unusual step of inserting an editorial comment to alert readers to the controversial nature of Wegenast's views, and directs readers to another article that rejects the construct behind Wegenast's claims" (*WSB*, chapter 3, §A [iv]). If readers of *WSB* thought this editorial insertion from Colin Brown had anything to do with what Wegenast says about *didaskō* ("teach"), they would be mistaken, though understandably. The insertion has nothing to do with "teaching". It appears in a different entry (p.774) and is inserted into a paragraph where Wegenast is claiming that Paul's notion of *passing on tradition* (*paradidōmi*) was less strict than that of Jewish rabbis of the day.

This is why *WSB*'s third claim against Wegenast's work (and therefore mine) has to be challenged. The article which Colin Brown, as editor, points readers to does not argue "the Pastoral Epistles do not have any increased preoccupation or concern with the handling of traditions" (*WSB*, chapter 3, §A [iv]). It says no such thing. It rather highlights the "strong evidence that the process of formulating Christian truth began at a much earlier stage" (*NIDNTT* vol.3, 61). In other words, the great concern for 'tradition' undeniably present in the Pastoral Epistles can *also* be found in nascent form in Paul's earliest letters. Whatever *WSB* achieved by its unflattering remarks about Wegenast's reasoning, it is simply untrue to suggest that Wegenast's description of *didaskō* in the Pastoral Epistles was ever regarded as "controversial" by Colin Brown or anyone else in the *NIDNTT*. His views have stood the test of time. Indeed, they are nicely *emphasised* in the concluding statement of the revised dictionary entry on *didaskō*: "The striking usage of this word group in the Pastorals shows that no tension was felt between (1) the gospel, constantly preached afresh, and (ii) doctrine to be learned, kept pure, and defended against heresies. Indeed, 'to teach' involves passing on a tradition that is more or less fixed, as is stressed also by the term *parathēkē*, 'that which is entrusted'" (Moisés Silva, *NIDNTTE*, vol.1, Nov 2014, 715).

3. James Dunn

Women, Sermons and the Bible says there are "problems with Dickson's appeal to the work of James Dunn" (*WSB* chapter 3, §A [iv]). Professor Dunn is universally regarded as one of the most important New Testament specialists in the English-speaking world. Anyone who has tracked my work over the years, from *The Christ Files* to today, will have seen his name many times. He has published numerous major New Testament commentaries and monographs, and since his 2003 *Jesus Remembered* he has become

a leader in discussions about “oral tradition” and the “historical Jesus”. It is in this context that I cite Dunn in *Hearing Her Voice* to underline how “teachers” in Paul’s day were tasked primarily with *transmitting the apostolic traditions of and about Jesus*.

Imagine my surprise, then, to discover from *WSB* that Dunn apparently disagrees with me: “not only can Dunn *not* be drawn upon to support Dickson’s thesis, he actually *contradicts* key claims Dickson is making”; “Dunn’s work disagrees with Dickson’s theory” (chapter 3, §A [iv]). This uncompromising claim sounds forceful but it is well off-target.

The aspect of Dunn’s research that is meant to contradict my argument is his insistence that ancient “teachers” offered *Christian interpretations of the Scriptures*. *WSB* latches onto this idea as a knock-down argument against my insistence that “teaching” in Paul does not, as its defining feature, refer to *exposition of Scripture* but to transmitting the apostolic traditions.

I am tempted to dismiss this part of *WSB*’s claim simply as another example of ‘platform thinking’, as if finding a difference between Dunn and Dickson at one point undermines Dickson’s use of Dunn at another. But the misunderstanding runs deeper. On the one hand, I actually say what *WSB* insists I *don’t* say about “teaching” and “Scripture”. And, on the other, Dunn *doesn’t* quite say what *WSB* wants him to say about “teaching” and “Scripture”. *WSB* forces Dunn and Dickson apart, when our views on “teaching” and “Scripture” are in fact quite similar.

WSB manages to find statements from Dunn’s works that sound as though he reckons ancient teachers had *two* defining duties: (1) to hand on Jesus traditions and (2) to expound the written Scriptures. Even if this *were* Dunn’s point, I would be within my rights to accept his first point and reject his second. As I say, platform thinking has no place in such discussions. It would be quite normal to draw on one major aspect of a scholar’s findings without accepting some other facet. But *WSB*’s claim is even more problematic. Dunn does *not* say that teachers expounded the Scriptures as a constitutive part of their role. He says that they offered Christological “interpretations” of the OT Scriptures in the context of presenting the oral gospel traditions. *WSB* may wonder “what is interpretation if not exposition?” (chapter 3, §A [iv]), but such ponderings are easily answered by looking carefully at Dunn’s work.

Dunn means that early Christian teachers in the course of their work of instructing people in the new covenant, showed how the Jesus tradition brings to fulfillment the Scriptures of Israel. Teachers did not take biblical books and expound them in anything like the way we do now. They rather laid down the material about Jesus showing how he is the climax of God’s covenant story. Indeed, Dunn thinks the best indication of exactly how Christian teachers dealt with the Old Testament Scriptures is to look at the way the Gospels themselves employ the Scriptures of Israel. I couldn’t agree more. The content of the Gospels is the most important evidence of what “teaching” in the early churches looked like. And what do we see? Plenty of Christian interpretation of the Old Testament as a key aid to telling the story of Jesus (the gospel), but nowhere do we see “exposition of Scripture” *per se*. Christian interpretation of the OT Scriptures is of course part of the New Testament idea of “teaching”, as I state several times in my book (e.g., *Hearing Her Voice*. Zondervan, 2014, pages 44-45, 51-55 [48-49, 60-64 in the Australian print edition]). But this does not mean that Scriptural exposition *per se* was a constitutive part of their task.

WSB is doubly mistaken: it *underplays* the role I give to Old Testament interpretation within teaching and *overstates* the role Dunn gives to Old Testament interpretation. In truth, Dunn and I are saying basically the same thing.

Dunn has read my account of his views in *Hearing Her Voice* (and above) and *WSB*'s claim that we contradict each other, and he has given me permission to quote him: "I see nothing in what you have written which 'contradicts' what I have written – and confess to some surprise that anyone could read what I have written as doing so" (email, July 2014).

4. Howard Marshall

Howard Marshall is another British New Testament exegete and the author of one of the major scholarly commentaries on the Pastoral Epistles (*International Critical Commentary*. T&T Clark, 1999). He was also one of my PhD examiners years ago. I follow his interpretation of Paul at many key points (and depart from him at some others). *Women, Sermons and the Bible*, however, reckons I misrepresent his views. But, again, I think I can demonstrate that *WSB* has created a reading of Marshall that isn't quite right.

As part of my case for closely connecting the verb "teach" (*didaskō*) with the apostolic deposit, I note the way the related noun "teaching" (*didaskalia*) plays a major role in the Pastoral Epistles. It functions as a "technical term", or piece of jargon, for the *content* of that apostolic deposit. As part of this argument, I quote Howard Marshall as saying that *didaskalia* ("teaching") in the Pastoral Epistles is a technical term for "the approved, apostolic doctrine" underlining Paul's "emphasis on the concept of a fixed body of Christian doctrine" (Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 381). But I am criticised in *WSB* for *once more* misleading readers into thinking a scholar offers some support for my views:

But once again, this is *not* what Marshall says. Marshall's first comment refers to the expression "the sound teaching" (*hugianousa didaskalia*) as a "technical term for the approved apostolic doctrine", not *didaskalia* alone without the adjective (*WSB* chapter 3, §D).

The point may seem subtle, or trivial. *WSB* is saying that Howard Marshall doesn't think "teaching" *on its own* is a technical term but only when it is accompanied by the adjective "sound/healthy". I went back to Marshall's commentary, and I can see why someone might think there was ambiguity in his words. I like to think, though, that if I were the *WSB* author at this point, I would have either let the point go or perhaps remarked that Marshall could be read in a couple of ways, so Dickson might not be 100% right. But the uncompromising rebuke, with the addition of "once again"—as if I routinely misrepresent scholars—comes across as overly eager to catch me out. And in this case it is mistaken.

Howard Marshall has read *WSB*'s remarks (and my book) and has confirmed to me in an email that *WSB* isn't quite right:

I think that you can stand by what you said in relation to me. I think that sharp distinctions of the kind they are making are mistaken. I don't recognise 'sound teaching' as somehow more a technical term than 'teaching'. Imagine Timothy being invited to give a teaching session in Berea and being told it doesn't mean that it must necessarily be 'healthy'; the need for healthiness is taken for granted, and the healthiness is its capacity to heal and edify the hearers, and this capacity is due to its content; so I think that trying to draw a distinction between 'teaching' and 'healthy teaching' is misguided (email, July 2014; quoted with permission).

None of this should surprise a student of the New Testament. It is very widely acknowledged in the commentaries and scholarly dictionaries that "teaching" (*didaskalia*) in the Pastoral Epistles is a technical term. For example, without controversy or fuss, Hans-Friedrich Weiss comments in the three volume *Exegetical Dictionary of the New*

Testament (one of the standard scholarly dictionaries), “In the Pastoral Epistles *didaskalia* in the singular is a technical term for apostolic or Christian teaching as a whole” (*EDNT*, vol.1. Eerdmans, 1993, 317). This is the standard view. The authors of *WSB* are entitled to disagree with such scholarship, but they need to make their case, rather than engage in the trivial—and, as it turns out, inaccurate—sort of criticism that afflicts parts of this book.

5. Edwin Judge

A truly adventurous example of *WSB*'s attempt to use my own supporters against me involves Edwin Judge, the philologist, classicist, and historian from my own Macquarie University. I don't explicitly cite Judge in support of my thesis in *Hearing Her Voice* but it is well known that I see him as a mentor, and his warm commendation of the argument of *Hearing Her Voice* appears in the book.

I had to read the comments of *WSB*, chapter 6, §F, several times before I could believe that the author really meant to say that Professor Judge rejects my approach to New Testament history. Apparently, I have a “model” of history that “posits a huge gap between first-century and present-day practice” and that this model “can be blamed for the unfortunate divide between the New Testament and history that Edwin Judge complains of being widespread amongst New Testament specialists”. Chapter 6 then quotes Judge against (an imagined) me:

Here “although the intricate disciplines of the field were methodologically historical, the convention was to use the term ‘history’ for the study of its cultural and social setting”—that is, history was what happened outside the New Testament, not the New Testament itself. Unfortunately, the language of *Hearing Her Voice* appears to buy into this misleading dichotomy (*WSB*, chapter 6, §F).

The criticism appears contrived. On the one hand, it is obvious there is a ‘gap’ between the first-century and the present-day (whether it is “huge” depends on one's definition of the word). Anyone who as ever prepared a sermon and asked, “What did the passage mean to the first readers?” and “What does it mean for my hearers?” recognises this gap. Anyone who has read Edwin Judge's work will know this with even greater clarity, since a major part of his project over the last 40 years has been to help New Testament specialists read their documents as texts of Graeco-Roman *antiquity* not of contemporary Christianity.

