

1 Timothy 2:8–15 and Gender Wars at Ephesus

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While it is now generally agreed that 1 Tim 2:8–15 is directed against the heresy that had taken hold within the Ephesian church, the key question is whether the passage is directed against the *content* of the heresy or is concerned to establish a *process* that will eventually see the victims corrected and the heresy expunged.¹ If concerned with the content of the heresy, the instructions may be directed at restoring a hierarchical framework. If the passage is concerned with process, however, Paul's demands are shaped by the particular nature of the heresy and its form of transmission in Ephesus.

Both these approaches have considerable difficulties. Regarding the *content* view, for example, there is no evidence outside this passage that the false teaching in Ephesus undermines first-century assumptions about gender. Nor does this passage fit well into its own immediate context if its concern is ensuring proper behavior within a gender-based hierarchy. This view also fails to take into account the nuances provided by the particular vocabulary and grammar that Paul employs in this passage.

Those who take the *process* approach, as does this article, typically reconstruct a context in which women were “the group most influenced by the false teaching” and prominent among the heretics.² However, this line had been criticized on the grounds that the only heretics named are men (1 Tim 1:20), and that to silence *all* women because *some* women were teaching heresy would be unnecessary and unjust. As William Mounce says, “It seems a strange twist of logic to say that women may not teach error while implicitly allowing men to teach error.”³ If Paul wanted to silence false teachers then he can be expected to identify them and silence them without silencing all women.

In his critique of such readings, Mounce raises an intriguing possibility when he says, “If all the women, and only the women, are deceived, then this [process] interpretation would be more feasible.”⁴ This possibility is summarily dismissed by Mounce with the statement that “it seems unlikely that Priscilla would have been tricked (2 Tim 4:19; Acts 18:24–28).”⁵ Nevertheless, this objection is not insurmountable since Priscilla may have still been in Rome at this time (see Rom 16:3). Further, it would not be necessary for *every* woman to have embraced the heresy for Paul to address them *en masse*. Rather, if a *vast majority* of women, and *only* women, had fallen victim to the heresy then this would be sufficient to justify his silencing of all women in the church at Ephesus.

The suggestion that the vast majority of the women, and only women, were deceived finds support within the Pastoral Epistles, and thus it makes better sense of the text in question than other reconstructions. The issue Paul is dealing with, which will become apparent as we examine the details of this letter, is that many of the women have become victims of an ascetic heresy which teaches that true spirituality is found in denial—especially of marriage, sex, and food. This issue is the cause of

great tension within the congregation, with the result that men are expressing their dissatisfaction by quarrelling with women during their meetings (especially since the heresy includes denial of food, marriage, and sex), while the women are attempting to persuade the men that their philosophy offers a path to a higher spirituality. Paul demands that the men stop quarreling with the women, and that the women stop imposing their view on the men. Instead they are to be silent and submit to the teaching of the church on this matter. The serpent is operating at Ephesus as in the Garden, which should alert them to the satanic origins of these false teachers. It is not too late, and by exhibiting proper behavior they can be spared judgment.

Setting

The Heresy

It is widely recognized that the major pastoral concern occasioning this letter is the destructive effect of false teachers at Ephesus, and it is generally accepted that the passage under consideration, 1 Tim 2:8–15, addresses the heresy. The letter begins and ends with warnings against false teachers (1:3f., 6:20–21) who are explicitly named Hymenaeus and Alexander (1:20). Second Timothy seems to be dealing with the same issue under the leadership of Hymenaeus, although at a somewhat later stage and accompanied by Philetus (2 Tim 2:17).⁶ However, there is widespread disagreement regarding whether there is a single coherent heresy that Paul engages, or a number of unrelated or loosely related false teachings.

The elements of the heresy described in the letter are diffuse and appear to be a synthesis of Christianity with Hellenistic Judaism. The teachers themselves seem to be Jewish Christians. Their apparent self-designation as “teachers of the law” (1 Tim 1:7), imposition of a strong legalistic framework, promotion of “myths and genealogies” (1 Tim 1:4, 4:7, 2 Tim 4:4) and anti-Gentile prejudice (1 Tim 2:1–7) suggest a Jewish background.⁷ At some point, these Jewish men were converted to Christ, but they have since “suffered shipwreck in the faith” (1 Tim 1:19). Whether or not they are Greek, their worldview is distinctively Hellenistic, evidenced by the dualism inherent in the asceticism that they promote (1 Tim 4:1–4, 8). The strong Jewish features and the numerous dissimilarities between this heresy and Gnosticism locate the asceticism in a Jewish rather than proto-gnostic framework.⁸

This form of asceticism demands abstinence from marriage, fasting (1 Tim 4:3), and physical training or other regimes designed to ensure mastery over the body by mind and spirit (see 1 Tim 4:7–8). Paradoxically, there is evidence of sexual immorality, with the younger widows surrendering to their “sensual desires” in the process (1 Tim 5:11). While this appears contradictory, it may arise simply out of sexual frustration, or as a consequence of the ascetic disregard for the physical.

