

1 Tim 2:8-15: Exegetical Considerations

It is evident in 1 Tim 2:9-15 that some women were teaching in the public assembly of the church in Ephesus or Paul would not have forbidden it.⁸⁵ Two basic questions emerge from this text.⁸⁶ What precisely is Paul forbidding? In what way should the injunction apply to churches today?

A. The Context of 1 Tim 2:8-15

The introduction to 1 Tim begins in 1:3-11 with a statement of the problem created by individuals wanting to teach who do not have adequate or appropriate information, and it concludes in vv. 18-20 with Paul's excommunication of two of these, Hymenaeus and Alexander. Chapter three presents detailed characteristics essential for church leaders, which contrast markedly with what is said in the epistle about the false teachers. 1 Tim 2 occurs between these concerns about church life in Ephesus, all in the context of the disruptive influence of false teaching.

"Therefore" in 2:1 is to be understood as beginning the body of the letter in which the introductory appeal to Timothy to remain in Ephesus and counter the sinister influence of these false teachers (1:3-7) is given fuller discussion. The opening section of the body of the epistle (2:1-8) demands cessation of an exclusivist mentality on the part of the males and the incorporation of a vigorous prayer life for rulers and all in authority, in fact for *all* people. This continues a standard custom common in Jewish synagogues. Jewish people had been exempted from having to pray to the

⁸⁵Douglas Moo, "1 Timothy 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance," *Trinity Journal* 1 (1980): 62-83, esp. 82, however, curiously denies even the possibility that women were teaching at Ephesus.

⁸⁶It is unacceptable either to dismiss this text from consideration, as does E. M. Telford, *Women and Ministry in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist, 1980), or to disregard it because it does not cohere with one's preconceived notion of what Paul must have thought, as does Robin Scroggs, "Paul and the Eschatological Woman," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 40 (1972): 283-303.

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Roman emperor, but were expected to pray *for* him.⁸⁷ Such prayer was expected to result in peaceful lives for the Christians in Ephesus.⁸⁸ It is not unimportant in this connection that the conclusion in v. 8 stipulates that men ought to pray without wrath and dissension.

This paragraph on prayer in Ephesian worship also establishes the context for the following paragraph on the dress and conduct of women while in the worship. Both sections in 1 Tim 2 address specific situations in the Ephesian church.

B. 1 Tim 2:(8)9-10

The Greek text does not have a main verb in v. 9, so one must be supplied from v. 8. If "I wish to pray" is brought over, as most understand to be the case, v. 9 would be understood as a specific instruction to women at prayer.⁸⁹ This would cohere with Paul's admonition in 1 Cor 11:3 that women pray in the public worship. "Likewise," in 2:9, suggests that, having instructed the men how to pray in Ephesus, Paul now instructs the women in the same way. If Scheiner is correct, that only "I wish" is to be brought over, v. 9 would give general instruction on women's clothing and adornment.⁹⁰ The matter may be incapable of resolution, but what is clear is that the context is the worshipping church in Ephesus, and it is probable that prayer is in focus in v. 9.

1 Tim 2:9-10 presents injunctions that are every bit as serious as those in 2:11-12. Instructions in vv. 9-10 are given without qualification and affirm acceptable standards of decency, as opposed to those found in the false teaching.

⁸⁷See A. M. Rabello, "The Legal Condition of the Jews in the Roman Empire," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 2:13:703-04.

⁸⁸Hans Conzelmann, *History of Primitive Christianity* (trans. J. Steely; Nashvile: Abingdon, 1973): 133.

⁸⁹This view is advocated by Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives*, 102-03; Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 70-71.

⁹⁰Scheiner, *Women in the Church*, 114.

Certainly, from 1:3-8 it is clear that Paul directs Timothy to counter the sinister effect of certain teachers in the congregation. Their influence surfaces in Paul's directives in 2:1-8 (men not to argue), 2:9-15 (women) and 5:11-15 (widows). The situation in Ephesus is that some Christian women have overstepped traditional roles held by society. Their fundamental attitudinal shift has two facets. 1) They dress in culturally unacceptable ways. 2) They forsake domestic roles, seeking visible, teaching roles in congregational life. In each instance, their attitude is assertive, insensitive, and out of line.