Equally artificial is the suggestion that Edwin Judge would think that *Hearing Her Voice* buys into the misleading dichotomy between “history” and “the New Testament”. Perhaps I should state plainly that the New Testament *is itself* history. Therefore, the importance of having a detailed knowledge of first-century history more broadly is to give contemporary readers better lenses with which to see what really is there in our New Testament texts. We learn history precisely so that we don't impose on the text of Scripture our modern presuppositions. As I put it in *Hearing Her Voice*:

New Testament specialists ought to have a grasp of all three disciplines: Greek language, first-century history, and systematic theology. Equally, it is crucial that they use these tools to shed light on Scripture, not to distort its meaning. The lens of history, properly employed, does not obscure the text; instead, it gives us sharper vision to see what is really there—what we perhaps have overlooked because of our existing cultural lenses (*HHV*, 34, [34 in the Australian print edition]).

I know Edwin Judge approves of this statement of my “model of history” because in the margin of the manuscript he read for me before publication he penned a big *tick* beside this paragraph!

But perhaps more significant than this clarification of my views is the fact that, having read the manuscript of *Hearing Her Voice* and offered valuable corrections and clarifications, Edwin Judge wrote the following commendation which appears in the book itself:

Paul, of course, has women “praying” and “prophesying” in the meeting. So, why not also “teaching”? Must one downplay or discard this ban? In this book, however, we learn that we have been missing the special force of that word anyway. With John Dickson, a careful researcher into the context and setting of the New Testament, we uncover its history. This is no mere “battle over words”. Apart from instinct and the bare data, all meaningful knowledge (i.e., “science”) is revealed through enquiry (i.e., “history”). The testimony of this gifted expositor convincingly discloses the lost meaning of Paul’s “teaching”.
(Edwin Judge, Emeritus Professor of History, Macquarie University)

In fairness to *WSB*, the manuscript of *Hearing Her Voice* (second edition) that I sent Matthias Media to help them prepare their critique did not include the commendations. So *WSB*’s criticism at this point is perhaps not as brazen as it seems—deliberately trying to drive a wedge between the author of a book and the expert commending it. But it is surely clear that this attempt to make yet another of my scholarly supporters ‘disappear’ is misguided.

6. Donald Robinson

My final ‘vanishing’ supporter is Donald Robinson. In *Hearing Her Voice* I explain where my first thoughts about women, sermons and the Bible started: in second year Moore College listening to lectures by the former Archbishop of Sydney and New Testament specialist. I made clear to readers that I do not claim Robinson would agree with me on the question of women preaching; only that his lectures “prompted my early ponderings that have since resulted in this book” (*HHV*, 47, [51 in the Australian print edition]).

I introduce my remarks about Robinson with a description of “teaching” and a suggestion that this should not be seen as controversial:

This basic understanding of “teaching” should not be controversial. In lectures at Moore College years ago, I recall Archbishop Donald Robinson, a careful New Testament specialist, impressing on us the high and sacred duty laid upon teachers: “Teaching is much more specific both as to content and purpose in the NT; it is not just any imparting of information or any sort of discourse. It relates to a specific body of truth, the deposit of the faith” (*HHV*, 47 [51 in the Australian print edition]).

Things are slightly complicated by the fact that this quotation is not a verbatim remembrance on my part of oral lectures twenty years ago. Rather, as I say, “These words capture the thrust of his lectures but the quotation comes from a booklet produced for Anglican ordinands” (*HHV*, 94 [124 in the Australian print edition]).

It is important to realise, then, that I am not claiming very much about Robinson. I am not claiming to have distilled his writings on the theme. I am not claiming that he would go along with me in everything I say about “teaching”. And I am not saying he would accept

my argument for women preaching in church. In short, I am simply saying that I learned from Donald Robinson a vital aspect of my understanding of how “teaching” relates to other forms of speaking referred to in the New Testament: teaching involves instruction in the fundamental structures of the faith or the apostolic deposit.

Somehow, *WSB* is able to turn all this on its head so that Robinson’s writings “flatly contradict Dickson’s theory about the meaning of *didaskō* and its relation to ‘teaching’ today” (*WSB* chapter 3, §A [ii]). But *WSB* has not carefully noted how much—or how little—I was intending to claim Robinson into my corner. His emphasis on *teaching as transmitting the apostolic deposit* got me going on the journey that became *Hearing Her Voice*. Nothing in *WSB*’s critique undermines this point, but in the process the book does introduce several caricatures (of me and Robinson). They are worth noting.

An important part of my case in *Hearing Her Voice* is my argument that there is a close connection in Paul’s letters between “handing over” traditions (*paradidōmi*) and “teaching” (*didaskō*). Everyone acknowledges that “hand over / receive” is technical language in Paul (and elsewhere) for transmitting early Christian oral tradition. When Paul explicitly quotes the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, for example, he describes this as an item he “handed over” to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:23-25). My argument suggests that “hand over” and “teach” in Paul frequently go together, and that in the Pastoral Epistles “teach” directly refers to transmitting the fixed traditions of the apostle (the sayings and stories of Jesus—such as the Last Supper—and the various formal rulings of the apostles).

WSB, however, tries to show that “Robinson thinks the New Testament maintains a clear distinction between ‘teaching’ and ‘preserving tradition’” and, further, that he “deliberately contrasts the relatively punctiliar (once-off) nature of preaching the gospel and handing over apostolic traditions with the continuing or ongoing process of ‘teaching’” (*WSB*, chapter 3, §A [ii]).

The Robinson quotations used by *WSB* to demonstrate this point come from another publication entirely, not the booklet produced for Anglican ordinands from which I quote in *Hearing Her Voice* (as representative of the lectures I heard). While in this *other* publication Robinson does seem to draw a distinction between “handing on” (*paradidōmi*) and “teaching” (*didaskō*), *WSB* has given an exaggerated account of the matter. For in the little booklet my quotation comes from—in the paragraph immediately before—Robinson stresses the *close connection* between “handing on” and “teaching”:

Also closely connected with *teaching* in the NT terminology is *handing over* or delivering the deposit of the faith in its various components. The term for this handing over is *paradidōmi* with its cognate *paradosis*, and its correlative term is *paralambanō*, ‘receive’ or ‘take receipt of’ (Donald Robinson, *Ordination for What?* Sydney: Anglican Information Office, 1991, 19).

Robinson does not think of “handing over” as identical to “teaching”. He sees the former as the *initial* laying down of the apostolic deposit and the latter as the *ongoing* instruction in that same deposit. But it is all focused on the apostolic deposit—teaching, for Robinson, does not refer to all teaching from the Bible. This is not very far from what I say in *Hearing Her Voice* (*HHV*, 65 [50 in the Australian print edition]). There are differences of emphasis between Robinson and me, but *WSB* is wrong to say that Robinson sharply distinguished between “handing over” and “teaching”.

As part of its attempt to show that Robinson “flatly contradicts” Dickson, *WSB* points out that the former Archbishop “identifies teaching *the Scriptures* as one of the two main tasks

of Anglican ministry.” If readers of *WSB* were confused by this statement, imagining that I do not think teaching the Scriptures is central to Anglican ministry, let me put on the record that I entirely agree with Robinson. Although it seems clear to me that “teaching” in Paul’s letters never refers to the activity of expounding Scripture, I do nonetheless believe that the *primary* way true teaching takes place today—and, yes, despite rumours to the contrary, I do think teaching continues today—is through the exposition of Scripture. *Most* of our *careful transmission of the apostolic deposit*, i.e., “teaching”, will take place in biblical expository sermons (which is not the same as saying all expositions are teaching, for many expositions today are rightly closer to what Paul called “exhortation”). I say “most” of our teaching will take place in expository sermons because I still see a place for formal catechesis, memorising the Lord’s Prayer, learning the Creeds, and so on, all of which I think function as “teaching” in the Pauline sense.

WSB further remarks, “Robinson draws attention to the relational focus of ‘teaching’ and the causal link between teaching and learning.” This is presented as something I might disagree with, but I can state plainly that I couldn’t agree more! I can’t imagine “teaching” that does not presuppose a relationally compliant “learner”. At this point, *WSB* seems to be scratching around for differences between Robinson and me—more platform thinking.

7. The findings of Donald Robinson’s Sydney Anglican Doctrine Commission

Finally, I now suspect that both the *WSB* authors and I might all have been wrong to think Donald Robinson would reject the logic of my case—that “teaching” in 1 Tim 2:12 refers to *transmitting the apostolic deposit* and so cannot be read as a blanket ban on women giving sermons. In the first edition of *Hearing Her Voice* I remarked that Robinson “*would not have agreed with me*”. In the second edition, as *WSB* notes, I changed this to “*may not have agreed with me*”. I changed “*would not*” to “*may not*” because, in between writing the two editions, I learned that the former Archbishop happily spent his retirement years in a suburban church with a women preacher on staff. I felt it best to soften the language.

However, since the second edition, I have discovered the 1984 report of the Doctrine Commission of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney on the question of women’s ministry. The report comes to a conclusion similar to my own, and via the same logic. The significance of this for discussing Donald Robinson is obvious: he was the Archbishop who commissioned and oversaw the report. Moreover, the language of the report at key points decisively reflects the thinking of Robinson as expressed in the booklet *Ordination For What?* and in his important book *Faith’s Framework*. The report finds that “teaching” in the New Testament sometimes refers to exposition and application of Scripture (something I would still dispute) but what it says about the use of “teaching” *in the Pastoral Epistles*, in particular, is clarifying:

In the Pastoral Epistles, teaching appears to be an authoritative function concerned with the faithful transmission of apostolic doctrine or tradition and committed to men specially chosen (e.g. 2 Timothy 1:13-14; 2:2; 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9). It is within this context that the specific prohibition of 1 Timothy 2:12 must be understood. Women are not to assume *the authoritative teaching office that properly belongs to men in the Christian congregation*. In our own context this would not appear to exclude absolutely the possibility of women preaching or teaching in church. It nevertheless appears to exclude the possibility of women exercising the role of teaching elder or “priest” as that term is defined by the Anglican Ordinal.

(“9/84 Ordination of Women to the Priesthood of the Anglican Church”, Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney, 1984, by Peter Jensen, Peter O’Brien, David Peterson, Paul Barnett, Harry Goodhew, et al.)

So, thirty years ago, under the direction of Donald Robinson, the Doctrine Commission of the Sydney Diocese found that “teaching” has a special sense in Paul’s Pastoral Epistles. It does not refer to all kinds of preaching but only to the authoritative task of faithfully transmitting the apostolic traditions. It is *this* function—and not preaching sermons generally—that Paul forbids to women in 1 Tim 2:12.