While there is abundant evidence to suggest that the heresy is essentially ascetic, there is no evidence outside our passage to

suggest that gender roles are an issue. Douglas Moo's assertion that "The false teachers were encouraging women to discard what we might call traditional female roles in favor of a more egalitarian approach to the role relationships of men and women" is unwarranted.⁹ While this assumption is integral to Moo's interpretation of 2:8–15, he admits that it "is not stated explicitly as a plank in the false teachers' platform anywhere in the pastoral epistles."¹⁰ It is surprising, then, that he insists that this "is an inference with a high degree of probability."¹¹

To support this claim of high probability, Moo firstly asserts that if the false teachers were promoting abstinence from marriage, "the teachers' program . . . is likely to include a more general denigration of traditional female roles."¹² He offers no support for this denigration. There is, however, evidence to the contrary in 1 Tim 2:9, which suggests that the clothing, jewelry, and hairstyles being adopted were particularly feminine. His second point, that Paul's counsel to young widows "to marry, to have children, to manage their homes" (1 Tim 5:14) means that they are to "occupy themselves in traditional female roles"—is no more convincing. This verse commends the very opposite to the behavior described in the previous verse—being idle, moving from house to house and gossiping—behaviors which can hardly be described as suppressing femininity.

Finally, Moo appeals to supposed parallels with 1 Corinthians where he understands that part of the problem at Corinth involved women disregarding appropriate gender roles, especially with respect to their husbands. However, these are only parallels if we prejudge the situation in 1 Timothy, and the differences between the two passages are more apparent than any supposed similarities. The issue of "head covering" in Corinth (1 Cor 11:4–16) is an entirely different matter from the ostentatious clothing of the Ephesian women (1 Tim 2:9), and Paul is permitting the women to prophesy at Corinth, whereas, at least in Moo's understanding of 1 Tim 2:11, in Ephesus he demands silence.

There is no basis to suppose that the heretics promoted egalitarianism or undermined traditional gender roles. Every indication is that the heresy promoted asceticism as a means of spirituality. Nevertheless, the amount of material in the Pastoral Epistles concerning female behavior could suggest gender roles are part of the heresy. However, as will now be shown, gender issues do not form part of the content of the heresy; rather, they relate to the manner in which the false teaching is being embraced and taking hold at Ephesus.

The Victims

There is a distinction between the male teachers who have been excommunicated and the female victims who remain within the church and promote the heresy, though not in the manner of the false teachers themselves. This distinction is apparent in the different manner with which the parties are addressed: the false teachers are reprimanded harshly (1:20) and the female victims are treated more gently throughout.¹³ The false teachers are identified as Hymenaeus and Alexander in 1 Timothy, while Philetus appears to have replaced Alexander by the time Paul

wrote 2 Timothy (2 Tim 2:17). This distinction between the false teachers and the female victims seems to be recognized by Mounce who notes that "while the text never says women are teaching the heresy, names only men as teachers (1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17; 3:6), and explicitly pictures only women as being influenced by the heresy (2 Tim 3:6–7; possibly 1 Tim 5:11–13, 15), the charge here [1 Tim 2:12] suggests that women, at least in some way, are promulgating the heresy even if they are not leaders of the opposition."¹⁴

If the opponents who teach the heresy are Hymenaeus and Alexander, it is apparent that their victims are exclusively women. It is striking how much of the negative material in the letter is directed at women, more than in any other epistle, with no fewer than twenty-one out of 113 verses regarding women exclusively (1 Tim 2:9–15, 4:7, 5:3–7, 9–16),¹⁵ while nowhere are men singled out as victims of the false teachers. The women have vowed not to remarry (1 Tim 5:11–12) and are indulging their sensual passions, while there is no indication that men are behaving in this way. Moreover, it is widows who are becoming idle and being busybodies and gossips (5:13). Perhaps the most compelling evidence for this proposition is found in Paul's second letter to Timothy where he describes the method employed by the false teachers "who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires" (2 Tim 3:6 NIV). The predilection for female victims is recognized by some commentators, such as Towner who notes that the opponents are "exerting considerable influence at all levels, especially among women,"¹⁶ while one of Moo's key propositions concerning the heresy is that "the false teachers had persuaded many women to follow them in their doctrines (1 Tim 5:15; 2 Tim 3:6–7)."¹⁷

With such evidence it is reasonable to suggest that the victims of the heresy were *exclusively* women, and that they constituted the majority of women in the Ephesian church. A group of men, who are no longer part of the church since they have been "handed over to Satan" (1 Tim 1:20),¹⁸ has operated outside the assembly to persuade a large group of women concerning ascetic practice. Within the church the women are defending their behavior and commending the heresy. This defense, along with their attitudes and behavior, provokes anger from the men in their meetings, and immorality and disharmony outside them.