That these women in the Ephesian church are brazenly over-dressed is stated and not at all unrelated to the following context.⁹¹ The prohibition against excessive adornment should be understood against its cultural background. Diodorus, *Hist.* 12.21, says that golden jewelry or a garment with a purple border was a sign of a prostitute. Ps-Lucian, *Affairs of the Heart* 38-43, laments a husband's horrible experiences in living with a wife who spends her day before the mirror attempting to beautify herself with creams, powders, expensive jewels, earrings, bracelets, and necklaces. She then visits the various gods, and later returns home after being unfaithful to her husband. Philo, *On the Virtues* 39-40, says that such adornment was associated with visiting pagan temples and with sexual promiscuity, as well as with disrespect for the husband's authority. In the *Sentences of Sextus* 513 is a typical observation of the period that, "A wife who likes adornment is not faithful." In view of these, and many similar statements, the dress and adornment of a wife is certainly very closely related to her submission to her husband.

Such women, disdaining the accepted code of dress, are told in vv. 11-12 that they must *learn*. This certainly denotes inadequate information on their part. That they should learn in a *peaceable* and *deferential* manner suggests some sort of unruly, disquieting, tumultuous, autocratic, domineering, or

⁹¹Note the similar prohibition against excessive adornment in 1 Pet 3:1-6, also in a context addressing deferential attitude.

arrogant behavior on their part. Now some, such as Philo,⁹² argued that women should take care of domestic matters and appear in public only to go to the market and to the temple. He also stressed that women did not need education.⁹³ However, not all women were so restricted. The education of women was common among Stoics and Pythagoreans, among others (note the false teaching typical of both these groups in 4:1-4; see p. 229 above).⁹⁴ Yet, this education had certain drawbacks. Musonius Rufus,⁹⁵ a first-century AD philosopher who favored the education of women, argued that,

some say that it is inevitable that women who associate with philosophers will be self-willed for the most part and arrogant when they abandon their duties at home and spend their time with men practicing discourses, speaking subtly, and analyzing syllogisms. They ought to be home spinning! I would not expect that the women who practice philosophy—any more than the men—would abandon their appropriate tasks to deal only with discourses; rather, I maintain that whatever discourses they pursue ought to be about the deeds they pursue.

What Musonius Rufus said probably would not occur, did in fact occur among some of the Christian women in Ephesus. Interest in teaching resulted in arrogant attitudes and abandonment of various domestic tasks. Paul finds this unacceptable.

⁹²Philo, *Special Laws* 3.169-71, "A woman, then, should not be a busybody, meddling with matters outside her household concerns, but should seek a life of seclusion."

⁹³Philo, *Apology for the Jews* 7.14, "The husband seems competent to transmit knowledge of the laws to his wife, the father to his children, the master to his slaves." In certain rabbinic circles, women were seen as temptation and distraction from study. See Pirke Aboth 1.5.

⁹⁴Stirling, "Women in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds," *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, 1.76-84.

⁹⁵Musonius Rufus, F. 3. See O. Hense, ed., *Musonii Rufi Reliquiae* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1905).

In lieu of this situation, Paul stresses in v. 10 that these Christian women would do well to concentrate on healthy teaching conducive to genuinely Christian life-style. "Good works" here does not refer to works that might be done with the motive of acquiring merit, but to the sort of "good works which God designed long ago that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10)—that is to say, works (life-style characteristics) such as goodness, kindness, patience, gentleness, modesty and the like. These things are just more "fitting" for these Ephesian women who "profess" the Christian faith than expressing a lack of respect for their husbands by wearing inappropriate clothing that sends distinctly wrong signals.

C. 1 Tim 2:11-12

English translations of 1 Tim 2:12 vary somewhat.