The findings of the 1984 Doctrine Commission were reaffirmed in a follow-up report of 1987 (also under the direction of Robinson), which found that “a woman is not permitted to assume the office of teacher within the congregation.” Yet, in unpacking this finding, the report concludes with the following points (4.3 being the most significant for this discussion):

4.1 It is our judgement that the passing of the years has not changed the implications of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 for ministry to ordinary "family congregations".

4.2 We believe, however, that a woman may "speak" in church in a number of ways, e.g. to prophesy, exhort or testify. There appears to be no restriction based on sex on the speaking activities in 1 Corinthians 14:26, which refers to hymns, words of instruction, revelation, tongues and interpretation. We take the prohibition in 1 Corinthians 14:34 as referring to the evaluation of prophecy.

4.3 Contemporary preaching is not identical with teaching in the NT. Preaching covers a whole range of activities, including teaching, evangelism, encouragement, exhortation, prophecy and testimony. Teaching in the NT refers to the faithful transmission and defence of apostolic doctrine or passing on the fundamental structures of the faith. Admonition, prophecy, exhortation and encouragement are derived from this teaching ministry.

4.4 As is the case with all Christian ministry however (see 2.3, 2.4 above) the privilege of exercising ministry depends on the context. Under certain circumstances, a woman may be involved in any of those preaching activities listed above. She may speak in the contemporary congregation, provided that she does not take the responsibility for the teaching of the faith in the family congregation: the teaching function is not hers for the reasons given in scripture (1 Timothy 2:11-13).

4.5 It would be impossible, however, to separate altogether the teaching element out of almost any "sermon". Such would be quite artificial. Every Christian has a teaching role within the congregation, according to Colossians 3:16, and this would surely impinge on any publicly spoken word to the congregation by men or women.

4.6 Furthermore, the passing of the years has changed the pattern of congregational life. The ordinary "family congregation" is not the only kind of congregation within the pluralities of modern society. Today there are single sex congregations of primary and secondary children. There are congregations of women only in colleges and hospitals. There are congregations of university undergraduates who are mostly single. If the Pastorals encourage women to teach women and children, we believe it appropriate to appoint women as chaplains in women's institutions, authorised to preach and preside at the Lord's Supper. The point is that while 1 Timothy 2:11-15 applies still to "family congregations", not all congregations today fall into that category.

(“8/87 the Ministry of Women,” Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney, 1984, by Dr D. B. Knox, Dr P. T. O'Brien, Dr P. W. Barnett, Dr P. F. Jensen, The Rev J. G. Mason, The Rev R. Bowles, et al.)

The conclusion at 4.3 is remarkably similar to my own: ‘teaching’ in the Pastoral Epistles refers to a specific preaching activity, not to all preaching activities in church. Hence, in 4.4 the report says “a woman may be involved in any of those preaching activities listed

above”, i.e., the activities of “admonition, prophecy, exhortation and encouragement,” all of which are said to be “derived from this teaching ministry.” The additional conclusions of 4.5 and 4.6 are particularly striking to me, because they seem to go even further than my own practical conclusion in *Hearing Her Voice*. In noting that it would be “quite artificial” to try to “separate altogether the teaching element out of almost any ‘sermon,’” the report is certainly *not* providing a reason why women may not give sermons. It isn’t suggesting that because there will always be some element of ‘teaching’ in any sermon it would be best for women never to preach at all. It is saying the opposite. Here in 4.5 the commissioners are trying to head off the pedantic response that any hint of teaching in a sermon would make it unbiblical for a woman to preach. The report forestalls this by pointing out that *some* teaching role is envisaged for *all* Christians, men and women alike, in Colossians 3:16. Thus, no one should fret that a woman’s sermon in church might have some teaching in it. The important thing is not to try and exclude all teaching from a woman’s sermon. It is rather to make sure “she does not take the responsibility for the teaching of the faith in the family congregation: the teaching function is not hers.” In short, the report here distinguishes between little ‘t’ teaching and big ‘T’ teaching, the latter being the role of the priest alone (in an Anglican context). The final conclusion (4.6) is that *outside* the normal congregation—in, for example, an all-female gathering—a woman may perform all Christian duties, including formal “teaching” and even presiding at the Lord’s Supper (though an appended note in the report indicates that two members of the commission did not agree that women may preside at the Lord’s Supper).

To return to my larger point about Donald Robinson. I cannot prove beyond doubt that the former Archbishop was happy for women to preach sermons in church (on occasion), but the logic and wording of the diocesan reports he commissioned should raise questions about *WSB*’s efforts to show that Robinson’s views “flatly contradict Dickson’s theories.”

A bit of detective work further uncovers the probable pedigree of the Doctrine Commission’s findings. An almost identical statement about teaching and the Pastoral Epistles can be found in the classic work of C. F. D. Moule, a leading British New Testament scholar of the mid-twentieth century and Donald Robinson’s own New Testament teacher at Cambridge University:

The Pastoral Epistles betray an awareness of ‘orthodoxy’; and although the ‘faithful sayings’ cited in the Pastorals are not sayings of Jesus and do not in any sense represent a ‘canon’, yet the very phrase shows an instinct for classification into true and false. Moreover, a good deal of prominence is given in these Epistles to the need for careful transmission of the apostolic teaching; it is a precious deposit, entrusted by God to the apostle, and by the apostle to his chosen disciple, to be handed on by him to carefully chosen men. The ‘pattern or mould of teaching’ (*tupos didachēs*) of Rom. vi. 17, and the ‘traditions’ (*paradoseis*) of II Thess. ii. 15, iii. 6 (cf. I Thess. iv. 1 f), are on their way, via the ‘sketch’ or ‘outline’ (*hypotupōsis*) of sound teaching (II Tim. i. 13) and the *parathēkē* or ‘deposit’ (I Tim. vi. 20, II Tim. i. 12, 14; cf. ii. 2) into the ‘canon’ of approved writings (C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*. London: A. & C. Black, 1981, 252-53).

Anyone who has read Donald Robinson’s best-known work, *Faith’s Framework*, will recognise here the profound influence Moule’s ideas about “tradition”, “teaching”, and “canon” had on the former Archbishop of Sydney. While Peter Jensen, Peter O’Brien, David Peterson, Paul Barnett, et al. authored the 1984 report, the influence of the views of Donald Robinson (and Charlie Moule) can hardly be denied. *WSB* is free to claim that these opinions are wrong. It is not correct to suggest these arguments do not have a long and important pedigree in classical Sydney Anglicanism. The argument of *Hearing Her*

Voice may be wrong, but it represents an unwitting revival of an argument made 30 years ago by some of our most influential thinkers.

Conclusion

In no small part, *Women, Sermons and the Bible* reads like an attempt—I can believe an *unconscious* attempt—to deny all scholarly support for the views outlined in *Hearing Her Voice*. But it is surely one of the most demonstrably inadequate features of *WSB*. Not only is the book *not* a reliable guide to my own views (as I explained in the first chapter), the authors seem unable to allow that there is indeed some scholarly support for the things argued in *HHV*. As I have said numerous times, and will say again in the final chapter, there is something artificial about *WSB*'s approach. An opportunity to progress the debate over women's ministry has been missed.

Chapter 6

HOW CAN ONE GUY BE WRONG IN SO MANY WAYS?

The awkward decision we are forced to make

I naturally expected Matthias Media's *Women, Sermons and the Bible* to contain a vigorous exegetical defence of the no-women-preaching case. I also imagined it would offer genuine challenges to my interpretation of key biblical passages. (And, in some places, that is what we find.) I did not, however, expect to be told repeatedly that the case for women preaching sermons in *Hearing Her Voice* rests on "basic linguistic errors", obvious "flaws", and simple "exegetical fallacies", as if the argument need hardly detain us and Dickson would be well advised to head back to Moore College for a refresher course!

WSB is a very unusual book. Instead of standing at the crease, as it were, and skilfully batting away serious arguments with better arguments, the authors of *WSB* choose to describe perfectly reasonable exegetical observations—made by numerous experts—"fallacies", "errors", and so on. This is not a healthy mode of argument among friends, especially friends who know that each of us has spent considerable time gaining some familiarity with the New Testament, Greek grammar, history, and so on.

I suppose it is possible I have presented nothing substantial in *Hearing Her Voice*—that the evidence for my case is "vanishingly thin", as one of the editors declares it. But some readers must be wondering: *How can one guy be wrong in so many ways!?* One senior academic friend quipped that *WSB* manages "to articulate your position into a *quadrivium* of error." Somehow, I have found every possible way to go astray in New Testament studies—grammar, syntax, linguistics, exegesis, history, theology, not to mention application. It's quite an achievement!

The zero-sum, overreaching strategy of *WSB* has rhetorical force, but it does not progress the conversation very far. And in several cases it risks the plausibility of *WSB* itself. For if it can be shown that much of what this book declares to be *plain error* is, in fact, regarded by New Testament experts as *pretty standard*, readers will be forced to make an awkward judgement: Either the scholarship of *WSB* is uniquely authoritative, or the book is guilty of an exaggerated and obscuring mode of argument.

In this final response to *WSB*, I will confront some of the book's key exegetical and linguistic criticisms. To treat them all, in a point-by-point manner, would be laborious and probably unnecessary. My main aim in what follows is to demonstrate that, despite the multi-author team, copious footnotes, and frequent self-declared 'victory', *WSB* trades more in *discrediting* arguments than *wrestling* with them.

I can only hope that the authors will one day agree to a moderated public discussion where this intellectual 'trench warfare' can give way to a genuine, human conversation about this important topic. Until that happy day, this chapter represents my final reply to Matthias Media's *Women, Sermons and the Bible*.

1. MY PRIVATE LESSON IN LINGUISTICS

From my perspective, the argument of *Hearing Her Voice* is simple. It has almost nothing to do with linguistics or dictionary definitions. It is just an argument about what the apostle Paul seems to think “teaching” (*didaskō*) refers to. He clearly distinguishes between “teaching”, “exhorting”, and “prophesying” (Rom 12:4-8) and he seems to link “teaching” *alone* with the formal task of carefully transmitting to believers the fixed deposit of apostolic memories and rulings about Jesus. Therefore, Paul’s ban on women “teaching” in 1 Tim 2:12 precludes only a certain kind of preaching ministry, not every kind of sermon today.

WSB unnecessarily complicates things by focusing on dictionary definitions, semantics, and so on. This allows the authors to make serious sounding claims about my various linguistic and exegetical fallacies. But on closer inspection these criticisms amount to a fallacy of their own, what I call the naming-of-fallacies fallacy.

1.1. Three linguistic dangers

In a section of chapter 3 subtitled “A basic linguistic error” (*WSB*, chapter 3, §B [iv]), the author gives me/us a lesson in the hazards of doing word studies: for “Dickson,” we are told, “seems unaware of these dangers.”