While it is possible that all the women were deceived, it is not necessary to show that every woman without exception was misled since Paul can, for example, rebuke men for quarrelling without implicating every single man in the process. If the majority of women were deceived then silencing all women is warranted, provided no men were also involved.

We should consider the possible objection that the grammar at certain points may indicate that men are among the victims of the heresy. In one instance, Paul asks Timothy to "put these instructions before the *brothers*" (4:6). While *adelphoi* ("brothers," "siblings") refers to men and women together, it would not be appropriate if only women were in mind. Similarly, in the following chapter Paul speaks of those *presbuteroi* ("elders") "who

persist in sin” using the masculine gender.¹⁹ However, in each case the heresy is not in view, and while the victims of the heresy fall within the scope of the injunction, the context indicates that Paul has the full range of instructions given in mind. As Mounce observes, *tauta* (“these things”) in 4:6 “refers to the whole epistle” since, “it is Paul’s practice in the PE and elsewhere (cf. 1 Tim 3:4) to sum up a previous discussion through the use of *tauta*.”²⁰ Similarly, his instructions concerning elders who persist in sin are part of a new section, beginning in 5:17, that covers the “honor” afforded to elders, their discipline and correction, and not the heresy or its victims.

Thus far we have not mentioned the gender specific language of 1 Tim 2:8–15, or the bearing, if any, it has on our reconstruction of the heresy. However, the way in which the heresy is addressed in this section, along gender lines, provides further support for our suggestion that women are exclusively the victims. With this background in mind we now turn to an examination of the passage.

Verses 8–10

Having exhorted the Ephesian church to pray for those (Gentiles) in authority (2:1–6), Paul reiterates his role as apostle to the Gentiles. This is not so much to ground in his apostolic authority the demands that follow; rather, it suggests that the content of the heresy is undermining the Gentile mission and the disruption it is creating is distracting the church from engaging in prayer. Thus Paul reaffirms the universal scope of God’s saving work in these verses, and will go on to restore proper order with the instructions that follow.

The first injunction, in v. 8, is directed to men, urging them to pray “in every place . . . lifting up holy hands without anger or argument.” The context appears to be the church’s gatherings, and Paul’s concern is that these are conducted without the men arguing.

Of particular interest is the question of with whom the men are prohibited from arguing. It is usually assumed that the men are quarrelling with *each other*. However, it is more likely that they are arguing with the women. If there were generalized arguing among individuals in the congregation he would simply prohibit disputes. However, the care with which Paul delineates his exhortations, first addressing men and then women, suggests something more nuanced is happening. It is reasonable to infer that, if women were being seduced by a philosophy that promoted singleness, celibacy and neglect of domestic duties, it would have caused considerable consternation among the men, generating heated arguments between the sexes and disrupting their meetings so that little prayer was being offered.

Interpreters typically recognize that the heresy is likely to cause “divisiveness and discord,” but they fail to explain why quarrelling should be expressed only by the men.²¹ If the heresy concerned women discarding traditional female roles, then we might expect Paul to instruct the men to reassert their own manhood and not to be intimidated by the women. The fact that he directs them to stop arguing suggests a different problem is in view. Our position implies that v. 8 is no longer an isolated

command with no relationship to the following argument, but forms an appropriate opening as Paul seeks to address the issue of gender-based division in the Ephesian church.

The brief discussion on women’s clothing in v. 9 raises numerous issues, not the least being the question of the relationship between the heresy and female attire. The verse indicates that the attire being worn is feminine, which is further evidence against the view that the women are somehow disregarding gender roles and acting like men. It is notable that the choice of clothes, jewelry, and hair style demanded by Paul in v. 9 parallels almost exactly the requirements for female ascetics in the ancient world.²² While this indicates that the ascetic heresy is indeed a factor in this passage, the difficulty for our perspective is that Paul, by seeking modest dress, *affirms* this element of ascetic practice. However, given the strong adversative force of *alla* (“but”) introducing the next verse, Paul may be commending them here, while exhorting them in v. 10 to fill their spirituality with display of the kind of good works that are appropriate for a Christian woman as opposed to those being advocated by the heretics.

