

# Contextual Discussion of 1 Timothy 2

## **I. The Context of 1 Timothy**

One of the key themes in 1 Timothy 1 is false teaching...the church in Ephesus was being attacked. This is evident when you consider the number of times words pertaining to “teaching” occur in the text (remember that exegesis – interpreting the text using sound historical and grammatical controls) is like listening into one side of a telephone conversation. If terms or themes occur repeatedly, they give the reader clues as to the point or subject matter of the letter).

Paul uses words that refer to “teaching,” “teacher,” “teach,” “teach otherwise,” “able to teach” 17 times in this little letter, (1:3, 7, 10; 2:7, 12; 3:2; 4:1, 6, 11, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:1, 2, 3 [2x]). This theme is especially prevalent in 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 4:1-4, 7; 6:3-5, 20-21. For example:

1 Timothy 1:3-7 – “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer<sup>4</sup> nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work--which is by faith.<sup>5</sup> The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.<sup>6</sup> Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk.<sup>7</sup> They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.”

Another key theme in 1 Timothy is that the home was apparently also under attack. Women play a prominent role in 1 & 2 Timothy and in Paul's discussions about the home. For instance, Much of 1 Tim. 5 (vv.3-16) is given to the discussion of the difference between “real widows” (“widows who are really in need” - 5:3, 5, 16) and the “younger widows” (5:6-7, 11-15). Obviously Paul mentions women in 1 Tim. 2 in the passage under consideration. In the discussion of elders and deacons in 1 Tim. 3, there's the emphasis on the family and elders: An elder should be the “husband of one wife” (3:2) and should “manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect” (3:4). Paul says a deacon must be a “one-woman man” and “manage his children and household well” (3:12). So there is a great deal of emphasis on the home in 1 Timothy.

## **II. The Context of the Passage**

One thing any reader of English Bibles has to come to grips with is that our Bible translations make some decisions for us (they decide to translate certain things in certain ways – sometimes to protect a doctrine – sometimes the translators just bring some baggage to the work of translation). And so, there are some inconsistencies in translations and you need to be aware of when the translators are making those decisions for us.

For example, 1 Timothy 2:1 the NIV says, “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone” (rather than “everyone,” the KJV and the NASB and other translations use “all men.” But the word is *anthropos*, which is the generic word for “humanity” or “all people” or (as in NIV) “everyone.” The same thing occurs in 1 Timothy 2:4 – “[God] wants all men [*anthropos* – everyone] to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” But then, in 1 Timothy 2:8 (“I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing”), the word truly should be translated “men” (The Gk word is *aner* and should be translated “man” or “men.”

The point is that you can't always tell what the word is (and this is why you should always use multiple English versions to study the Bible if you don't know Greek).

The same kind of thing happens in this passage on women in the church. In the NIV, 1 Timothy 2:2 is rendered, "[Pray] for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." The phrase "quiet lives" is *hesuchios bios* describes how all Christians should live in the culture in which they find themselves. *Hesuchios* is the adjective that modifies the noun *bios*. However, the noun form *hesuchia* in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is translated differently. In the NIV, these verses are translated, "A woman should learn in quietness [*same word as in v.2 – hesuchia*] and full submission. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent [*hesuchia - quiet*]." The KJV says, "Let the woman learn in silence [*hesuchia – quietly*] with all subjection. <sup>12</sup> But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence [*hesuchia – quietly*]." There is quite a different "flavor" depending upon which translation you use!

The word *hesuchia* means "quiet, peaceable demeanor" not total silence. So sometimes translations hurt our understanding because they're not consistent. It's helpful to know when translators are making decisions for us when they translate...

Paul's emphasis in 1 Tim. 2:1-3:15 has to do with behavior in the church. 1 Tim. 2:1-8 has to do with prayer, 1 Tim. 2:9-15 has to do with women, 1 Tim. 3:1-7 talks about qualities of elders and 1 Tim. 3:8-13 speaks to qualities for deacons (and perhaps women deacons or wives of deacons or women assistants to the deacons).

Paul concludes the immediate discussion in 1 Timothy 3:14-15 when he says, "Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, <sup>15</sup> if I am delayed, *you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household* [emphasis added], which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth."

### **III. Immediate Context of 2:9-15.**

If you will recall from our discussion of 1 Cor. 14, v. 26 and v. 40 form "brackets" around a completed thought (what scholars call an "inclusion"). 1 Cor. 14:26 states, "All must be done for the strengthening of the church" 1 Cor. 14:40 concludes "All must be done in a fitting and orderly way." In between those two statements is HOW you do things for strengthening and in a fitting and orderly way.

