

1 Timothy 2:8-15: Paul and the “New Roman Women” at Ephesus

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1 Timothy 2:8-15 (TNIV)

Therefore I want men everywhere to pray lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. 9 I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves not with braided hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, 10 but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. 11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. 15 But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

I have told my VLI students for many years what has become a mantra in our classes: “All meaning is context dependent.” In dealing with any text, and especially these difficult texts, we must keep this principle in view. The two contexts we are always concerned with when interpreting a passage of Scripture are: historical and literary.¹ So, our method will be to move from the historical-cultural background of the text, to the literary context of the passage, to the interpretation of the target passage itself.

The importance of knowing the historical setting of a passage is well illustrated by this piece of prose sent to me by Gordon Fee.

With hocked gems financing him, our hero bravely defied all scornful laughter that tried to prevent his scheme.

Your eyes deceive you, he had said, an egg not a table correctly typifies this unexplored planet.

Now three sisters sought proof, forging along sometimes through calm vastness, yet more often over turbulent peaks and valleys.

Days became weeks as many doubters spread fearful rumours about the edge.

At last, from nowhere, welcome winged creatures appeared, signifying momentous success.

¹ This frames the exegetical enterprise as it does in Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: WJK, 1983, 1993).

Confidence in our interpretation of this passage greatly increases with some basic background information related to its context.² In the same way, we can get far wide of the mark in understanding what a passage of Scripture is talking about without knowing its correct setting.

I. HISTORICAL-CULTURAL CONTEXT

There are two significant cultural forces and one theological factor that would have influenced Christian believers living in Ephesus in the first century. The first cultural trend is what classical scholars have been calling over the last decade of research the “new Roman woman.” The second cultural influence was the Ephesian cult of Artemis. The third influence was a heresy gaining entrance into the Ephesian house churches. We will discuss this last influence under the heading of literary context.

The New Roman Woman

In just the last dozen or so years, results from the close study of neglected texts, particularly legal texts, and archaeological evidence have surfaced new critical background material for our understanding of women in the late Republican and early Roman Empire. In the first century a “new” kind of woman emerged across the Roman Empire.

From the Old Morality to the New

In the period of the Republic up to the middle of the first century B.C., husbands were expected to be unfaithful; but it was required of wives to be chaste. Otherwise, wives could suffer the ultimate penalty for this indecency. Aulus Gellius cites Cato from a speech, *On the Dowry*:

It is also written, regarding the right to kill: “If you catch your wife in adultery, you can kill her with impunity; she, however, cannot dare to lay a finger on you if you commit adultery, nor is it the law.”³

Before the first century B.C., the Greek and Roman ideals for a wife could be summed up under the cardinal virtue of “modesty” (Latin, *prudencia*; alternatively, *prudicitia*; Greek, *sōphrosunē*).⁴ According to S.B. Pomeroy, this term commonly means “temperance” and connotes chastity and self-restraint. It was, moreover, the pre-eminent virtue of Greek women mentioned more frequently on women’s tombstones than any other quality.⁵ In a letter from the Pythagorean school of philosophy written by a woman, Melissa, to Clearete, the issue of modesty was discussed.

² See the bottom of the last page of this paper for the title of this piece.

³ Aulus Gellus, *Attic Nights*, 10.23. Greek texts will be cited from *Inscriptiones Graecae* (Berlin, 1873ff.) and Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press); Latin texts from *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (Berlin, 1863-1909) and Loeb Classical Library.

⁴ Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Roman Women in the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 60.

⁵ S.B. Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt: From Alexander to Cleopatra* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 70; cited by Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Women*, 64.

It is necessary then for the free and modest (*eleutheran kai sōphrona*) wife to live with her lawful husband adorned with quietness, white and clean in her dress, plain but not costly, simple but not elaborate or excessive But if she is to be attractive to one man, her own husband, the ornament of a wife is her manner and not her dress (*stola*) ... and a good and noble bearing and decency and modesty (*kosmioteta kai sōphronsunēn*) rather than gold and emerald.⁶

Another Greek woman, Phintys, who wrote a manual on modesty (*sōphronunē*), addresses adornment:

... a woman will neither cover herself with gold or the stone of India or of any other place, nor will she braid her hair with artful device ... nor will she bathe frequently. For by pursuing these things a woman seeks to make a spectacle of female incontinence.⁷