I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. NIV

I do not permit a woman to be a teacher, nor must woman domineer over man; she should be quiet. NEB

I am not giving permission for a woman to teach or to tell a man what to do. A woman ought not to speak. JerB

It must be kept in mind that the entire letter of 1 Timothy deals with the false teachers mentioned in 1:3ff and Timothy's role in quelling their influence. In 2:1-8, the men are admonished to pray for all people, without "getting involved in the quarrels and disputes engendered by the false teaching."⁹⁶ In 2:9-15, the women are admonished to present and conduct themselves in a manner appropriate for godly women, without abandoning submission to their husbands and distorting their place among men in general.⁹⁷ In 2:11-12, Paul continues to address the problem of insubordination, moving from dress and demeanor to the realm of information.

⁹⁶Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 57.

⁹⁷Scholer, "1 Tim 2:9-15," *Women, Authority & the Bible*, 201.

Two principal views have emerged concerning the interpretation of 1 Tim 2:11-12. 1) One view holds that this text forbids women from teaching or exercising authority over men because of the order of creation. Proponents of this view maintain that the Genesis material in vv. 13-14 provides the reason for the prohibitions in vv. 11-12, and the conclusion is drawn that these sanctions are to be applied universally in all times and places. 2) The other view holds that this is a temporary restraint to curb the inordinate conduct of certain Ephesian women who were teaching the heresy mentioned in 1:3-7 as the reason for the epistle. In this view, the Genesis material in vv. 13-14 provides an example or explanation of how the deception of Eve having drastic consequences parallels that of the women at Ephesus.

To begin with, just as vv. 9-10 are to be understood in terms of ancient cultural values and are addressed to the threat of certain false teachers in Ephesus, so also are the admonitions to silence and submission in vv. 11-12. The stipulations in vv. 11-12 are well in line with first-century AD expectations for women, both in the Jewish and Greco-Roman worlds. Consequently, vv. 11-12 stipulates responsible action for women in response to the sinister teaching that forms the basis of the epistle from 1:3.

In this view, vv. 11-12 is a temporary stipulation intended for the particular situation at Ephesus. These injunctions were not intended as universal norms for all women in all times and places.⁹⁸ Instead, vv. 11-12 were intended to curtail the influence and involvement of certain women involved in the false teachings at Ephesus.

V. 11 states that "a woman must learn in a quiet spirit with all submissiveness." The term "learn" (*manthanéō*) is a present imperative in Greek, which means that the term is concerned with the ongoingness of their learning, i.e., "a woman must go about this business of learning with a" Women were participating in worship and learning; but such learning was a relatively new thing for women at that time.

⁹⁸With Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 61, and others.

Whereas some in Ephesus might oppose women learning, Paul underscores the right of women to learn. These women, though, have presented a problem in that regard and need to adopt an appropriate manner of learning, e.g., in a spirit of quietude which implies receptivity. They should learn adequate and correct information before challenging their teachers or even trying to teach it themselves. They should remember that they are novices, not "teachers." Silence was expected of students, both in Judaism and in the Greco-Roman world.⁹⁹

The phrase, "with all submissiveness," describes the manner in which these women are to learn. The meaning of "submissiveness" must be determined by the context in which it occurs. Townner cautions that the term has a wide range of meanings, and that care must "be taken to avoid assigning the basic meaning of 'order under' indiscriminately."¹⁰⁰ The term is used at times when hierarchy is under discussion (Rom 8:20; 1 Cor 15:27-28; Phil 3:21), but in numerous other instances the term denotes a willing deference rather than hierarchy (Eph 5:21-22; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1). Such "submissiveness" was intended to provide order and peace, but the text does not specify to whom they are to be submissive. Actually, the term simply signifies a basic attitude. As Ward puts it, "Paul's aim is to avoid 'disturbance'."¹⁰¹ "Submissiveness" refers to a willingness to be taught and to be accountable to what is taught.