Thus, vv. 9 and 10 describe the outcome that Paul is seeking from the women, while vv. 11–15 do not address the content of the heresy as such; rather they describe the process by which the women will be rescued from the false teachers. Verse 8 also deals with the question of process, but concerns the men whose argumentative behavior is only serving to exacerbate the problem.

Verses 11–12

Having described the desired outcome, Paul then instructs the women to learn “quietly with all submissiveness.” The noun *hēsuchia*, here translated “quietly,” was used in 1 Tim 2:2 in connection with “peacefulness” and can convey the meaning “‘to harmonious peace’ among citizens.”²³ Moo’s contention that “there is good reason to think that the word should be translated ‘silence’ in this context, since its opposite is ‘teaching’”²⁴ is dubious. “Learning” is the opposite of “teaching,” not “silence,” and since the heresy is causing quarrelling in the congregation (v. 8 and 6:4–5) it makes better sense for Paul to demand that they learn in a peaceable manner. In every other instance of *hēsuchia* in the NT (Luke 14:4, Acts 11:18, 21:14, 22:2), the word carries the connotation of an unruly crowd being “hushed,” so that its antonym is not “speaking” but “unruly behavior.” Major lexicons offer “silence” as a possibility, although the works they cite do not convey the sense of absolute silence.²⁵ Where Paul wants false teachers silenced in Titus he uses *epistomizō*, and elsewhere he uses *sigāō* (1 Cor 14:34). Thus, the demand to learn in peaceableness parallels the earlier demand that the men stop fighting with the women. While the men were simply told to stop quarrelling, more is required from the women than to simply stop fighting. Since they are maintaining and promoting the heresy, they need to be corrected, and so must learn without disputing.

Moo recognizes that this verse implies that the women were fighting with the men, concluding that, “Clearly, Paul is concerned that the women accept the teaching of the church ‘peaceably’—without criticism and without dispute.” However,

he persists in his suggestion that submission to specifically *male* leadership is also on view. He bases the first part of his claim on Paul's use of "submission," *hupotagē*, or its related verb *hupotassō*, elsewhere. Although it is a noun in this passage, Moo argues that in its verbal form "submission" denotes the appropriate response to those in authority (slaves to masters, husbands to wives, believers to Christ). However, careful examination of Paul's use of the noun form in three other places suggests no such thing. In 2 Cor 9:13 and Gal 2:5 the term is used in relation to obedience to teaching and non-submission to heresy, respectively. Moreover, as Mounce recognizes, the context in 1 Tim 2 concerns learning; thus teaching is most likely on view.²⁶ This is further supported by the close connection of this section with 3:1–7 which concerns the appointment of properly qualified overseers for whom teaching is a key responsibility (3:2, cf. 5:17). Hence, "the context limits the women's submission to the teaching overseers, those who are responsible for teaching the true gospel and refuting error."²⁷

If, as Mounce suggests, "this places v 11 in line with other scriptural calls for *men and women alike* to be subject to the ruling authorities,"²⁸ why are only women called to submit to such teachers here? Once again, the possibility presents itself that the women are being addressed in this manner because the heresy is being embraced only by women. Male-female relationships in this section are secondary to the main issue of women listening without interruption or presumption in order that they might be corrected and harmony might be restored. This will be achieved, not by submission of women to men, but by women submitting to the teaching of the duly authorized overseers as opposed to the heretics.

Verse 12 develops the instructions in v. 11 with three key points. The first is that Paul does not permit a woman "to teach . . . a man." Taken in isolation the verse creates the impression that this is a universal principle that he has adopted elsewhere; a point strengthened by the apparently universal principle regarding male headship that he establishes in the following verse. With Wayne Grudem we agree that there is no sense in arguing that this command is temporary simply by virtue of his use of present indicative verb.²⁹ The grammar, of course, does not demand that the principle has universal force either. Certainly Paul is preventing women from teaching, but the purpose, force and ongoing applicability of this instruction can only be provided by the reasoning of vv. 13–15.

A clue to Paul's wider argument is given by his use of the unusual verb *authenteō*, which English translations usually render "have authority." Paul's normal words for authority are the noun *exousia*, a word he uses in every other instance where he speaks of the use of authority in a hierarchical context, and the closely related verb *exousiazō* (1 Cor 7:4, Luke 22:25). Applying Moo's own logic, if Paul uses language consistently then we would have to conclude that something other than hierarchical relationships is on view here.³⁰

The verb *authenteō* is found only here in the NT. Sources close to the time of Paul use the word to convey the idea of "authority that is taken on oneself" or "to usurp authority."³¹ This interpretation finds strong support from etymology, other

usages during this period and the immediate context of v. 12. "Teaching" and "usurping authority" are closely related ideas in this interpretation, for the act of teaching the heresy within the congregation is to take authority to teach without being qualified or authorized. This rendering also makes better sense of the way the letter develops into the next chapter, where Paul affirms those who aspire to positions of authority and discusses the proper qualifications and due authorization of elders. Thus, the use of *authenteō* suggests that male-female hierarchy is not the issue; rather, Paul addresses the problem of women championing the heresy by instructing them not to take it upon themselves to teach it to men.