Around 44 B.C., however, there emerged what classicists are calling the “new Roman woman.” Changes in Roman law for the purpose of increasing economic justice for wives had unpredicted consequences. The property of wives was no longer automatically transferred to their husbands on marriage. Consequently, wives gained newfound independence and financial security. Women were allowed to terminate their marriage and receive back a portion if not their whole dowry; and they could retain their own property. Therefore, women experienced financial independence and new social freedoms.⁸

Many of these financially independent women used their new freedoms in inappropriate ways. They now sought the sexual freedoms previously reserved for men. The traits of the “new Roman woman” were immodesty, in general, and sexually provocative dress and sometimes promiscuous lifestyle, in particular. Many older women with substantial endowments were seeking sexual liaisons with younger men. This contrasted starkly with the traditional image of the modest wife.

Sallust (c. 86-c.35 B.C.) said of wealthy Sempronia in *Catiline*:

There was nothing which she held so cheap as modesty and chastity. Her desires were so ardent that she sought men more often than she was sought by them . . . she was a woman of no mean endowment.⁹

Sallust himself took up with a woman of high standing ten years his senior. Concerning her, Cicero wrote:

⁶ P.Haun. II 13, ll. 1-42, cited in Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 72-73.

⁷ Perictone, “On the Harmony of a Woman,” cited by Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt*, 69.

⁸ S. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), ch. 10 and p. 446; cited by Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 21-22.

⁹ Sallust, *Catiline*, 25.

The daughter of one of Rome's noblest families, claiming the sexual freedom of a woman of no social standing to lose, and making no effort to conceal her behaviour—'a woman not just noble but notorious'.¹⁰

Morals had so changed by the turn of the first century that Ovid (43 B.C.-A.D. 17) made fun of those old-fashioned husbands who felt injured by their wives' infidelities: "That man is so provincial who is hurt by an adulterous wife."¹¹ Plautus depicts the older woman of wealth dominating her marriage by size of her dowry and boasting of her sexual appetite both within and outside of her marriage.¹² In fact, the older woman of high social standing and sexual prowess became a common theme in Roman Comedy.¹³

By 44 B.C. the influence of these new mores were not limited to Rome, but were evidenced in the East, as well.¹⁴ Dio Chrysostom notes the lifestyle of the "new Roman woman" in the East at the end of the first century:

...men condone even the matter of adultery in a somewhat magnificent fashion and the practice of it finds great and most charitable consideration, where husbands in their simplicity do not notice most things and do not admit knowledge of some things but suffer the adulterers to be called guests and friends ... inviting them to their table at festivals ... and display but moderate anger at actions that are most glaring and open—where, I say, these intrigues of the married women are carried on with an air of respectability.¹⁵

Reaction: Caesar legislates against the "New Roman Woman"

Fearing the destabilizing of the Roman household which, in turn, could undermine the empire, Caesar Augustus passed laws against the "new Roman woman" seeking young sexual partners; and he put in place incentives for bachelors to marry and create a stable family rather than hook up with older women.¹⁶ He legislated moral conduct: financial disincentives for remaining single, career advantages for getting married and having children, punishments for husbands ignoring their wives' extramarital affairs

¹⁰ Cicero, *pro Caelio*, 32.

¹¹ Ovid, *Amator I*, 37, ll. 38-40.

¹² Plautus, *Menaechmi*, ll.766-67, 690-97.

¹³ E. Schuhmann, "Der Typ der Uxor Dotata in den Komödien des Plautus," *Philologus* 121 (1997), 45-65, cited by Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 30-31.

¹⁴ Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 32-37.

¹⁵ Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 7.141-42.

¹⁶ Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 39. Tacitus, *Annals* 2.85, recorded in A.D. 19, "The senate passed severe provisions to repress women's dissoluteness and prohibited prostitution for granddaughters, daughters, and wives of Roman knights." Seutonius, *Augustus* 34, 40.5, records, "He [Augustus] reformed the laws and completely overhauled some of them, such as the sumptuary law [against extravagance and indulgence], that on adultery and chastity..."; the *lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* regulating marriage, incentives for having children and penalties for refusing to do so; and the *lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis* legislating on promiscuity and making it a public crime, cited in Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 40. It must also be noted, however, that there were many Equestrian men and noble women who opposed and tried to defy the Augustan legislation.

