

Unraveling 1 Timothy 2:8-15

- **The Context of 1 Timothy**
 1. False Teaching: The church is under attack.
 - Words pertaining to teaching (viz., “able to teach,” “teaching,” “teacher,” “teach,” “teach otherwise”) occur 17 times in 1 Timothy (1:3, 7, 10; 2:7, 12; 3:2; 4:1, 6, 11, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:1, 2, 3 [2x]).
 - See especially 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 4:1-4, 7; 6:3-5, 20-21.
 2. Women in 1 & 2 Timothy: The home is under attack.
 - Note the amount of discussion given in 1 Timothy 5:3-16.
 - “Real widows” in 5:3, 5, 16
 - “Younger widows” in 5:6-7, 11-15
 - “Weak women” in 2 Timothy 3:6-7
 - Note also the emphasis on the home and the relationship to society in the description of elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3:2, 4-5, 7, 12).

- **The Context of the Passage**
 1. Inconsistencies in Translation
 - The Greek text reads “humanity” in 1 Timothy 2:1, 4, 5 and “man [male]” in 1 Tim 2:8. Compare the diverse translations.
 - Some translations read “peaceable, quiet [adj.]” in 1 Timothy 2:2 (referring to all Christians), but “silent [noun]” in 1 Tim 2:11, 12 (referring to women).
 2. Paul is concerned about the behavior of the church (1 Timothy 2:1-3:15, esp. 3:15).

- **Structural Features of the Passage: An Emphasis on Modesty**
 1. *Inclusio* (bracket) in 2:9, 15 (“with modesty;” *meta sōphrosunēs*)
 2. *Inclusio* (bracket) in 2:11, 12 (“with quiet behavior;” *en hēsuchia*)

- **Keys Terms in the Passage: An Emphasis on Modesty**
 1. In 2:9, note the piling up of words connected to modesty:

I desire that the women adorn (*kosmein*) themselves in modest (*kosmios*) attire with modesty (*aidōs*) and moderation (*sōphrosunē*).
 2. Paul also shows attention to the idea of modesty in his use of *prepein* (“be fitting, be seemly/suitable”) in 2:10.
 3. Note the importance of *sōphrosunē* as follows:

“The term means ‘temperance’ but also connotes chastity and self-restraint. It was the pre-eminent virtue of Greek women; it is mentioned more frequently than any other quality on women’s tombstones.¹”

¹ S. B. Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 70.

The Interpretation of the Text

Verse 8

- Notice the following passages from 1 Timothy, in which we see some probable causes and evidence for the men's quarreling in 2:8:
 - They pay attention to myths and endless genealogies that promote useless speculations (1:4).
 - Some, while going astray, turn away to fruitless discussion (1:6).
 - Avoid godless and silly myths (4:7).
 - He is sick with a morbid craving for debates and disputes about words, from which come envy, strife, slanders, evil suspicions, wranglings of people who have corrupt minds and lack the truth, thinking that godliness is a means of gain (6:4-5).
 - Avoid the godless, empty chatter and the contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge (6:20).

Verses 9-15

- Why does Paul devote these seven verses to women?
 - It seems that there is a specific problem with the women in Ephesus.
 - See **Links Between the Women in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 And the "Younger Widows" in 1 Timothy 5** below.

Verses 11-12

- Why does Paul single out women and teaching?
 1. It seems likely that they are involved in the false teaching in some way.
 2. See 1 Timothy 5:13; 2 Timothy 3:6-7.
- What is the best translation for *authentēin*?
 1. On the translation of *authentēin* as "bossy," note the definition in BDAG: "to assume a stance of independent authority, *give orders to, dictate to ...* (practically = 'tell a man what to do' [Jerusalem Bible].)"
 2. Note how "to teach and to be bossy over men" is in contrast to the phrase "but she is to be in quietness."

Verses 13-14

- How is the OT being used?
 1. A proof text: Genesis 15:6 in Romans 4:3
 2. An example/illustration/analogy: 1 Cor 10:1-11; 2 Corinthians 11:1-4
 - "Watch out for the 'Eves' who are being deceived by the false teachers."