The sharp adversative *alla* ("but"), followed by the injunction to *hēsuchia* ("quietness") shows that the activity of women teaching and usurping authority caused disruption, and that, by following this instruction, peace will be restored. Thus, v. 11 concerns how the women themselves will be corrected, while the instructions in v. 12 are designed to restrict their activity in perpetuating and defending the heresy, thereby causing disruption.

Verses 13–15 Temporal Priority

Moo argues that v. 13 renders any occasional reading of the text impossible, bemoans that it is often ignored by egalitarians, and finds this "telling." Taking 1 Cor 11:3–10 as a parallel passage, Moo envisages that "the order of creation is indicative of the headship that man is to have over woman."³² Since this temporal priority is rooted in the creation rather than the fall, "Paul shows that he does not consider these restrictions to be the product of the curse and presumably, therefore, to be phased out by redemption."³³

Of course, the significance of Adam's temporal priority is not supplied in the passage and requires inferences to be drawn. Moo assumes Paul's point is that temporal primacy implies headship. However, this interpretation seems to be unduly shaped by 1 Cor 11. The difficulties with reading 1 Timothy through the lens of 1 Corinthians are that Paul uses different words to make a different argument, and thus a parallel is not obvious. In 1 Corinthians Paul explicitly speaks about "headship," an expression not found in 1 Timothy, and his argument in 1 Corinthians is not based on the *order* of creation but the *origin* of male and female.

Grudem attempts to deal with the verse on its own terms, although his results are no more convincing. He maintains that Paul is invoking the principle of primogeniture whereby "the firstborn male in any family is assumed to be the leader in that family in his generation, and Adam is the firstborn in his generation, so he was the leader."³⁴ Grudem illustrates this principle by appealing to the natural leadership that a seventeen-year-old son would take over his younger brother when the latter joins him part way into the chore, commissioned by their father, of trimming and pruning trees:

he was put on the job first, he is older, and he received instructions directly from his father, while the younger son was sent to be the older son's "helper." The father will hold the older son responsible for completing

the task, and will hold the younger son responsible for helping in that task. If the fifteen-year-old tried to take over and give orders to his older brother on how the job should be done, he would be usurping his brother's authority and acting outside the boundaries of the father's expectations.

Of course, often Paul's arguments are so dense that inferences need to be made. However, this reconstruction imports a great deal into the argument. For example, Genesis does not state or even imply that Adam carried primary responsibility for the task given in Gen 2:15, or that he received specific instructions, or that he began the "chore" without Eve. We also might ask how well this analogy would work if the two boys were adults, in which case the significance of being the older son would be considerably diminished.³⁵

Paul simply says, "Adam was created first, then Eve." He deduces nothing about headship, superiority, responsibility or authority from this. Is Paul arguing that temporal priority creates a hierarchical relationship which demands female submission? Given that the object of their submission in v. 11 remains unstated, that quietness rather than absolute silence is being demanded, and that hierarchical language is not used here, such a conclusion is far from certain. More importantly, the rationale provided by v. 13 must be considered in the light of v. 14.

Three Verses, One United Argument

Rather than making two points, one in v. 13 and a second in v. 14, with a conclusion to the entire section being offered in v. 15, all three verses should be taken together as one argument. This is not obvious in the English Bible where the idea is separated into three verses and a full stop is placed at the end of v. 13. Furthermore, in English we often use "and" to indicate that a further point is being made, whereas in Greek the coordinating conjunction *kai* has a much broader range. Indeed, the conjunction *de* is typically used to enumerate a list in Greek, while *kai*, the conjunction used at the beginning of v. 14, implies a strong relationship between two phrases, joining them to form one idea.³⁶ Only the context can determine how *kai* operates, but we should not readily assume that these verses form two separate points.

Mounce maintains that v. 14 is a second reason vv. 11–12 are true, as suggested by the parallelism between vv. 13 and 14. He argues that this is the most natural reading given the syntactical similarities and that, "in both, Adam is the subject of the verb and emphatically listed at the beginning of the sentence. In both, Adam plays the dominant role; he was created first; he was not deceived."³⁷ While there is some repetition the parallels are not strong—"Eve" becomes "the woman," there is no sequence of action in v. 14 like there is in v. 13, and v. 13 makes a positive point while v. 14 a negative one. Thus, the structure cannot be used to argue that separate points are being made in each verse.