So certain Ephesian women have serious attitudinal problems relating to their dress and adornment and to the learning process going on in the assembly. Paul's counter in vv. 9-11 is that they should 1) dress in ways that show respect for their husbands and for males in general, 2) be more concerned with basic life-style characteristics that are appropriate for godly women, and 3) undertake the learning of accurate information in a receptive spirit.

⁹⁹See Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives*, 107-08.

¹⁰⁰Townner, *The Goal of Our Instruction*, 213.

¹⁰¹Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*,

It is easy to understand how 2:12 could be read in English with the conclusion that a woman is never to teach a man or be in a position of authority over a man. However, in the Greek text, the verb "domineer" [NEB; "have authority" RSV NIV] qualifies "teach" and specifies what kind of teaching is prohibited.¹⁰² It is not that these women are "teaching" per se, but specifically that they are "teaching domineeringly" that annoys Paul.¹⁰³

The term *authentēin* is taken by some to mean "exercise authority" [RSV NIV], but stronger reasons exist for taking it to mean "domineer."¹⁰⁴ Instead of "domineering over a man," they are encouraged to be "deferential" (2:11). Instead, they should evidence an attitude of "peaceableness/quietude."¹⁰⁵ This prohibition of "domineering" does not introduce a second prohibition, but qualifies the first—that is, they are "not to teach *in a domineering way*, but are to be in peaceableness/quietness." In this context, the term refers to the role the women were playing in teaching the erroneous information of the false teachers.¹⁰⁶

The admonition at the end of v. 12 that these women are to "keep silent" [RSV] is not a mandate that women maintain absolute silence in worship. It rather specifies that an attitude of "peaceableness/quietness" be maintained instead of their current attitude of "domineering." Since in 1:7 Paul specified that "they want to be teachers of law, but they do not understand what things they so confidently affirm," it is

¹⁰²When two Greek verbs are joined in this way, the nearer qualifies the farther, i.e., "domineer" qualifies "teach." See Herbert W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (rev. G. Messing; Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1956): 364-365.

¹⁰³With J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: A. & C. Black, 1963): 68, among others.

¹⁰⁴See, among others, Scholer, "1 Tim 2:9-15," *Women, Authority & the Bible*, 205; Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 73; Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives*, 108-09.

¹⁰⁵See Carroll Osburn, "AYΘENTEΩ (1 Timothy 2:12)," *Restoration Quarterly* 25 (1982): 1-11.

¹⁰⁶Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives*, 111-12.

clear that they need instruction. It follows that if they learn in a peaceable and gentle spirit (v. 11) and teach in a peaceable and gentle spirit (v. 12), Paul would have no problem with them.¹⁰⁷ This is not at all unlike the situation in 1 Cor 11, where Paul had no problem with the women praying and prophesying, only their bad attitude in disdaining social customs regarding appearance in public.

D. 1 Tim 2:13-15

The Greek *gar* [for] in 2:13 indicates that the two following illustrations are intended to support the prohibition against domineering teaching by these women. Paul grounds his prohibition in the creation stories in Genesis. Now v. 13 is often taken to refer to an "order of creation" in which man has authority over woman because Adam came first,¹⁰⁸ and v. 14 is likewise taken to mean that Eve's gullibility illustrates why women should not teach.¹⁰⁹ Thus, hierarchalists view these as reasons from Genesis for the prohibitions. Alternatively, the Greek term *gar* is not used here in an illative sense [for, because], giving the reason for the prohibition, but simply introducing an example [for example].¹¹⁰ In this view, vv. 13-14 are a short exposition on Gen 2:7ff and 3:1ff, texts commonly used by Jewish expositors to teach women a lesson.¹¹¹ At issue is whether the connective "for" [Greek, *gar*] relates vv. 13-14 to vv. 11-12 as giving the reason or examples. Taking *gar* to provide examples rather than reasons, Scholer argues that

¹⁰⁷With Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives*, 112.

¹⁰⁸Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*, 207.

¹⁰⁹Moo, "What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?" *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 188-190.

¹¹⁰A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934): 1190, says that in Greek, *gar* "does not always give a reason. It may be merely explanatory."