The same kind of thing happens in 1 Tim. 2. Regarding women, 1 Tim. 2:9 says women should "dress modestly, with decency and propriety" (*meta sōphrosunēs – propriety or modesty*). In 1 Tim. 2:15 Paul concludes "if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with propriety" (*meta sōphrosunēs – with propriety or modesty*). So if the section referring to women begins and ends with "modesty" or "propriety," that lets you know we're dealing with an issue of modesty. Those are the two "brackets" of the conversation.

However, in this passage there is also a bracket within the larger bracket. In 2:11 Paul says, "A woman should learn in quietness" (*en hesuchia – behave quietly – not silence*). In 2:12 he says "A woman must have quietness" (*hesuchia – quiet behavior – not silence*).

While Paul does address the issue of quiet behavior, the main emphasis is this idea of modesty.

Modesty is a key concept in this passage. When Paul says, "I want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety," he's "piling up" words that are synonyms for "modesty" to emphasize the

idea of modesty. More literally, Paul says, “I desire that the women adorn (kosmein – verb) themselves in modest (kosmios – adj.) attire with modesty (aidōs) and moderation (sōphrosunē).” If you did the same thing in English, you’d almost run out of words!

So what you have here is this “piling on” of words in v.9 about modesty and then the very last two words in 2:15 are “with modesty.” So that’s an indication that what occurs in between has to do with an issue of modesty (or immodesty). The same idea is in 2:10 when Paul talks about behavior or deeds that are “appropriate” (“fitting,” “suitable” or “seemly”). So the sense of the passage is about modesty or modest behavior as opposed to immodest actions or behavior.

And this is important because modesty was important in the Greco-Roman culture of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. In fact, “modesty” or “propriety” was THE preeminent virtue among Greco-Roman women. The word is *sōphrosunē* and can be translated “modesty” or “temperance” or “soberness” or “self-control” or “propriety.” The idea is really not the idea of modesty most of us grew up with (i.e. showing a lot of skin). The term means “temperance” but also connotes chastity and self-restraint. It was the preeminent virtue of Greek women and it is mentioned more frequently than any other quality on women’s tombstones in the ancient world. So when dear mom or dear wife died, and you wanted to say, “This was an amazing woman,” you used this word *sōphrosunē*. This was how you described the ideal woman in Greco-Roman culture. And in 1 Timothy, this ideal virtue was at issue. Paul is dealing with the violation of a virtue that was incredibly important in that culture!

#### **IV. The Interpretation of the Text**

In 1 Tim. 2:8, Paul states, “I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.” In 1 Timothy there are several passages that suggest that the men in Ephesus were spending a great deal of time quarreling and disputing (the very opposite of “lifting holy hands in prayer, without anger and disputing!”). 1:4 says some people pay attention to fables (myths) and endless genealogies that promote controversies. In 1:6 Paul asserts that some have “wandered away” by turning meaningless talk (fruitless discussion). In 4:7 he admonishes them to avoid “godless myths and old wives’ tales” (silly myths). In 6:4-5 states that “[False teachers] have...an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions<sup>5</sup> and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.” In 6:20 Paul warns Timothy to “Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge...” So there is a lot of angry arguments and disputes going on. And as you read through 1 Timothy, you’re really not surprised when Paul says that when men pray, they should be holy and not be attacking people. Even in our day and time, it is not unusual for people to pray “attack prayers” which attack a person or a political party or people who have a different conviction on some issue.

Well, Paul says to NOT do that...instead to pray with holiness!

And then, he says in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 – “I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes,<sup>10</sup> but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.<sup>11</sup> A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.<sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.<sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve.<sup>14</sup> And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.<sup>15</sup> But women will be saved through childbearing--if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.”

The discussion has moved from a very brief mention of men in v.8 to a more detailed mention of women in 9-15. And since this gets more real estate in the letter, this must have somehow been a bigger issue! So, questions arise: Why does Paul devote these seven verses to women? Is there something going on specifically in Ephesus that might prompt Paul's discourse here on women? What else was going on with the women in Ephesus?

In 1 Timothy 5, Paul has a long discussion on widows. Is it possible we might be getting some clues as to why Paul wrote what he did in Ch. 2? In other words, is it possible that the discussion about women in Ch. 2 is informed by what Paul says about women in Ch. 5? Remember that context is important. What Paul writes in 1 Tim. 2 is part of the larger context of the letter. If, however, we ignore that context and go straight to ch.2 and start reading there, we may miss the point! Our goal is to work from the outside in rather than from the inside out.

So was there a specific problem with women specific to Ephesus and Paul's first letter to Timothy?

**V. Links Between the Women in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 and the "Younger Widows" in 1 Timothy 5.**

-The 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?