The first hazard is “illegitimate identity transfer”, that is, assuming that the usage of a word in one context determines its usage in another context. *WSB* says I fall into this trap when I argue that “teach” (*didaskō*) in 2 Tim 2:2 refers to *transmitting the apostolic deposit* and then go on to insist that “teach” in 1 Tim 2:12 refers to the same thing.

The second danger is related. I am guilty of the fallacy of “unwarranted restriction of the semantic field.” This just means ruling out possible meanings of a word before analyzing the word in its new context. “With these errors,” the chapter remarks, “the interpreter jumps to conclusions about the meaning of a word on the basis of its meaning *in other texts*” (*WSB*, chapter 3, §B [iv]). I do this quite a bit, apparently.

A third fallacy is added, the “error of chronology”: letting the usage of a word in a *later* text inform the usage of the same word in an *earlier* text. Given that 2 Tim 2:2 was probably written shortly after 1 Tim 2:12, it would be anachronistic, *WSB* tells us, to think that “teach” in the *later* passage has a bearing on “teach” in the earlier one.

These criticisms are offered with all earnestness, but I struggle to take them seriously. It is true there are linguistic pitfalls known as “illegitimate identity transfer”, “unwarranted restriction of the semantic field”, and the “error of chronology”. I too read Don Carson’s *Exegetical Fallacies* in first year Moore College. But these descriptions do not function as warning signs (like HAZCHEM), forbidding us from ever transferring the identity of words, restricting a semantic field, or looking to later passages to inform our reading of the earlier. They are more like ‘flags’ on a sideline (to change the metaphor) which only need to be raised when an author crosses a threshold, bringing unwarranted assumptions about a word into a text without thinking things through.

1.2. Why we can transfer the identity of a word

It is true one must not assume, without reflection, that a word in one context means exactly the same thing in another context. Equally, words frequently *do* mean the same thing in different contexts, especially when used by the same author in the same body of literature (like Paul in the Pastoral Epistles: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus). It is entirely

appropriate to build a case that “teach” in 2 Tim 2:2 has the same referent as “teach” in 1 Tim 2:12. And that’s the point: *I build a case*.

The way *WSB* describes matters, someone who hadn’t read my book might imagine that I “jump” from 2 Tim 2:2 straight to 1 Tim 2:12 without further ado. But in *Hearing Her Voice* I slowly build my case from 2 Tim 1:11–2:2, the passage with the most sustained picture of what it means to “teach”, through numerous other passages in the Pastoral Epistles, until we arrive at the less clear usage of “teach” in 1 Tim 2:12 (*Hearing her Voice*, Zondervan, 2014, pages 55-61 [64-73 in the Australian print edition]). Responsible scholars do this all the time: they examine Paul’s *clear* uses of a term in order to gain a better idea of what the same term might mean in passages where the sense is less clear. There are no assumptions, no fallacies, no “illegitimate identify transfer”; just a commonsense awareness that authors frequently use key words in the same way (even if sometimes they don’t).

The same can be said of my supposed “unwarranted restriction of the semantic field”, and “error of chronology”.

1.3. Why we can restrict the dictionary definition of words

Making the argument that “teach” in 1 Tim 2:12 probably has the same sense as “teach” in numerous other instances of the terminology in the Pastoral Epistles is not the same as *prejudging* what the word refers to in that text. It is just being sensitive to an author’s practice.

If we don’t pay careful attention to the clearer instances of “teach”, we are liable to fall into the equal and opposite error named by Carson as “unwarranted adoption of an *expanded* semantic field”. This is where a reader insists on giving a word its *broad dictionary definition* instead of paying attention to the specific nuance of the word in a particular context. I think a sensitive reading of the Pastoral Epistles demands that we read “teach” in 1 Tim 2:12 *not* in its broad sense of *instructing/informing about God’s truth* but in the more nuanced sense of *transmitting the apostolic deposit of the faith*. The *meaning* of the word is the same but its *usage* or *reference* is more specific.

A good analogy may be found in the word *euaggelizesthai*, “evangelise” or “preach the gospel”. The dictionary definition of the word is simply *to tell important or good news*. In Paul, however, this word almost always—not always (see 1 Thess 3:6) but almost always—refers to *announcing the gospel of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection for our salvation*. We must not insist on the broad meaning of a word like “evangelise”, when an author routinely uses it in a more specific way. My contention in *Hearing Her Voice* is that the word *didaskō*, “teach”, in Paul’s letters routinely refers to something more specific than *informing* or *instructing* people in God’s will generally; it has the particular sense of *transmitting to people the apostolic traditions of the gospel*. The case for this is (I still believe) very strong. But even if one isn’t convinced, it is not appropriate to call this line of reasoning a linguistic fallacy.

1.4. Why we can use Paul’s *later* letters to understand his *earlier* ones

Nor is there anything wrong with looking at usages of “teach” in a later letter of Paul in order to build up a picture of the same word in an earlier letter. We are, after all, talking about the *same* author in a *very small band of time*. The “error of chronology” usually refers to taking a third-century usage of a word, for example, and trying to impose that usage on a first-century occurrence of the same term. That *is* problematic. But scholars go

backwards and forwards *within Paul's letters* to discern his meaning all the time. Open any commentary on a Pauline letter and we discover that this is normal practice: we look to Paul's use of words in, say, Romans or Philippians (later letters) to detect nuances in the same terminology in 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians (slightly earlier letters). Looking to 2 Timothy for help in understanding 1 Timothy is standard practice.

I note that the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission report of 1984 provides a good example of this methodology. It lists examples from 2 Timothy in order to bring clarity to the meaning of the ban on women teaching in 1 Timothy. The way Paul expresses the ban (1 Tim 2:12) does not, on its own, tell us what "teach" refers to, but by calling other passages as 'witnesses', especially 2 Tim 1:13-14 and 2 Tim 2:2, the Doctrine Commission was able to make a confident judgement about the use of "teach" in 1 Tim 2:12:

In the Pastoral Epistles, teaching appears to be an authoritative function concerned with the faithful transmission of apostolic doctrine or tradition and committed to men specially chosen (e.g. 2 Timothy 1:13-14; 2:2; 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9). It is within this context that the specific prohibition of 1 Timothy 2:12 must be understood. ("9/84 Ordination of Women to the Priesthood of the Anglican Church", Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney, 1984, by Peter Jensen, Peter O'Brien, David Peterson, Paul Barnett, et al.)

There is, of course, some value in highlighting the fallacies of "illegitimate identity transfer", "unwarranted restriction of semantic field", and the "error of chronology", but in *WSB* these appear to function more as 'boo-words'—giving a criticism a solemn sounding title so that it sounds more serious. But this is just another sort of fallacy: the naming-of-fallacies fallacy.

2. EXEGETICAL ERRORS

It is unfortunate that the same style of argument continues through the more exegetical sections of *WSB*. Instead of offering considered responses to my own considered arguments, the book dismisses most of my key exegetical observations as blunders. I will offer just a few key examples of this all-or-nothing program before concluding with a clear restatement of my argument in the hope of inspiring a genuine debate.

2.1. How "tradition" and "teach" relate in Galatians 1:12

WSB speaks confidently of the "linguistic and exegetical errors" in my work (*WSB*, Appendix, §B) and provides the example of my discussion of Gal 1:12. In *Hearing Her Voice* I try to show that Paul closely connected the activity of "teaching" with "handing over" the apostolic traditions. I write:

Significantly, Paul sometimes places the word "teaching" in synonymous parallel with "delivered/received". All scholars note, as I have already said, that "delivered/received" (*paradidōmi/paralambanō*) are Paul's favourite technical terms for the *initial* laying down of the oral traditions (1 Cor. 11:1; 11:23; 15:3; 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thess. 3:6). This comes straight from his Jewish heritage, as he makes clear when he uses precisely the same language to describe the "traditions of my fathers" (Gal. 1:14) to which he was formerly devoted as a Pharisee. The word "teaching" appears side by side with this technical vocabulary in Gal. 1:12, where the apostle insists that he came to know the gospel not in the normal human way, as the Galatians did, but through a direct disclosure from Jesus: "I did not *receive*

(*paralambanō*) it, nor was I *taught* (*didaskō*) it.” For Paul, then, to be “taught” is a perfectly apt alternative term for “receiving” the traditions about Jesus (*HHV*, 45-46 [49-50 in the Australian print edition]).

WSB does not even entertain this argument as a genuine possibility. Instead, “Dickson once again makes two words into synonyms that cannot be synonyms, either linguistically or exegetically,” and “Paul’s point is exactly the contrary to what Dickson says it is” (*WSB*, Appendix, §B). The self-confident tone is striking (here and elsewhere in the book) but it is not warranted. I might be wrong to connect “receive” and “taught” in this verse. It is possible, I suppose, that Paul intended to *contrast* activities that aren’t even “closely related”, as *WSB* suggests (Appendix, §B). But surely this is a point to be *discussed*, not declared, especially since some of the major commentators on this verse share my interpretation, as I will now show.

2.2. What do the commentators say about Galatians 1:12?

Let me start with a commentator who comes *close* to supporting *WSB*’s reading (that ‘taught’ and ‘receive’ refer to different things), only to end up saying something more akin to my claim. James Dunn, a scholar I respect enormously, writes:

By adding ‘nor was I taught it’ Paul was not simply being tautologous; nor was he denigrating the idea of teaching. Rather he was seeking to cover all loopholes: he had neither been converted by human agency, nor had he been taught the gospel in the basic catechesis in which no doubt already all new converts to the new faith were instructed” (James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 53).

So Dunn thinks there is *some* distinction between these two words. “Receive (tradition)” stresses human agency; “taught” refers to basic *catechesis* concerning the gospel. I can happily accept this description. It isn’t far from my own argument that teaching refers to transmitting the apostolic deposit (an idea Dunn frequently endorses). In other words, while Dunn does accept a difference of nuance between “receive (tradition)” and “taught”, he nonetheless sees both as belonging to the activity of formal transmission—*catechesis*—of core gospel material. That’s my argument.

Several other scholars provide explicit support for my reading.

J. Louis Martyn in the *Anchor Bible Commentary* on Galatians connects Gal 1:12 to the Jewish practice found in the Mishnah of teaching material in a ‘line of tradition’. He says:

Of course, the Galatians will not have known that Mishnaic tractate; but, especially given Paul’s supplementary clause, ‘nor was I taught it,’ they will have sensed that he has selected the key expression of the traditioning process in order to say with maximum emphasis: I did not receive the gospel in a line of tradition (J. Louis Martyn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 143).

For J. Louis Martyn “taught” is obvious *traditioning* language, and will have been read as such by the Galatians. Alan Cole, a name well known in Sydney Anglican circles, makes the same observation in his Tyndale Commentary on Galatians. Explaining Paul’s “I did not receive it”, Cole writes, “[Paul] did not receive it as a ‘tradition’, in the way in which Jewish beliefs and practices had been handed down.” Explaining “nor was I taught it”, he remarks, “Neither was the gospel something learned by rote and repetition, as doubtless Paul had learned rabbinics in the school of Gamaliel at Jerusalem” (Alan Cole, *Galatians*. 46). These observations are almost identical to my own.