-Structure (C. Osburn in Geer, *EWEC*, 1. 296 n. 45)

- | | | |
|----|---|------|
| a | I am not permitting a woman to teach | 2:12 |
| b | nor domineer over a man | 2:12 |
| b' | for Adam was formed first, then Eve | 2:13 |
| a' | the woman, when she was deceived, became a transgressor | 2:14 |

Verse 15

- See the instruction to the "younger widows" in 1 Timothy 5:14.
- "Bearing children" is shorthand for a "well-run family" (Geer, *EWEC* 1.298).
- On "salvation," compare the advice to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16.

Links Between the Women in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 And the “Younger Widows” in 1 Timothy 5

Question: If Paul is not speaking about women in general, but rather to a particular problem with immodest women in Ephesus, then what evidence is there to connect the women in 2:9-15 with a specific problem in 1 Timothy? Notice the following links between the women of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 and the young widows described in 1 Timothy 5:3-16.

1. Immodest expenditures

In 1 Timothy 2:9, Paul cautions women not “to adorn themselves with braids or gold or pearls or very expensive clothing.” Correspondingly, Paul describes the young widows in 1 Timothy 5:6 with the verb *spatalan*, which means “to indulge oneself beyond the bounds of propriety, live luxuriously/voluptuously” (BDAG). Thus, 1 Timothy 2:9 contains specific examples of what it means to “live luxuriously” (1 Tim 5:6).

2. Good deeds

In 1 Timothy 2:10, Paul remarks that a proper woman adorns herself “with good deeds.” In his contrast between the younger widows and the real widows in 1 Timothy 5, Paul affirms that a “real widow” (5:3) should be “attested for her good deeds and devoted to every good deed” (5:10). With this item, we have a strong, verbal parallel between the two passages.

3. Quiet behavior

If Paul is concerned with *how* the women are behaving and speaking in 2:11-12, is there any evidence of unacceptable behavior among the younger widows in 1 Timothy 5? In the language of 1 Timothy 2, do the younger widows exhibit a lack of “quiet behavior” (*hēsuchia*)?

Paul has at least three descriptions of behavior that is not quiet behavior. The younger widows are described as “busybodies” who “run about from house to house” (5:13). Apparently their behavior has been so scandalous that it has provided others an opportunity to “revile” the church (5:14). Paul issues a command to avoid luxurious living in order that younger widows may be “without reproach” (5:7). Each of these three descriptions is connected to the absence of “quiet behavior” in other New Testament texts. As evidence, Paul contrasts *hēsuchia* with “busybodies” in 2 Thess 3:11-12 (cf. how the verb *hēsuchazein* (“live quietly”) is parallel to “to mind your own business” in 1 Thess 4:11). Also, those who “live quietly” earn the “respect” (not “reproach”) of outsiders (1 Thess 4:11-12).

4. Problems with teaching

When Paul writes “I do not permit a woman to teach” (2:12), is there any evidence that false teaching is a problem among women in Ephesus? Or, is Paul talking about women teaching in general? From our earlier investigation of the “angry men,” we know that there is ample evidence that the church is under attack from false teaching. Seventeen times Paul uses words associated with teaching (1 Timothy (1:3, 7, 10; 2:7, 12; 3:2; 4:1, 6, 11, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:1, 2, 3 [2x]). But what about the younger widows? Is there any false teaching connected with them? In 5:13, Paul describes the younger widows as “saying what they should not,” a phrase that is associated with false teaching in Titus 1:11 (namely, “teaching what they should not”). It also appears that false teachers are using the homes of women as outposts for the false teaching (2 Timothy 3:6-7).

5. Deception

Twice Paul uses the language of deception in his illustration treating Adam and Eve—”Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (2:14). What evidence is there that the younger widows have been deceived? Paul uses neither the verb “deceive” nor the noun “deception” in 1 Timothy 5. However, it seems highly likely that the younger widows, who “have followed after Satan” (5:15), can be described as “deceived.”