-Here are some links between the women of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 and the young widows described in 1 Timothy 5:3-16.

A. #1 - Immodest expenditures

1. In 1 Timothy 2:9, Paul cautions women not to adorn themselves with "braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes."
2. Correspondingly, in 1 Tim. 5:6 – "But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives."
  - a. Paul describes the young widows with the verb *spatalan*, which means "to indulge oneself beyond the bounds of propriety, live luxuriously and/or voluptuously" (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, & Gingrich Lexicon).
  - b. So, 1 Timothy 2:9 contains specific examples of what it means to "live luxuriously" (general idea is in 1 Tim 5:6).

B. #2 - Good deeds

1. In 1 Timothy 2:10, Paul says that a proper woman adorns herself "with good deeds."
2. In his contrast between the younger widows and the real widows in 1 Timothy 5, Paul affirms that a "real widow" (5:3, 10) should be "well known for her good deeds...devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds."

3. The exact same language is being used in Ch. 2 and also in Ch. 5.
4. We have a strong, verbal parallel between the two passages.

C. #3 - Quiet behavior

1. 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?
2. In other words, do the younger widows in Ch. 5 exhibit a lack of “quiet behavior” (*hēsuchia* – the word used in Ch. 2)?
3. The answer is “Yes.” Paul has at least three descriptions of behavior that is not considered “quiet behavior.”

- a. #1 - The younger widows are described as “busybodies” who “run about from house to house” (5:13).

-Paul uses the same word in 2 Thess. 3:11-12 to contrast “hesuchia” – quiet behavior – with busybodies...

- 2 Thessalonians 3:11-12 – “We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies [same word as in 1 Tim. 5:13].<sup>12</sup> Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down [hesuchia – live quietly] and earn the bread they eat.

- b. #2 - Apparently their behavior has been so scandalous that it has provided others an opportunity to “slander” or “revile” the church (5:14).

- c. #3 - Paul also issues a command to avoid luxurious living in order that younger widows may not be “open to blame” (5:7) (literally, “without reproach” – exact same word used of elders in 1 Tim. 3:2).

- A parallel passage might be 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 – “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life [*hesuchadzo* – live quietly], to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you,<sup>12</sup> so that your daily life may win the respect [rather than reproach or slander] of outsiders [and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.”

-The point – there’s a strong connection between *hesuchia* (quiet behavior) and how Christians should act...

-What Paul says about women (widows) is consistent with what he says for all Christians elsewhere.

D. #4 - Problems with teaching

1. In 2:12, Paul says “I do not permit a woman to teach”...
2. So, is there any evidence that false teaching is a problem among women in Ephesus or is Paul talking about women teaching in general?
3. Well, when we talked about the “angry men,” (2:8), we saw that there was ample evidence that the church is under attack from false teaching.
4. But what about the younger widows? Is there any false teaching connected with them?
  - a. Well, in 5:13, Paul describes the younger widows as “saying things they ought not” say...
  - b. That same phrase is associated with false teaching in Titus 1:11 – “They [false teachers] must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they *ought not to teach*...”
  - c. It also appears that false teachers were using the homes of women as outposts for false teaching (2 Timothy 3:6-7 – “They [false teachers] are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, <sup>7</sup> always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.”)
  - d. So it appears that false teaching was being spread, at least in part, by false teachers who were using at least some of the houses of younger women (would have to be widows) as headquarters for their false teachings.
  - e. So that’s a pretty strong connection to false teaching...

E. #5 - Deception

1. Twice in Ch. 2, Paul uses the language of deception in his illustration about Adam and Eve— “Adam was not deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner” (2:14).
2. Is there any evidence that the younger widows were deceived?
3. While Paul uses neither the verb “deceive” nor the noun “deception” in 1 Timothy 5, it seems pretty reasonable that the younger widows, who “followed Satan” (5:15), can be described as “deceived.”

F. #6 - Bearing children

1. In 2:15, Paul uses this cryptic phrase “But women [literally: she] will be saved [or restored] through childbearing” (teknogonia – the bearing of children).