Likewise, F. F. Bruce in his *New International Greek Testament* commentary on Galatians tells us plainly that “receive (tradition)” and “taught” in this context are virtual synonyms: “there is little difference here between *parelabon* (“receive”) and *edidachthēn* (“taught”) (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 89).

However plausible it may be that Dickson would make this basic “linguistic and exegetical error”, are we to imagine that scholars like Martyn, Cole, and Bruce would fall into such traps? Is *WSB* uniquely qualified to discern such things?

But more can be said. Ronald Fung in his volume on Galatians in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* makes my point with great clarity and force:

The clause “nor was I taught it” is added to enforce and explain “I did not receive it”, while the emphatic “from ... man” (placed before both verbs in the original) is probably to be understood as predicated of both verbs, so that the two negative clauses convey the single thought that it was not from any human persons that Paul received or learned the gospel. Since “to teach” (cf. Col. 1:28; 1 Tim. 4:11; 2 Tim 2:2) and “to be taught” or “to learn” (cf. Eph. 4:21; Col. 2:7; 2 Thess. 2:15), no less than “to receive” and “to deliver,” are used in connection with Christian tradition, Paul’s emphatic denial here of his gospel having any connection with mankind appears to assume the more specific form of the claim that he is not one of the tradition-receiving members of the church (Ronald Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 52).

Notice that Fung not only closely connects “receive (tradition)” and “taught”; he insists that “to teach” and “to be taught” are key parts of the technical vocabulary used in the New Testament for *handing over* and *receiving* the gospel traditions. That’s the idea I am trying to convey in *Hearing Her Voice*. That’s the idea *WSB* thinks involves “linguistic and exegetical errors.”

Let me stress that my point here is not to defend my reading of Gal 1:12 against *WSB*’s critique. I am just highlighting—with Gal 1:12 as a test case—the way *WSB* does not engage in normal scholarly debate. It does not let its readers know that most of these arguments are found frequently in the scholarly literature. Instead, it tries to dismiss things out-of-hand. Time and time again, *WSB* appears unable to allow that there are some half-decent arguments in *Hearing Her Voice* which are well supported in the wider literature. I am happy for the authors of *WSB* to counter my points with better arguments, but I think our conversation is diminished by calling everything a “mistake”, a “fallacy”, an “error”, or the “contrary” of what Dickson says, especially when the same lines of argument are also found in important works by well known authorities.

The same *overbearing tone*, coupled with an unwillingness to acknowledge how frequently my views are found in good scholarship, appears throughout chapters of *WSB* I will pass over without comment: chapter 4 (“Can the Old Testament be ‘taught’?”), chapter 5 (“Is the modern sermon an ‘exhortation’?”), and chapter 6 (“Reading God’s history as our good news”). In these chapters, as elsewhere, the authors say things that effectively force readers to decide whether Matthias Media has assembled a group of scholars without peer, or whether it has unconsciously obscured and overstated things in pursuit of its goal.

2.3. Why “teaching” must relate to “handing over” the gospel traditions

Before I leave the important topic of the connection between “teach / learn” and “hand over / receive (tradition)” I want to underline why I believe *WSB*’s approach to this question is way off-target.

One of the book’s central counterarguments against my case is that “traditioning” language—i.e., the language of handing over fixed, formal traditions about Jesus and the gospel—is genuinely *distinct* from “teaching” language. A massive effort is made to keep the two ideas apart. It is perhaps the key argument of *WSB*. But it cannot succeed.

The first and most obvious point to make is that “hand over” (*paradidōmi*) and “receive” (*paralambanō*) are basically metaphors not actual *speaking activities*. The key idea behind the terms is that an *object*, a body of content in this case, is passed from one hand to another, from an expert to a student. Obviously, nothing *actually* changes hands. It is a word picture conjuring up the image of a ‘package’ or ‘deposit’ of material transmitted from person to person. Most scholars recognise that when Paul uses these words, he is usually talking about the transmission of the gospel deposit: stories and sayings of Jesus, credal summaries of the faith, formal commands about living for Christ, and so on. That is not in dispute.

We have to ask, however: How is the gospel package or deposit *transmitted*? What *activity* is assumed in the metaphor of “handing over / receiving”?

There are *two* answers to this question, depending on the audience: the apostolic deposit is either “evangelised” or it is “taught”. When the gospel deposit is delivered to those for whom it is ‘news’, “evangelise / preach the gospel” (*euaggelizesthai*) is the activity that *hands material over* so that converts “receive” it. This is why we see a clear connection between *traditioning* language and *evangelising* language in 1 Cor 15:1-3.

But when Paul wants to talk about this same gospel deposit being *handed over* to willing learners, i.e., to disciples or converts, the more appropriate terminology is “teach/learn”. The point is simple: “hand over / receive (tradition)” is metaphorical language for a speaking activity, and that speaking activity is *teaching/learning* (or *evangelising/hearing*).

Galatians 1:12, discussed above, is not the only passage to connect “hand over / receive” with “teach / learn”. We see it also in Colossians 2:6-7:

Therefore, as you *received* (*paralambanō*) Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were *taught* (*didaskō*).

Here, “as you were taught” is, as Marcus Barth says in his *Anchor Bible* commentary, “used in a *parallel construction* to ‘as you received’” (Markus Barth, *Colossians*, 306). Douglas Moo makes the same observation in his commentary: “With the phrase *as you were taught*, Paul returns to where this sentence began, with the ‘tradition’ that the Christians have received” (Douglas Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*. Eerdmans, 2008, 182). The point is not that the two terms are synonyms. It is that “receiving” is picture language for the educational activity of “teaching”. Or perhaps the better way to put it is to say that “teaching / learning” is the way the apostolic deposit is “handed over / received”.

A few paragraphs earlier in Colossians the apostle Paul reminds the Colossians of how, or from whom, they first received the gospel. It was not through Paul; rather, “you learned it [the gospel] from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant” (Col 1:7). The word “learn” (*manthanō*) is, as *WSB* also notes, the usual correlate of “teach” (*didaskō*). Here, in referring to the foundational laying down of the gospel in Colossae by Epaphras, Paul uses not “receive”, as we might have expected, but “learn”. The gospel was *learned* because it was *taught*. And, as we have just seen above, precisely the same idea is conveyed in the next chapter (Col 2:6-7) by the words “received” and “taught”. “Teaching / learning” are not different activities from “handing over / receiving”. They are part of the same *traditioning* language. They all refer to *transmitting* and *accepting* the gospel deposit.

Again, in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul combines “hand over” and “teach”:

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to *the traditions* (*paradosis*) that you were *taught* (*didaskō*) by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

Here “tradition” is the noun form of the verb “hand over”. It is the traditional language of oral transmission. And, clearly, “teaching” is the *activity* by which such traditions changed hands. Commenting on this verse, Australian evangelical scholar Leon Morris takes the opportunity to make a general point about Paul’s key *traditioning* language, including *didaskō* / “teaching”:

The handing over of the Christian message is expressed with quite a variety of terminology [*at which point Morris inserts a footnote which reads, “Verbs used of delivering it include, didōmi, paradidōmi, didaskō, gnōrizō, paraggellō”; the quotation continues*] but the underlying idea is always the same. It is a message which comes from God. It must therefore be accepted with humility and transmitted faithfully (Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*. Eerdmans, 240-41).

The connection Leon Morris makes between “teach” (*didaskō*) and “hand over” (*paradidōmi*) is so widely accepted in scholarship, I find myself at a loss to explain *WSB*’s repeated denial of the point.

Another relevant example is Philippians 4:9: “What you have *learned* and *received* and heard and seen in me—practice these things.” The word “learn” (*manthanō*) is, as I just noted, the usual correlate of “teach”, just as “receive” is the typical correlate of “hand over”. Here Paul seems to be coupling *learn-and-receive* and *heard-and-seen*. The first couplet seems to refer to content that was *formally transmitted* to the Philippians (taught, or handed over to them). The second couplet seems to refer to more *ad hoc* things the Philippians might have picked up *informally* as a result of being around Paul. If this is so, Paul has again combined the concept of teaching / learning with that of handing over / receiving, just as he does in Gal 1:12, 2 Thess 2:15 and Col 2:6-7. This interpretation of Philippians 4:9 might not be correct. Someone might find a way to dismiss it as a fallacy. But no less an exegete than my own New Testament instructor Peter O’Brien reads things precisely the same way in his commentary on Philippians: “The first two and last two verbs are grouped together”; “the first two may be understood as Paul’s teaching, his second of his example” (Peter O’Brien, *The Epistles to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 508-09). Again, the point is not that “learned” and “received” are synonyms, anymore than “heard” and “seen” in this passage are synonyms. But they are conceptually connected in Paul’s mind. They both refer to the *founding education* in the gospel

traditions. If we were to ask Paul, “How did you *hand over* your apostolic deposit so that the Philippians *received* it?” he would reply, “I *taught* them and they *learned* it.”

Finally, in Romans 6:17 there is a probable ‘pun’ on the link between “hand over” and “teach”:

Thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching (*didachē*) to which you were handed over (*paradidōmi*).

Leading evangelical commentator Douglas Moo describes Paul’s sense well in his volume on Romans in the *New International Commentary on the New Testament*, and in the process he makes clear *how widely assumed* it is in contemporary scholarship that “hand over” and “teach” are related terms:

The verb “hand over” might connote the transfer of a slave from one master to another—an image appropriate to this paragraph. But perhaps more relevant in conjunction with a word like “teaching” are those places where, in probable dependence on Jewish concepts, Paul uses “hand over” to refer to the transmission of the early Christian teaching or tradition (cf. 1 Cor. 11:2, 23; 15:3). In this verse, however, it is not the teaching that is handed down to the believers but the believers who are handed over to the teaching. This unusual way of putting the matter is intentional; Paul wants to make clear that becoming a Christian means being placed under the authority of Christian “teaching” (Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 401).

Even if one does not go along with this interpretation of the function of “hand over” in this particular verse, Moo’s comment surely underlines the way scholars—including conservative evangelical ones like him—take for granted that “a word like ‘teaching’” is closely connected to the Jewish practice of transmitting formal tradition. One *hands over* the gospel traditions by *teaching* them.

Again, my point in all this is not to convince readers that my interpretations of these various passages are all correct. I am simply underlining that an idea dismissed in *WSB* as involving “linguistic and exegetical errors” is rather more widely supported in contemporary scholarship than this book is willing to admit: “hand over” and “teach” in Paul are intimately connected. They are the language of *traditioning*, laying down the basic structures of the faith. The heart of my case is that in the Pastoral Epistles the word “teach” connotes the authoritative task of faithfully transmitting this apostolic deposit. The evidence for this usage within the Pastoral Epistles themselves is, I think, compelling. And *WSB*’s refusal to concede anything to this perspective highlights the unsatisfactory character of the book, as I will try to show below.