6. Bearing children

Finally, what is one to do with the cryptic phrase “she will be saved through the bearing of children” (*teknogonia*) in 2:15? Interestingly, the verb (*teknogonein*) appears in 1 Timothy 5 when the younger widows are admonished “to marry, bear children (*teknogonein*), and manage their households” (5:14). In other words, it is highly unlikely that Paul, in 2:15, is saying that a woman must bear a child to be saved. Rather, the word “bearing of children” (*teknogonia*) is a compressed way of saying, “Pay attention to your domestic responsibilities.”² This interpretation of 2:15 not only fits well with the admonition to the younger widows, but also with other passages in 1 Timothy (e.g., those people who “forbid marriage” in 4:3).

Elsewhere in 1 Timothy, Paul also shows care for the state of the home, likely indicating that there are problems in that area. For example, in his instructions regarding elders and deacons, Paul highlights the importance of a strong home. In effect, he also tells potential elders and deacons, “Pay attention to your domestic responsibilities” (3:2, 4-5, 7, 12). Thus, in a context where the home is under attack, and possibly being used as an outpost for false teaching (cf. 2 Tim 3:6-7), such instructions from Paul are not surprising.

² “Bearing children” is shorthand for a “well-run family” (Geer, *EWEC* 1.298).

Three Options for the Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:8-15

1. A Rule for All Time

- + Paul's instructions do not allow women "to teach or have authority over men" (RSV; 2:12).
- + There is an appeal to creation in 1 Tim 2:13-14.
- + They argue for a hierarchical relationship between men and women, primarily based on the phrase "Adam was created first" (2:13).
- + They argue that 1 Cor 14:34-35 fits with this interpretation
- It is difficult to consistently apply 1 Timothy 2:8, 9, 12, 15 as rules for all time.
- If men should occupy positions of authority based on creation, then there are difficulties with modern application. Today women fill virtually every position of leadership in our culture.
 - Supreme Court Justice
 - Senator
 - Mayor
 - Doctor
 - Lawyer
 - Judge
 - Professor
 - Umpire
 - School principal
 - Manager
 - Counselor
 - Teacher
 - Voter
 - Engineer
 - Architect
- 1 Timothy 2:8 seems to apply to a specific problem with men in Ephesus.
- There are other places in the OT and NT where women teach or lead.
- Does the appeal to creation mean that all women are by nature more gullible than men?

2. Specific Instructions for a Specific Problem

- + Since 1 Timothy 2:8 seems to respond to a particular problem with men in Ephesus, it seems likely that 2:9-15 respond to specific problems with women in Ephesus.
- + One can easily apply 1 Timothy 2:8, 9, 12, 15 on the level of principles. For instance, with 2:12 one might say the following:
 - If we had problems with immodest, bossy women teaching false doctrine, then we would tell those women not "to teach or be bossy"³ (2:12); but we don't have that problem. The principle is 'Stop immodest and bossy behavior, as well as false teaching.' Such behavior today should evoke a similar response.⁴ In fact, Jesus condemns any disciple—male or female—who behaves in an overbearing way (Luke 22:24-26).
- + There seem to be connections between the women in 1 Timothy 2 and the younger widows in 1 Timothy 5.
- + The appeal to creation in 2:13-14 functions as an illustration.
- + There are no problems with biblical passages showing women teaching or leading.
- ? If the situation with the younger widows changed, would the instructions in 1 Timothy 2:8-15 also change?
- Opponents argue that 1 Cor 14:34-35 does not fit with this interpretation.
- There is an appeal to pre-Fall creation in 1 Tim 2:13-14.

3. Diversity in the New Testament on this Issue

- + Not all the NT passages affirm or restrict the roles of women.
- + The NT is diverse on some issues (e.g., the attitude of Christians to government, metaphors for salvation, attitude toward slavery, etc.).
- + Perhaps the church was still in the process of working out this issue.
- + Diversity is a reality today with a number of practices in our churches.
- Is diversity an option on this issue?
- The other options fit the evidence.

³ On the translation of *authentēin* as "bossy," note the definition in BDAG, "to assume a stance of independent authority, *give orders to, dictate to* ... (practically = 'tell a man what to do' [Jerusalem Bible]."

⁴ Elsewhere in 1 Timothy, men are also called to modest behavior with the same word as the women (*kosmios* ["respectable, appropriate"] in 2:9 and 3:2) and with a word built on the same root (*sōphrosunē* ["prudence"] in 2:9, 15 and *sōphrōn* ["prudent"] in 3:2).