The most compelling reason for taking these verses together is that v. 14 makes little sense by itself. One of the most obvious difficulties with Paul's use of Genesis in v. 14 is that Adam also ate the fruit and became a transgressor (see Rom 5:14 where the same

word, *parabasis*, is used of Adam). Is Paul being highly selective in his argument, deliberately ignoring obvious facts to ground his wider instructions? It would not be convincing if he were, and it would certainly provide no basis for a universal anthropological principle. Indeed, it would be absurd to argue that women are either ontologically or functionally different when Adam also transgressed after being given the fruit by Eve. As Mounce recognizes, "If Ephesian women may not teach because Eve was deceived, would it not follow that the Ephesian men may not teach because Adam sinned knowingly, without the excuse of deception (Gen 3:12, 17)?"³⁸ If vv. 13–15 are taken together as one argument then these serious difficulties are resolved.

One thing all interpreters agree on with respect to this passage is the difficulty of v. 15. Nevertheless, whatever it says ought to make sense of any reconstruction of the preceding argument.

Moo believes that,

it is preferable to view verse 15 as designating the circumstances in which Christian women will experience (work out; cf. Philippians 2:12) their salvation—in maintaining as priorities those key roles that Paul, in keeping with Scripture elsewhere, highlights: being faithful, helpful wives, raising children to love and reverence God, managing the household (cf. 1 Timothy 5:14; Titus 2:3–5).³⁹



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He further believes that raising children is mentioned because it is so central to the role of a woman that it is an appropriate designation for “appropriate female roles generally.”⁴⁰ Such an interpretation would have the advantage of conforming to the gender-role framework that he uses, and offering further argument against those who apparently have left behind their responsibilities as wives in response to the false teachers.

However, this interpretation does not stand scrutiny. Despite Moo’s insistence that “the women with whom Paul is concerned in this paragraph are all almost certainly married,”⁴¹ we know from ch. 5 that this is not universally the case as there are enough older widows that a roll is required to keep track of them, and that is in addition to a number of younger widows and those who are *yet* to marry. Bruce Winter estimates that as many as forty percent of women aged forty to fifty were widowed, forming a significant proportion of the female population.⁴² Further, there is nothing particularly feminine about “faith, love and holiness” and they scarcely carry the connotation of being “faithful, helpful wives.” If this is what Paul meant he not only could have plainly said it, but the sentence could have been structured much more simply, with “childbearing” being listed with the other attributes in the conditional clause. Moo’s reconstruction also fails to account for the use of the singular *sōthēsetai*, “she/he will be saved,” followed by the plural, *meinōsin*, “if they continue.”

So what do these three verses mean when taken together? The events described in vv. 13–14 are chosen because they parallel exactly the circumstances in which the women find themselves, while v. 15 provides a gentle warning of judgment while pointing them to the behavior that will result in their restoration. Thus, these verses provide a conclusion to the preceding argument and encourage the appropriate behavior that will resolve the issue.

We should note that to be deceived (Gk. *apataō*) is to be *subject* to temptation, and is not the same as submitting to temptation. Paul is right in saying that Adam was not deceived when this statement is understood to be concerned with whom Satan tempted, and not with who sinned and their supposed gullibility. The statement in v. 13 that “Adam was created first, then Eve” serves to highlight the fact that Adam was around and could have been subject to Satan’s temptation, but Satan chose to wait until Eve was created and target her, just as the false teachers at Ephesus are targeting the women.

Thus, the episode in the Garden parallels the experience of the Ephesian church where the women had been deceived, while the men had not. The activity of the false teachers resembles that of the serpent who sought out the woman rather than the man (cf. 2 Tim 3:6) and so led the woman to sin. This is not to suggest that women are generally more susceptible to Satan; rather, the fact that women are being deceived ought to alert them to the satanic origin of this false teaching. There may also be an implication that the activity of the women in attempting to persuade the men parallels that of Eve tempting her husband.