3. THE EVIDENCE OF 2 TIMOTHY 1:11 – 2:2

A close reading of 2 Timothy 1:11 – 2:2 is a crucial part of my exegetical argument for seeing “teaching” in the Pastoral Epistles as focused on transmitting, or laying down, the apostolic deposit. In this passage Paul as “the Teacher” reminds his apprentice Timothy that he has been entrusted with a fixed body of content which he is now to entrust to reliable men who will be able to “teach” this same apostolic deposit to others.

3.1. Reading the passage as a whole

Let me quote the passage in full—in its three interconnected paragraphs—and then offer a few thoughts in response to *WSB*'s arguments against my reading. Here, as elsewhere, we find *WSB* dismissing ideas that are found frequently in scholarly literature.

2 Timothy 1:11 – 2:2 ... the gospel, for I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher (*didaskalos*), which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me—may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach [*didaskō*] others also (2 Tim 1:11 – 2:2).

First, it is important that we read 2 Tim 1:11 – 2:2 as a *single rhetorical unit*. The literary clues make this plain. There is the obvious point that the whole passage concerns maintaining Paul's gospel content against possible corruption. More technically, there is a kind of *inclusio*—a literary top and tail—beginning with Paul calling himself a “Teacher” (*didaskalos*) and ending with Timothy ensuring he appoints men to “teach” (*didaskō*). This is the same root word.

There is another play on words around the terms “deposit” in the first section and “entrust” in the final section—these, too, are just the noun and verb of the same Greek term. Paul gave a “deposit” (*parathēkē*) to Timothy (1:14); now Timothy is to “deposit/entrust” (*paratithēmi*) the content to men who can *teach* others also, i.e., who can transmit this fixed content (2:2). The “then” or “therefore” at the beginning of 2:1 also tells us that this final call to appoint teachers is the fitting conclusion, or application, of what came in the two paragraphs before. I feel *WSB* does not pay sufficient attention to the unity of this passage as a whole and so misses some important subtleties, as I will outline below.

WSB has several things it doesn't like about my reading of this passage (they are all listed in *WSB*, chapter 3, §B [ii]). Let me take them in turn.

3.2. How *fixed* were Paul's “pattern of sound words”?

WSB says that *Hearing Her Voice* contains the “unsupported assumption” that the content passed onto Timothy was a “fixed set of words” to be passed on “verbatim”.

I never use the word “verbatim” in *Hearing Her Voice* (deliberately). *WSB* acknowledges this in a footnote (n.97, chapter 3) but routinely uses the term in the body of the book as an appropriate description of my view (at least 7 times by my count, and in key summaries of my position).

I do use the term “fixed” quite a bit in *Hearing Her Voice*, and the fact that *WSB* thought this meant “verbatim” suggests to me I should have done more to help readers appreciate that I mean “fixed” like a long-form gag or joke not “fixed” like the Times-Table kids learn verbatim. My model of how oral tradition worked in the first century has always been that of James Dunn (*Jesus Remembered*, 2003), who speaks of both “fixity” and “flexibility” in the tradition: he calls his model “informal, controlled oral tradition”. I discuss it at length in chapter 5 of my 2005 book *The Christ Files*. This combination of *informality* and *control* in early Christian oral tradition is why stories in the Gospels can be *similar* but *different* (e.g., the Centurion’s Servant in Matt 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10). This is why Paul’s rendition of the Last Supper (1 Cor 11:23-25) is *close* but not identical to Luke’s (Luke 22:19-20). These are the kinds of things Paul “handed over” to his converts (through teaching). They were fixed, more or less.

I emphasised the concept of a “fixed set of words” throughout my book because I didn’t want readers to think I meant only that Paul was merely concerned that his *doctrines* or *ideas* were to be preserved intact (substitutionary atonement, Christ’s divinity, and so on). I wanted readers to understand that oral tradition “handed over” not just *concepts* or *doctrines* but *bodies of material* to be remembered (with fixity and flexibility). Paul taught his converts to know what Jesus said at the Last Supper. He wanted them to be able to rehearse whole sayings and parables of Jesus. There is good evidence he taught them what we call the Sermon on the Mount (see Dale Alison, “The Pauline Epistles and the Synoptic Gospels: the Pattern of the Parables,” *New Testament Studies* 28/1, 1982, 1-32). Paul also wanted Christians to know certain lists of apostolic rulings/commands about Christian behaviour, as well as various hymns and credal statements. All of this stuff constituted the apostolic deposit, the founding gospel traditions. This is what Paul means when he says to Timothy, “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me ... guard the good deposit entrusted to you” (2 Tim 1:13-14).

The practice of preserving “the sound words” and guarding “the good deposit” is precisely how we ended up with the written Gospels a decade or two after Paul. As James Dunn remarks, “Assuming the Jesus tradition has much the same form and character for Paul as it still has in the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), the Synoptic tradition can then be said to represent the tradition which he received and its variability the manner in which he transmitted it” (James Dunn, *The Oral Gospel Tradition*. Eerdmans, 2013, 218). People like Timothy preserved these gospel traditions—not verbatim but as a fixed body of material. They told them over and over so that people learned them. Eventually, one of Paul’s other key mission partners wrote up this teaching: we call it the Gospel according to Luke.

I want to lay to rest *WSB*’s concern about my “unsupported assumption” that Timothy preserved a “fixed set of words” to be passed on “verbatim”. Compared to the modern Times-Table, the apostolic deposit was a *flexible* body of material. But compared to a general description of doctrine students might learn in a Theology class, the apostolic deposit was a *fixed set of words*, including actual stories and sayings of Jesus, creeds, apostolic commands, and so on.

3.3. Is there really no “teaching” in 2 Tim 1:13-14?

The “second problem” *WSB* finds with my reading of 2 Tim 1:11 – 2:2 is that “there are no teaching words in verses 13-14.” Teaching words are there a few lines before (Paul is “teacher”) and a few lines after (“teach others also”), but not there when Paul says, “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me ... guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”

This seems an arbitrary observation. Is it really plausible that “sound words” and “good deposit” refer to something *other than* the content Paul as “teacher” entrusted to Timothy and which Timothy was now to entrust to those who will “teach”? *WSB* thinks so: “there is no greater reason to link the traditions with Paul’s role as teacher than there is with his role as a herald or apostle” (*WSB*, chapter 3, §B [ii]). In other words, I presumptuously link the “sound words / good deposit” with the content Paul gave in his capacity as “teacher”. *WSB* reckons that deposit could just as easily refer to the content Paul gave in his capacity as “apostle” or “herald” not “teacher”. Any connection between “teacher” in verse 11 and the “sound words / good deposit” in verse 14 is thereby minimized by *WSB*.

On my view of teaching, *WSB*’s observation has no force. I believe it is *all the same content*. Paul is talking about the traditions of the gospel: “... the gospel for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and a teacher (v.11). When Paul *preached* this apostolic deposit to the world—to those for whom it was ‘news’—he thought of himself as a “preacher/herald”, since this word usually carries the sense of *making an announcement*. When he transmitted the same gospel traditions to willing learners, he thought of himself as their “teacher”, since this word usually connotes an educational relationship between speaker and hearers. The word “apostle”, of course, doesn’t refer to a speaking activity at all. It refers to Paul being *sent* by the Lord to be both a “preacher” to the world and a “teacher” of disciples. But it is all the same basic content, the same “pattern of words”, the same “good deposit”. I agree with *WSB*, then, that there is “no greater reason to link the traditions with Paul’s role as teacher than there is with his role as a herald or apostle,” but only because they’re all the same. Those gospel traditions lie at the heart of Paul’s commission *both* as preacher and teacher. One of the things I repeatedly emphasized in *Hearing Her Voice* is that “teaching” does not refer to all of the good things one might say for the building up of the church. It refers specifically to educating people in the basic structures of the faith, the apostolic deposit, the traditions of the gospel (which included everything we find in the Gospels and more). Viewed this way, *WSB*’s point is not relevant.

The way I see it, there is an obvious and unbreakable link between the description of Paul’s ministry in verses 11-12 and the apostle’s reminder in verses 13-14 that Timothy has been entrusted with a fixed body of words (the same material Timothy is to entrust to other teachers in 2:1-2). *WSB*’s suggestion that the “sound words / good deposit” may derive from Paul’s role as “preacher” or “apostle”, rather than his role as “teacher”, seems a very unsatisfactory interpretation to me.

3.4. What are Timothy’s appointees expected to “teach”?

This brings us to “the third flaw in Dickson’s argument in this section”:

Having decided, with no discernible basis in the text, that ‘teaching’ and the ‘oral traditions’ are closely linked in 2 Timothy 1:13-14, Dickson then carries that conclusion into 2 Timothy 2:2, and asserts that the words ‘entrust’ and ‘teaching’ mean essentially the same thing (*WSB*, chapter 3, §B [ii]).

WSB asks us to believe not only that there is little formal connection between Paul’s role as “teacher” (1:11-12) and the “deposit” entrusted to Timothy (1:13-14), but also that there is little formal connection between the “deposit” Timothy was to give to the teachers (2:2a) and the “teaching” these men were to perform in church (2:2b). The suggestion is that while “deposit/entrust” in 2:2a might refer to passing on oral tradition, the word “teach” in 2:2b refers to a different kind of ministry:

If any word in 2 Timothy 2:2 means something like “laying down and preserving, *this* [“deposit/entrust”] is the word. But does its presence in this verse mean that the word “teach” (*didaskō*) that follows it means basically the same thing, as Dickson argues? There is no reason to think so. The first word (*paratithēmi*) refers to the care of an object handed over for preservation, and the second (*didaskō*) refers to an activity that causes learning in people (*WSB*, chapter 3, §B [ii]).

This repeats the point made frequently throughout *WSB* that “traditioning” language is very different from “teaching” language, that the terms “hand over / receive” are *not* closely connected to “teach / learn”. In the same way, *WSB* asks us to accept that “entrust/deposit” is not intimately related to “teach”. One is a *traditioning* activity and the other is an *educational* activity.

I think I have demonstrated above that there is a very close connection between Paul’s *traditioning* language and his *educational* language (Rom 6:17; Gal 1:12; Phil 4:9; Col 2:6-7; 2 Thess 2:15): *teaching* is how stuff gets *handed over*. And I am far from alone in thinking this!

Something similar can be said of this passage. How did Paul the “teacher” give Timothy his “pattern of words” and “good deposit”? Surely, as the Teacher, he *taught* him. After all, the term “entrust/deposit” (just like “hand over”) is a word-picture, a metaphor, rather than a direct term for a speaking activity. Far from creating the problem *WSB* imagines—“of ‘entrust’ swallowing up the meaning of ‘teach’”—I am pointing out that the oral gospel traditions were “handed over” or “entrusted/deposited” to people *through teaching*. “Teaching” does not merely refer to “instructing” or “informing” people about God’s truth in the broad and bland dictionary definition *WSB* demands. It refers to the particular instructional activity of transmitting the apostolic gospel traditions *intact* so that people learn them.