¹¹¹Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 122-24.

there is no evidence that these allusions to Genesis give vv. 11-12 universal significance.¹¹²

Now 2:12-14 is a sentence in Greek. Within that sentence there are four thought-units: 1) not to teach, 2) not to domineer, 3) Adam first, 4) Eve deceived. V. 15, although a separate sentence, is closely linked to vv. 11-14. There exists here a literary structure in which the two items in v. 12 are followed by an analogy and an appeal. The analogy in vv. 13-14 comments on "not to teach" in v. 12a, and the appeal in v. 15 comments on "domineeringly" in v. 12b.

12 a I am not permitting a woman to teach
b domineeringly a man,

13 a' for Adam was formed first, then Eve,
14 Adam was not deceived, but the woman,
when she was deceived, became a

15 b' She will be saved through
childbearing, if they continue in faith,
love, and holiness with propriety

From a linguistic point of view, the relationship of an example or illustration to a specific situation must be understood in terms of topic, image, and point of similarity. In this passage, the topic is the *domineering* teaching of certain women in Ephesus. The image is that Eve was created after Adam. What, then, is the point of similarity?

Well, Paul is certainly not engaging in exegesis of Gen 1-3.¹¹³ Rather, he is using a common Jewish analogy in which Eve was caricatured as a deceived and bumbling fool who constantly led Adam into trouble. For example, we

¹¹²Scholer, "1 Tim 2:9-15," *Women, Authority & the Bible*,

208.

¹¹³See Rick R. Marrs, "In the Beginning: Male and Female (Gen 1-3)," *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity* (ed. Carroll D. Osburn; Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995): 2.1-36.

have already quoted Sirach 25:24, "from a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all will die." In the *Life of Adam and Eve*, a first century expansion of Gen 1-4, Eve is assigned in 44:2 responsibility for sin in the world, and in *Apocalypse of Moses* 32:1-2, Eve acknowledges full responsibility for the human dilemma. As Chesnut¹¹⁴ says,

the portrait of Eve as one constantly weeping, ignorant, perplexed, vulnerable to sin, and dependent upon the males around her for insight bears some relation to the way women were actually perceived and treated in the authors' and redactors' own times and places.

So, Paul does not draw from Gen 1-3 a universal principle from the historical Eve, but an ad hoc analogy from the later caricature of Eve in Jewish tradition. The point of similarity between v. 12 and v. 13 is that just as it is commonly remarked that Eve was deceived and led Adam astray, so certain women in the Ephesian church lack information and teach false information that leads people astray.

The reference in v. 14 to Eve's sin in Gen 3 comments on the analogy in v. 13. The image that Eve, rather than Adam, was deceived is drawn from traditional Jewish interpretation of Gen 3. It is important to remember that in Gen 3:1-7 the man and woman sin together, the serpent addresses the woman with the plural "you," and vv. 3 and 6 indicate that the man was with the woman at the time.¹¹⁵ However, in Jewish tradition, Eve was deceived with unfortunately catastrophic results for all mankind.¹¹⁶ The analogy is carried further in v. 14, specifying that these Ephesian women are not to teach because they have been deceived and transmit false information just as in Jewish tradition Eve was deceived and led Adam to sin.

¹¹⁴See Randall Chesnut, "Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman Era," *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity* (ed. Carroll D. Osburn; Joplin, MO: College Press, 1993): 1.93-130, esp. 102.

¹¹⁵See Scholer, "1 Tim 2:9-15," *Women, Authority & the Bible*, 210.

¹¹⁶See Philo, *Questions on Genesis* 33.

Paul's use of this illustration from Genesis underscores the fact that his prohibition against these women teaching was not done with reference to hierarchicalism. Instead, where the original complementary relationship between men and women is destroyed, as in Ephesus, Paul mandates what is necessary in that particular setting to restore the original pattern. It is not necessary or advisable to take this as a general directive to all women everywhere.