Verse 15 deals with the judgment that is the consequence of Eve’s transgression, which by implication is the judgment that the women will be under if they continue in this deception. The subject

of the singular “*she* will be saved” is Eve, since she is the nearest referent to the verb. The enigmatic reference to “childbearing” is a reference to the judgment that Eve experienced following her transgression.⁴³ This is logical since the previous verse refers to the transgression of Eve, and the principal judgment for that transgression is that the Lord “will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing” (Gen 3:16 NRSV). Furthermore, in 1 Tim 2:14 the use of the perfect tense of *ginomai* (*gegonen*, “has become” a sinner) points to the ongoing consequences of Eve’s action. Finally, since childbearing here is something that woman need to be “*saved* through” it is natural that some aspect of judgment or curse is on view.⁴⁴

While *dia* with the genitive is often taken instrumentally in both Greek and English it is not the case here. Paul is not saying *how* the reversal of the curse will be accomplished, indicating that childbirth is the means of being saved. Here the instrumental force in the verse is provided by the following clause (“if they remain”). Thus, *dia* could be taken temporally, indicating a period of time “through which” she will be saved, or spatially, giving the sense that she will be preserved and brought through safely by continuing in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

The second phrase is introduced by the conditional “if” and points the way to avoiding judgment and restoring harmony in the church. The use of the plural verb *menō* (*meinōsin*, “they continue”) is difficult, and many English translations obscure the shift from the singular “she will be saved” to the plural “if they continue.” We suggest that, because Eve is being used here as an illustration which closely parallels the experience of the Ephesian women, Paul can seamlessly move from the example of Eve to the implications for the Ephesian women. The implication is that, just as Eve was brought through judgment by remaining faithful, so too will the Ephesian women.

In his concluding verse Paul offers a warning and an encouragement to the Ephesian women that they, like Eve, will be saved from the consequences of their transgression through appropriate behavior, as opposed to their present inappropriate behavior which is leading them astray and will ultimately undermine their salvation (1 Tim 5:15).

Conclusion

Despite the apparent simplicity of the command that a woman is not to teach, the meaning and force of v. 12 can only be understood within the context of the entire passage and the following three verses in particular. Any interpretation requires a certain amount of reconstruction and inference, and the interpretation above is no exception. However, the argument draws its inferences from within the text, especially the contention that only women, and a vast majority of women, at Ephesus were victims of the heresy, and that the church was split along gender lines. The view presented here takes account of the particularities of the vocabulary of the passage and relates the argument of this section closely to the immediate context and the broader concerns of the letter.

The argument of the passage is that the problem of false teaching will not be resolved by a shouting match across the

congregation. Rather, if the men stop quarrelling with the women, and the women who have an arrogant demeanor are quiet and submit to the authority of the authorized teacher(s), they will learn and be corrected. Just as the men are to desist from quarrelling with the women, a woman is not to teach or assume authority over a man in the congregational gatherings. The illustration of Eve, which closely parallels the experience of the Ephesian women, serves as a warning of judgment and an encouragement to be saved from the consequences of their sinfulness by appropriate behavior and humility.

Nothing in these verses suggests a trans-occasional application of the command to women not to teach or to be silent. Nor is there any requirement that the women at Ephesus or anywhere else submit to men; rather they must submit to the teaching of qualified and authorized officials within the church. The universal principle is that failure to listen to the word of God renders a person more open to the deceits perpetuated by false teachers. All of us must always submit to the word of God, or else we are susceptible to false teachers and are in danger of falling away.

Notes

1. Douglas Moo, for example, has expressed this view, having previously held that the passage was not dealing with heresy, conceding “In fact, it is likely that the false teaching does give rise to Paul’s instruction in 2:9–15” in “What Does It Mean Not To Teach Or Have Authority Over Men? 1 Timothy 2:11–15,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 184. See also Gordon Fee, “Reflections on Church Order in the Pastoral Epistles, with Further Reflections on the Hermeneutics of Ad Hoc Documents,” *JETS* 28 (1985): 142–48.

2. Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 443. See also David M. Scholer, “1 Timothy 2:9–15 and the Place of Women in the Church’s Ministry,” in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986), 200.

3. William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 125.

4. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 125, 128, 134.

5. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 128, 134.

6. So Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy And Titus*, NICNT 13 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 41. Alexander may still be present and in view in 2 Tim 4:4. While there are also notable similarities between the false teaching in Ephesus and that in Crete, it is by no means certain that it was the same heresy or the same false teachers, so Titus will not be taken into account in this reconstruction.

7. Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 45. Mounce suggests that such appeals “are probably haggadic midrash: allegorical reinterpretations of the OT, perhaps as fanciful interpretations of the OT genealogies” (*Pastoral Epistles*, lxx).

8. Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1988), 9, notes that there are “far greater differences than similarities” between the heresy in the Pastoral Epistles and second-century Gnosticism.

9. Moo, “What Does It Mean,” 176–92, esp. 177. Also against Scholer, 197–98.

10. Moo, “What Does It Mean,” 177.

11. Moo, “What Does It Mean,” 177.

12. Moo, “What Does It Mean,” 177.

13. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, 299.

14. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 120.

15. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, 300.

16. Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 44.

17. Moo, “What Does It Mean,” 177.

18. With most commentators, I argue that to be “handed over to Satan” implies excommunication and that they are no longer part of the Christian fellowship at Ephesus (see Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 69).

19. The adjective can occur in the feminine (once in the NT in 1 Tim 5:2 and ten times in the LXX), meaning that the masculine plural may be generic, applying to male and female presbyters. However, it must include men, so this possible objection must be considered.

20. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 248.

21. Moo, “What Does It Mean,” 178.

22. M. R. Lefkowitz and M. B. Fant, *Women’s Life in Greece and Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 140, cited in Karen J. Torjesen, “Praise of Noble Women: Gender and Honor in Ascetic Texts,” *Semeia* 57 (1992): 52.

23. So BDAG.

24. Moo, “What Does It Mean,” 179.

25. For example, in support of “silence” BDAG offers Acts 22:2, which from the context cannot possibly mean a complete lack of sound, since the crowd are said to become “even more silent.” LSJ only provides “silence” as an option along with “stillness,” citing a play by Euripides (c. 490–420 BC) where *hēsuchia* means “quiet,” and where, in the following line, “silence” is being conveyed the word *sigāō* is used just as Paul does in 1 Cor 14:34.

26. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 120.

27. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 120.

28. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 120, emphasis added.

29. Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Sisters: Multnomah, 2004). 279–328, esp. 300. Contra Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, 319–35. See Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 122–23 for a thorough critique of Payne’s argument over the force and significance of the indicative.

30. Moo is strikingly inconsistent in his willingness to find meaning from Paul’s usage in his other epistles, being happy to speculate on the nuance of *hupotagē* based on the use of the verbal form of the noun elsewhere in Paul (p. 179), while being unwilling to make anything of the possible nuances of *authentēō* because “the vocabulary of the pastoral epistles is well known to be distinct from Paul’s vocabulary elsewhere” (“What Does It Mean,” 182).

31. Here we enter into a major debate, to which we cannot do justice in this space. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, 361–97, is thorough and convincing on the meaning of *authentēō*, particularly in his discussion of the papyrus BGU 1208, a letter of apology from Tryphon to Asklepiades dated 27/26 BC (365–336), where the apology would only be necessary if Tryphon had exerted authority that he did not have. This translation is also recognized as a possibility by complementarians such as H. S. Baldwin, “A Difficult Word: *authentēō* in 1 Timothy 2:12,” in *Women in the Church*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 65–80. Grudem also seems to accept this translation, since, in the illustration quoted below, he refers to the younger brother “*usurping* his [older] brother’s authority” (Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 67; emphasis added). See the recent studies: Jamin

Hübner, "Translating *authentēō* in 1 Timothy 2:12," *Priscilla Papers* 29, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 16–26; idem, "Revisiting *authentēō* in 1 Timothy 2:12: What Does the Extant Data Really Show?" *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 41–70; Cynthia Long Westfall, "The Meaning of *authentēō* in 1 Tim 2:12," *JGRChJ* 10 (2014): 138–73.

32. Moo, "What Does It Mean," 185.

33. Moo, "What Does It Mean," 185, see also n. 33.

34. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 67.

35. Grudem's second illustration, in which a senior employee is given a task and a junior is subsequently asked to help, is even more problematic. Grudem says in this case "the senior employee who was first given the task has leadership authority in deciding how to get the job done" (*Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 68). However, it is not the temporal priority of the senior employee that gives her/him leadership, but the designation "senior." If the senior manager had been asked to help second then she/he would be expected to assume authority.

36. An example of this difference can be found in Matt 1:2 where *de* is used to join the generations while *kai* is used to join the phrase "Judah and his brothers." This can be seen again in Matt 1:3 with "And (*de*) Judah the father of Perez and (*kai*) Zerah by Tamar. . . ."

37. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 135.

38. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 137.

39. Moo, "What Does It Mean," 187.

40. Moo, "What Does It Mean," 187.

41. Moo, "What Does It Mean," 187.

42. Bruce Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 124–25.

43. The noun "childbearing" is preceded by the definite article (*tēs teknogonias*), suggesting that something more specific than the general role of childbearing is in mind (hence, some commentators see this as a reference to the birth of Christ). Paul's reference to the general task of childbearing in 1 Tim 5:14 uses a verb (*teknogoneō*).

44. This view also preserves the eschatological sense of "saved" which is typical of Pauline usage (i.e., "Women will be brought through the *end time* salvation [i.e., final judgment] if they. . ."). See for example the force of *sōthēsetai* in 1 Cor 3:15.



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