Because *WSB* thinks I see “entrust/deposit” as pretty much identical to “teach”, it is able to construct a logical dilemma for my argument: this would demand, they say, that these faithful teachers were likewise to “entrust/deposit” the apostolic words to the church, and this would blur the two audiences Paul has in mind in 2 Tim 2:1-2. *WSB* rightly points out that Paul wants Timothy to entrust the gospel traditions to *faithful men* (audience 1) so that they can then teach the *wider church* (audience 2). It is perfectly true that Paul has these two audiences in mind. But nothing in my account of teaching dilutes this. “Teaching” is both how the faithful men are entrusted with the gospel traditions *and* how these faithful men cause the church to *learn* those gospel traditions.

This reading is supported by one little adverb tucked away in Paul’s sentence to which *WSB* does not pay sufficient attention: “also / as well”. Paul writes, “entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also / as well (*kai*).” Even without the “also / as well”, I think it would be obvious that “teach” here refers to transmitting to the church the apostolic “good deposit” which Paul handed to Timothy and which Timothy handed to faithful men. It is all about *causing people to learn* the gospel traditions. But the “also / as well” puts this beyond doubt, for me and plenty of other commentators. Surely, “teach others *also / as well*” means that these faithful men are to teach the church the apostolic deposit, just as Timothy had taught it to them (and just as Paul had taught it to Timothy).

In 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul is not saying, “I want you, Timothy, to do one activity with your appointees, and then I want those appointees to do a different activity with the church.” He is saying, “I taught you the gospel traditions, Timothy, so that they were deposited with you; and now I want you to teach the teachers, entrusting them with the same deposit, so

that they, in turn, will be able to teach that deposit to the church.” This is why I feel that *WSB* misses the mark when it insists, “There is nothing in 2 Tim 1:11 – 2:2 to overturn the otherwise universally attested meaning of *didaskō* in the first century and in the rest of the New Testament. In fact, Paul’s use of the word in this passage is entirely consistent with its usual meaning: to teach, inform and instruct” (*WSB*, chapter 3, §B [ii]). I have pointed out elsewhere that I am *not* proposing a new definition of *didaskō*. That is an entirely contrived argument. And here we can see how that contrivance is put to effect by *WSB*: “Dickson defines teaching as *entrusting the deposit*, thus inventing a novel definition.” But I can only repeat: my argument has nothing to do with a dictionary definition of *didaskō*. It is much simpler: I am saying that “to teach,” means *to instruct* in the sense of *transmitting to others the apostolic traditions*. There is no other word in the Greek language more suitable for this activity than the decidedly educational term *didaskō*. The terms “hand over” and “entrust/deposit” do not describe this activity. They describe—by way of a word picture—the *result* of that activity. The activity itself is “teaching”.

In all of this, the chief teacher, Paul, is establishing a chain of tradition, akin to what he knew as a former Pharisee. It begins with Jesus and ends with the ongoing church. Paul got a deposit from the Lord (1:12), Timothy got that deposit from Paul (1:14), teachers are to get that deposit from Timothy (2:2a), and now the church will get that deposit from their teachers (2:2b). “By teaching,” says Benjamin Fiore in his commentary on these verses, “they [Timothy’s appointees] continue the work of Paul (1:11) and Timothy in a line of tradition that looks to the future, *kai heterous*, ‘others as well’” (Benjamin Fiore, *The Pastoral Epistles*. Sacra Pagina vol.12, 147).

The Oxford exegete J. N. D. Kelly put it particularly well in his classic commentary on this passage:

Paul’s advice to Timothy to pass on the apostolic gospel to reliable persons, who will be able to instruct others also is of immense interest as containing, in embryonic form, the twin, closely related ideas of the tradition of the original revelation and of a succession of authorized persons charged with the responsibility of passing it on intact. Essentially the same ideas, though less explicitly set out, appear in Paul’s earlier letters. From the beginning the conception of tradition, or the handing down of the original revelation, was integral to Christianity (J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 174).

Kelly captures the thrust of 2 Timothy 1:11 – 2:2 perfectly, and it is an understanding of “teaching” that permeates the entire Pastoral Epistles, as I will show in the final section, where I briefly sketch the cumulative case for thinking of “teaching” as handing over the apostolic deposit.

4. THE CUMULATIVE CASE FOR “TEACHING” AS HANDING OVER THE APOSTOLIC DEPOSIT

When I wrote *Hearing Her Voice*, I genuinely thought it was well known that “teaching” in the Pastoral Epistles refers to *transmitting the apostolic traditions*. As a consequence, my argument in *HHV* moves at ‘high-speed’. I now regret not taking things more slowly, in a step-by-step fashion.

It surprises me that *WSB* chose to dispute this basic point so strongly, and I suspect that in the long term this editorial decision will not work in *WSB*’s favour, as pastors and theological students read their commentaries and find this idea frequently noted, or as

they study oral tradition in early Christianity and discover that it is widely acknowledged that “teachers” were *principally* repositories of the fixed apostolic traditions.

But let me lay out the steps of the argument, briefly in a step-by-step manner, and then I will be done:

4.1. Paul was clearly a ‘traditionalist’

Paul is frequently concerned with the preservation of his apostolic traditions and uses recognised technical language—“hand over / receive”—on numerous occasions (1 Cor 11:2, 23; 15:1-3; Gal 1:9, 12; Phil 4:9; Col 2:6; 1 Thess 4:1; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6). This is not in dispute in *WSB*.

4.2. Paul’s Pharisaic background

This concern for preserving the words of authoritative teachers no doubt derives from Paul’s Pharisaic background, since the evidence of Mark 7:1-8, Josephus *Antiquities* 13.297, and Mishnah *’Abot* 1 makes clear that “handing over / receiving” was at the heart of the Pharisees’ educational project (their “teaching”), as is widely acknowledged in scholarship today. That Paul himself had been part of this educational activity as a *Pharisee* is clear from Gal 1:14 and Acts 22:3.

4.3. “Teaching” is a *new covenant* activity

“Teaching” in the Pauline epistles focused on *new covenant* material not the content of the Old Testament. In other words, “teaching” for Paul is overwhelmingly a gospel-activity. *WSB* makes a case that “teaching” in Romans 15:4 *could* refer to the activity of teaching/explaining the Old Testament. But even if that’s right (and I doubt it), it would be the exception that proves the rule. Search through “teaching” words in Paul and we find loads of passages which unambiguously refer to Christians teaching *new covenant* content, and we find no texts which unambiguously refer to Christians teaching *old covenant* content. In this sense, “teach” is like “evangelise / preach the gospel” (*euaggelizesthai*) which in the New Testament only refers to announcing the good news of the *new covenant* (never the many good things of the old covenant).

The significance of this observation is that “teach” cannot refer broadly to exposition of written material, since hardly any written material existed when Paul wrote his letters (in the 50s-60s AD). All of the gospel traditions were preserved through oral tradition, which was “handed over / received” by constant “teaching / learning”. Part of the problem for modern readers is that we imagine that churches in Paul’s day had a fixed form of the Gospels in their hands, so that after they had heard the gospel once they could easily consult their Gospels to double check things. But there were no Gospels in Paul’s day. This made “teaching” the *only* lifeline to the gospel traditions. It is how the apostolic deposit was not just *believed* for salvation but *learned* for the Christian life. “Teaching” today performs a similar role (even if direct access to the Bible means we have *two* lifelines to the apostolic deposit). Teaching is not simply instructing people in all of the wonderful things the Bible contains for our edification. It is the more focused and authoritative task of ensuring that the *gospel traditions* are truly *learned* by believers.

Sermons today which have *learning the gospel traditions* as their primary purpose are the responsibility of the male elder (the priest in my Anglican context). But this is not the only preaching ministry today. At least *some* preaching ministry aims at what “prophesying” and “exhorting” achieved: inspiring people to trust and obey whatever God has spoken in the

gospel and the Scriptures. Such preaching will naturally contain a *teaching element*, just as formal “teaching” will contain an *exhorting element*, but there is enough difference between the two functions for Paul himself to have made a definite distinction: “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith ... the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation (Rom 12:6-8).

4.4. “Teaching” is clearly connected to “handing over”

Strikingly, on several occasions in Paul’s letters, the words “teaching/learning” appear in direct connection with the words “handing over / receiving” traditions (Rom 6:17; Gal 1:12; Phil 4:9; Col 2:6-7; 2 Thess 2:15). This proves what *WSB* denies: that “to ‘teach’ and to ‘be taught’”, no less than to ‘receive’ and to ‘deliver’, are used in connection with Christian tradition,” as Ronald Fung puts it (*The Epistle to the Galatians*, 52).

4.5. The Pastoral Epistles are concerned with preserving the “teaching”

The language of “handing over / receiving” does not appear in the three Pastoral Epistles. Does this mean those epistles don’t have any concern for passing on and preserving the fixed apostolic material? Of course not. It is universally acknowledged that these letters have an *increased* interest in transmitting apostolic traditions intact. The concept, however, is clearly conveyed through the language of “entrust/deposit”—and the language of “teaching” stands close by. We know that Paul elsewhere uses “teaching / learning” in the sense of *transmitting/receiving the gospel traditions* (Rom 6:17; Gal 1:12; Phil 4:9; Col 2:6-7; 2 Thess 2:15), so it shouldn’t surprise us that in the Pastoral Epistles “teaching” also conveys this idea.

4.6. 2 Timothy 1:11 – 2:2 provides the clearest account of “teaching”

In the single longest discourse on “teaching” in the Pastorals (2 Tim 1:11—2:2) this connection between the oral gospel traditions and “teaching” is explicit, as I have shown at length above. The teacher Paul received a deposit from the Lord; he passed it onto Timothy; Timothy is now to pass it onto other teachers; and these teachers are to teach the church, just as they themselves were taught: “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim 2:2). Here, there is no avoiding the conclusion that “teaching” is the activity by which the apostolic deposit is *deposited*.

4.7. The special use of the noun “teaching” in the Pastoral Epistles

It is regularly acknowledged that there is a terrific increase of the noun “teaching” (*didaskalia*) in the Pastoral Epistles: 14 of Paul’s 17 usages appear in the three Pastoral Epistles. The term is widely recognised as a technical term, a piece of jargon for the fixed body of tradition taught by the apostle (1 Tim 1:10; 4:6, 4:13, 4:16; 5:17; 6:1, 6:3; 2 Tim 3:10, 3:16; 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1, 2:7, 2:10), though on a few occasions the noun functions as a verb to describe the activity of “teaching” (1 Tim 4:13, 5:17; 2 Tim 3:16).