In 2:15, Paul concludes the admonition to these Ephesian women with an observation that women are not saved through teaching (i.e., domineering), but by attention to their traditional roles, represented here by bearing children.¹¹⁷ Porter notes that the passage should be understood contextually:

The author of 1 Timothy seems to be fighting against a group distinguished by several characteristics. They were promoting doctrine (1 Tim. 1.3) that resulted in the telling of all sorts of silly myths and the emphasizing of genealogies (1.4), holding to stories about deceitful spirits and demons (4.1), and forbidding marriage and other practices (4.3)... It is easy to conclude that the encouraging of ascetic practices, combined with shunning of the women's domestic roles, resulted in sexual abstinence or similar practices which were considered by the author to have missed the mark (cf. 1.3-7; 6.20-21). In the light of this ascetic tendency, the author endorses the resumption of normal practices between men and women, including sexual relations that result in giving birth to children.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷See J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963): 69; and Krijn A. Van der Jagt, "Women are Saved Through Bearing Children (1 Timothy 2.11-15)," *The Bible Translator* 39 (1988): 201-08. Thomas Geer, "Admonitions to Women in 1 Tim 2:8-15," *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, 1.297, mentions three other views: 1) despite Eve's transgression, Christian women will be saved through the childbirth, i.e., Christ; 2) despite the curse (Gen 3:16), Christian women are brought safely through the birth experience, and 3) in their proper submissive role, Christian women disdain teaching and domineering over men.

¹¹⁸Stanley E. Porter, "What Does It Mean to be 'Saved By Childbirth' (1 Timothy 2.15)?" in *New Testament Text and Language*

V. 15 is the climax of the entire unit of text that began in v. 9 with, "likewise women." This verse was written as a positive alternative for these women to the negative critiques in vv. 11-14.

One grammatical problem with v. 15 is that the first verb is singular (she will be saved) and the second is plural (they continue). This is due to the fact that womankind is in focus with "she" (as with Eve), whereas the latter reference shifts to the plural with the Ephesian women in mind (they).

The statement that "the woman will be saved through childbirth," is translated incorrectly in NIV as, "women will be kept safe through childbirth." Not only does experience show that this statement is incorrect, but "safe (saved)" is shown to refer to Christian salvation by the following phrase, "if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with propriety" (NIV). The point is that just as ancient (post fall) Eve was to find her place in society as a mother with domestic roles, so these women should find their place in society by fitting into "the maternal and domestic roles that were clearly understood to constitute propriety in the Greco-Roman culture of Paul's day."¹¹⁹

3. Conclusion.

It may be concluded, then, that 1 Tim 2:9-15 was directed to a specific group of troublesome women in a particular place in the early church. Their particular problem was specifically that of being misinformed and domineering teachers. In overstepping traditional roles, some Ephesian Christian women demonstrate a fundamental attitudinal shift which evidences itself in their dress and in forsaking traditionally domestic roles in a quest for visible roles in congregational life. Such domineering and assertive

(ed. by Porter and C. A. Evans; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996): 160-175 [originally published in *JNT* 49 (1993): 87-102].

¹¹⁹Scholer, "1 Tim 2:9-15," *Women, Authority & the Bible*, 197.

behavior, coupled with such scandalous behavior as overdressing in public, certainly sent the wrong signals to Ephesus about the real nature of Christianity. Hence, Timothy is admonished forthrightly to counter this sinister development in the Ephesian congregation.

So, wherever there are misinformed, unreliable, and domineering women attempting to teach Christian truth, the ancient admonition of Paul to Timothy has direct application. However, nothing is said in this text about informed, reliable, and gentle women teaching—either in church or out, either on religion or not, either to men or women, either to young or old. No biblical text has been so misused to legislate so many prohibitions that stifle so much service by so many people. Put simply, any female who has sufficient and accurate information may teach that information in a gentle spirit to whomever in whatever situation they may be.

While the particular situation Paul addresses in 1 Tim arose due to particular *women* who were misinformed and domineering, the point of the text would be equally applicable to any *men* who might be acting similarly.