2. What's interesting is that the same phrase is used in reference to younger widows in 1 Tim. 5:14 – “So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children [teknogonia - bear children], to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander.”
3. It is highly unlikely that Paul is saying in 2:15 that women must bear children in order to be saved.
4. So it may be that “bear children” is a compressed way of saying “Pay attention to your domestic responsibilities.”
5. And if you read 2:15 that way (“her quiet behavior will be restored if she pays attention to her domestic responsibilities”), it fits well with what Paul says to the younger widows in 5:14...
6. And it also fits well with Paul's admonition in 4:3 to refuse to listen to false teachers who “forbid people to marry”
7. Remember that the home is under attack in 1 Timothy. In several places Paul shows care for the state of the home in Ephesus which shows there were problems in the home. Paul tells Elders and Deacons and widows to “pay attention to your domestic responsibilities (3:2, 4-5, 7, 12). So 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.
8. So there are at least 6 places where there is a pretty strong connection (even a direct connection) between the description of the women in Ch. 2 and the younger widows in Ch. 5
  - a. And that points to there being some kind of specific issue in Ephesus (like the specific issue in 1 Cor. 14)...
  - b. You hear what Paul says in Ch. 2 about women and you ask, “Could it be that there was some specific issue in Ephesus that Paul is addressing?” and the answer is, yes, there could be – it could be the younger widows in Ch. 5.

## **VI. Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15.**

So why does Paul devote these seven verses to women? It is because there was something specifically going on in Ephesus.

In vv. 11-12 Paul says, “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.” Why does Paul single out women and teaching? It seems likely that they are involved in the false teaching in some way.

Again, 2 Timothy 3:6-7 indicates their houses were being used as outposts or headquarters for the false teachers (perhaps this was even a rival house church?). Also, again, 1 Timothy 5:13 says the women were gossiping and being busybodies and “saying things they ought not” say (same phrase used

in Titus 1:11 of false teachers). It is very possible these women were involved in false teaching and so Paul calls them out.

Also, what is the best translation for *authentain* (2:12 NIV - “to have authority”)? It turns out “to have authority” is not the best translation for two reasons.

First, the lexical definition (Bauer Danker Arndt Gingrich) is “to assume a stance of independent authority, give orders to, to dictate to ... (practically = “to tell someone what to do” and so, ‘tell a man what to do’ [Jerusalem Bible].” This isn’t just the generic exercising of authority, it’s exercising authority in a bossy, domineering kind of way (which is unfit behavior for ANYONE in God’s Kingdom! In fact, it is a MIS-exercise of authority! (Matthew 20:24-28). In other words, this kind of exercise of authority has definite negative connotations and if you translate it as a generic exercise of authority, you just don’t get the full flavor of what Paul is saying.

Second, many translations leave out a word in the original text here. The NIV in v. 12 says, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.” But in the Greek, there’s a “but” between “teach and have authority over a man” and “to be in quietness” (“I do not allow a woman to have authority over a man but to be in quietness”). What that means is that Paul is drawing a contrast between two things. On the one hand, you have a woman who is being immodest because she is being a bossy, domineering, authoritarian teacher. And on the other hand, you have a woman who is modest because she is being peaceable and behaving in quietness.

So the structure of the sentence helps us understand what Paul is talking about: A woman can behave in bossy, domineering, authoritarian ways or she can be peaceable and modest and behave with propriety. It’s modesty vs. immodesty – and if the “but” is not there, you don’t get that sense.

So what about Verses 13-14 – “For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup> And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.” How is Paul using the OT? Is Paul using the OT story of Adam and Eve to make a rule for all time? If so, you’d have to conclude that women are inherently more gullible and drawn to sin than men. Neither the text of scripture nor practical experience demonstrate this stereotype.

So is there another way to interpret this saying about Adam and Eve? Well, look at the only other place Eve is mentioned in the NT:

2 Corinthians 11:1-4 – “I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that. <sup>2</sup> I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. <sup>3</sup> But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. <sup>4</sup> For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.”

Paul’s point is that Eve is an illustration of how someone can be deceived and led astray (v.3 – “...as Eve was deceived...so your minds may somehow be led astray...”). Paul is not stating a rule for all time about the nature of women. Rather, he is using an illustration of how someone can be deceived.

So, it’s possible that in 1 Tim. 2, Paul is not making a statement about the nature of males and females, but instead is using Eve as an example of how a person could be deceived and led astray. So the

meaning would be something like, “*Watch out for the ‘Eves’ who are running around in Ephesus being deceived by the false teachers.*” That makes sense of what Paul is saying because if Paul is saying something about males and females from creation, then you have the problem of saying that all women are naturally more gullible and liable to sin than men. And that presupposition violates experience! There are women who are very savvy and some men who are very gullible and there men who are very savvy and some women who are very gullible. And generally, most women are more spiritually-minded and sensitive to God’s Spirit than most men! It’s difficult to see Paul describing the essence of males and the essence of females here.

It seems more likely that Paul is stating an example or illustration or analogy about how people can be deceived.

Again, what about 2:15? “But women will be saved through childbearing--if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.” The instructions to the “younger widows” in 1 Timothy 5:14 gives us some insight into what Paul is saying. “Bearing children” or “child-bearing” is shorthand for a “well-run family” (Geer, EWEC 1.298).