The cognate noun *didachē* / “teaching” appears just twice in the Pastoral Epistles, where it is a clear synonym of *didaskalia* (2 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:9). In fact, in Tit 1:9 it appears in perfect parallel with *didaskalia*: the overseer “must hold firmly to the trustworthy word according to the teaching (*didachē*), so that he may be able to exhort in the sound teaching (*didaskalia*) and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” In his earlier letter to the Romans, Paul uses *didachē* in precisely the same way, to refer to the basic deposit

already delivered to Christians (Rom 6:17; 16:17). Commenting on this noun in the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, one of the standard multi-volume dictionaries for New Testament scholarship, Hans-Friedrich Weiss makes the point particularly well:

Didachē is used in Acts 2:42 (“teaching of the apostles”) and in the Pastorals for the firmly established tradition of instruction in the Church; this is the case especially in Titus 1:9 in the context of the exhortation to the bishop to concern himself with the correct preaching “in accordance with the *teaching*”. Such usage was already prepared for by Paul in Rom 6:17 where there is an encouragement to obedience to the “form of teaching” (*tupos didachēs*) which was once (in baptism) transmitted to the addressees. *Didache* is used here, as in 16:17, for definite traditions of faith that one is to learn (*EDNT*, vol.1, 320).

My point here is that everywhere you look in the Pastoral Epistles the noun form of the word “teaching” seems to be talking about the “pattern of words” or “good deposit” Paul handed over to his colleagues (Timothy and Titus). It is a point widely acknowledged in scholarship, and it is highly significant for our understanding of the verb “teach” (*didaskō*) in the Pastoral Epistles.

4.8. The verb “teach” is linked to the noun “teaching” in the Pastoral Epistles

Given (a) that the verb “teach” throughout Paul’s letters is happily associated with the *traditioning* process and (b) that the nouns for “teaching” in the Pastoral Epistles (*didaskalia* / *didachē*) consistently refer to the apostolic deposit taught to the church, it is eminently likely that the verb *didaskō*, “teach”, shares this focus. That is my argument: not that I have a new definition of “teaching” but that the normal definition of the word is focused in Paul, and especially in his Pastoral Epistles, on *ensuring that people learn the apostolic deposit*. It is true that cognate verbs don’t always share precisely the same referent as their nouns, but they *very often do*. To agree that the nouns for “teaching” in the Pastoral Epistles consistently refer to the apostolic deposit and then balk at admitting that the verb “teach” refers to educating people in this deposit seems arbitrary and unnatural.

We have already seen that “teacher” (*didaskalos*) in 2 Tim 1:11 begins Paul’s description of the chain of tradition—from Jesus to Paul to Timothy to the teachers—that climaxes with the verb “teach” (*didaskō*) in 2:2. But there are other clear examples of the connection between verb and noun. The paragraph 1 Tim 4:11-16 opens with the instruction, “Command and *teach* these things” (verb, *didaskō*), then adds the exhortation “until I come devote yourself to the *teaching*” (noun, *didaskalia*, functioning as a verb), before closing with the warning, “keep a close watch on yourself and on *the teaching*” (noun, *didaskalia*). The verb and noun clearly have the same referent here: instructing and paying attention to the apostolic deposit.

Again, in 1 Tim 6:1-3 the verb and noun appear in rapid succession. In verse 1 Paul urges that slaves honour their masters “so that so that the name of God and *the teaching* (noun, *didaskalia*) may not be reviled”, clearly a reference to the gospel traditions. Two contrasting verbs then appear in verses 2-3, along with another noun: Timothy is to “teach (verb, *didaskō*) and urge these things” in contrast to anyone who “*teaches a different doctrine* (verb, *hetero-didaskaleō*) and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and *the teaching* (noun, *didaskalia*) that accords with godliness.” Most commentators make no distinction between “the sound words of our Lord” and “the teaching”. They are the same thing: “Teaching coming from Christ, where he is seen as the authority behind it,” as Howard Marshall puts it. “The solemn fullness of ‘our Lord

Jesus Christ' is intended to make the source and character of the sound teaching more precise" (Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 639). The point is: what Timothy is to *teach* concerning slaves and masters is firmly part of the apostolic deposit which Paul had received from Jesus.

4.9. "Teaching" in the all-important 1 Timothy 2:12

All of the above makes highly likely that "teach" (*didaskō*) in the Pastoral Epistles refers not to instructing people in God's word generally (where does the word *ever* mean that?) but to causing people to learn the apostolic traditions, the deposit of the faith. The context of the all-important 1 Tim 2:12 ("I do not permit a woman to teach") has three uses of teaching-vocabulary in close proximity.

First, here in 1 Timothy—just as in 2 Tim 1:11—Paul gives himself a threefold designation: "I was appointed a *preacher* and an *apostle* (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a *teacher* (*didaskalos*) of the Gentiles" (1 Tim 2:7). In 2 Tim 1:11 he remarked that he was appointed to these roles "for the gospel", narrowing the content of his preaching and teaching to the gospel traditions. Although the word "gospel" is not used here in 1 Timothy, the same idea is conveyed by the brief credal summary which immediately precedes his threefold self-designation:

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. For *this* ["testimony", i.e., the gospel] I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles (1 Tim 2:5-7).

The parallel with 2 Tim 1:11 ("the gospel, for I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher") is very striking, suggesting that it is a central concern of *both* letters to Timothy. Timothy must look to Paul as the appointed head of the chain of tradition in which he, as Paul's key apprentice, is now to play a vital part.

Unlike in 2 Timothy, Paul does not immediately raise the topic of Timothy's role in appointing "faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2). But it doesn't take long for Paul to get there. After a brief word about men lifting holy hands in prayer (1 Tim 2:8) and women adorning themselves respectably (1 Tim 2:9-10), Paul then issues the instruction to Timothy, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man" (1 Tim 2:12). Surely, this functions in precisely the same way as 2 Tim 1:11–2:2 does: Timothy is to ensure that he rightly maintains the *link* between Paul as teacher and those granted authority in the church to teach. This is confirmed by the fact that the next paragraph concerns "overseers" (1 Tim 3:1-7), who must be "able to teach" (adjective, *didaktos*), our third piece of teaching-vocabulary in rapid succession (1 Tim 2:7; 2:12; 3:2). It is interesting that, while most of this paragraph describes the *moral* qualities of overseers, there is just one *activity* mentioned: leading the church *through teaching*.

Many other speaking roles will take place in church, according to 1 Cor 14:1-35 and Rom 12:6-8, but the overseer alone will lead by his "teaching". This cannot mean instructing people in general about God's truth. In the Pastoral Epistles, it must mean the more focused task of ensuring that the new covenant "testimony" or "gospel" or "pattern of words" or "good deposit" is genuinely learned by the church. It is a vital speaking ministry, but it certainly isn't the only kind of speaking ministry. And since *only this* speaking ministry is reserved for men chosen as overseers, there are no biblical grounds for excluding women entirely from the modern pulpit.

CONCLUSION

The underlying perspective of *Hearing Her Voice* is well represented by leading conservative evangelical Pauline scholar, Thomas Schreiner, who in his major work on the theology of Paul writes about the “teaching function of overseers” according to the Pastoral Epistles:

Their [the overseers] primary calling is to pass on the tradition and truth of the gospel. Their leadership, in other words, is not primarily bureaucratic, as the case in so many denominations today. Overseer-elders exert their leadership through their teaching ministry and by their adherence to the gospel (1 Tim 5:17). The importance of tradition and teaching in the Pastorals is undeniable. Paul often contrasts unhealthy teaching with that which is healthy (1 Tim 1:10; 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13; 4:3; Tit 1:9, 13; 2:1-2). The truth that must be safeguarded is the gospel (1 Tim 3:16). False teachers veer away from the truth (1 Tim 1:3-11; 4:15), and so teaching centered on the faithful word is crucial (1 Tim 1:15; 3:9; 4:9; 2 Tim 2:11; Tit 3:8) ... The deposit must be guarded because of the threat of false teachers (2 Tim 1:14), and it must be passed on to the next generation (2 Tim 2:2) (Thomas Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*. IVP, 2006, 389-90).

My point is not that Schreiner would agree with my extrapolation of these insights: that since “teaching” in the Pastoral Epistles refers to passing on the apostolic traditions, the ban on women teaching in 1 Tim 2:12 cannot be universalized to all modern sermons. I offer Schreiner as a representative of the way scholars view “teaching” in the Pastoral Epistles. It is my practical application of this widely acknowledged insight—not the insight itself—that I thought would be the focus of any critique of *Hearing Her Voice*. As I say in the book:

If there is anything novel in what I am saying, and I suspect there isn't, it is not a particular historical or exegetical insight, still less a new linguistic definition. Again, few New Testament scholars would dispute that before the writing of the New Testament documents, there was a large body of rehearsed oral traditions referred to as “teaching(s).” What I am proposing has to do with the implication and application of these realities. If this is what Paul meant by “teaching,” why do we give the same label to a modern sermon? (*HHV*, 47-48 [52 in the Australian print edition]).

(Happily, since writing the book, I have learned that even my “application” of this understanding of teaching was argued twenty years ago by Robert L. Saucy in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 37:1 [Mar 1994], 80-97).

I have been genuinely taken aback by *WSB*'s efforts to describe my understanding of “teaching” in Paul as “new” or “novel” (words that appear many times in the book). When I wrote *Hearing Her Voice*, I was sure fellow students of the New Testament would accept that teaching, especially in the Pastoral Epistles, was primarily about transmitting the apostolic deposit.

I thought at the time that the only way to defeat my argument would be to show that every sermon today should primarily be an act of laying down the apostolic deposit, of transmitting the gospel traditions. This would indeed overturn my argument, since every sermon preached in church would fall under the ban of 1 Tim 2:12.

But *WSB* made a strategic decision to try and overturn my basic account of teaching in the Pastoral Epistles and even to dismiss it as novel. It was a bold move. Ultimately, it cannot succeed, and it potentially undermines *WSB* itself. Exegetical judgements described by *WSB* as “errors”, “flaws”, and “fallacies” turn out to be well represented in contemporary New Testament scholarship (and even in the formal doctrinal statements of the Sydney Anglican church). This doesn’t prove that I am correct. It does make the zero-sum, all-or-nothing approach of *WSB* very unsatisfying.

To repeat what I said at the outset of this final chapter, *Women, Sermons and the Bible* forces readers to decide whether Matthias Media is in possession of a uniquely authoritative kind of scholarship, or whether it is guilty of a contrived and overzealous approach to this important question.

Matthias Media and I agree on so much—too much to be engaged in what feels like trench warfare. We are family, and I trust we will remain friends. I also want to register once more my hope that the authors will agree to some kind of face-to-face discussion where we can put aside *mediated* versions of each other’s opinions and truly listen to, and learn from, one another in the fellowship of the gospel.

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