(exile and loss of property), and dress codes for how respectable women were to dress in contrast to adulterers, high-class prostitutes, and others.¹⁷

In other words, Roman jurisprudence distinguished between the traditional modest wife and the “new Roman woman” by means of appearance, which was defined in terms of apparel and adornment. For women in the first-century Roman Empire, “you were what you wore.”¹⁸

Reaction: Seneca contrasts His Mother to the “New Roman Woman”

Seneca (4 B.C.-A.D. 65), Stoic philosopher and the leading statesman during the reign of Nero, wrote his mother to console her while he was in exile from Rome (41-49 A.D.) by the emperor Claudius. In his letter, he contrasts his mother’s modesty with that of the “new Roman women.”

Unlike the great majority of women you never succumbed to immorality, the worst evil of our time; jewels and pearls have not moved you; you never thought of wealth as the greatest gift to the human race; you have not been perverted by the imitation of worse women who lead even the virtuous into pitfalls; you have never blushed for the number of children, as if it taunted you with your years; never have you, in the manner of other women whose only recommendation lies in their beauty, tried to conceal your pregnancy as though it were indecent; you have not crushed the hope of children that were being nurtured in your body; you have not defiled your face with paints and cosmetics; never have you fancied the kind of dress that exposed no greater nakedness by being removed. Your only ornament, the kind of beauty that time does not tarnish, is the great honour of modesty.¹⁹

We cannot miss his depiction of the lifestyle of Julio-Claudian married women: immoral, lavish with jewelry, pearls, cosmetics, preoccupation with physical beauty, immodest dress, desire to hide pregnancy (this was an age of extremely high value on the woman’s figure), use of contraceptives to avoid pregnancy (or abortion²⁰ if that was unsuccessful), pursuit of wealth, and pressuring others to pursue this trendy way of life.

¹⁷ E. Fantham, H. Peet Foley, N. Boymel Kampen, S.B. Pomeroy, and A.H. Shapiro, “The ‘New Woman’: Representation and Reality,” in *Women in the Classical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), ch. 10; Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 1-6, 39, 42-43, *passim*; Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 190-239; popularized for the general Christian reader by Scott McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008, 198-199.

¹⁸ Coined by T.A.J. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality and the Law in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 162.

¹⁹ Seneca, *ad Helviam*, 16:3-4.

²⁰ Juvenal, *Satires* 6.593ff., “Childbirth hardly ever occurs in a gold-embroidered bed since abortionists have such skills and so many potions, and can bring about the death of children in the womb”; Ovid *Amores*, 2.14.5-9, 27-28, 35-38, inveighs against the practice: “Can it be that, to be free of the flaws of stretchmarks, you have to scatter the tragic sands of carnage? Why will you subject your womb to the weapons of abortion and give dread poisons to the unborn?” Winter, *Roman Wives*, 110, cites K. Hopkins, “Contraception in the Roman Empire,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 8 (1965): 124-151, showing how well documented was the use of contraception at this time.

In addition to the immodesty and infelicity of the “new Roman woman,” she was also characterized by extravagant dress and brash outspokenness.

Extravagant Dress

First century satirist, Juvenal, commented on the hairstyles and accessorizing of contemporary Roman women:

So important is the business of beautification; so numerous are the tiers and storeys piled one upon another on her head!²¹

There is nothing that a woman will not permit herself to do, nothing that she deems shameful, when she encircles her neck with green emeralds, and fastens huge pearls to her elongated ears²²

Jewelry epitomized extravagance in Roman eyes; and the most expensive and preferred was that made of gold. Classicist A. Dalby notes, the Greek phrase, “dresses and gold” is the standard statement of the two accoutrements of a *hetairai* (prostitute).²³

Outspokenness

The “new Roman women” could be both brash and bold. The “new” wife or widow in the late Roman Republic and early Empire was one who pursued her social life at the expense of her family responsibilities. In addition, these women could often be outspoken, even aggressive, in public settings. According to Scott McKnight, the “new” Roman woman “was noted for snatching the podium for public address and teaching.”²⁴ Paul’s contemporary, Juvenal the satirist, wrote:

Let the wife, who reclines with you at dinner, not possess a rhetorical style of her own, let her not hurl at you in whirling speech the well-rounded syllogism. Let her not know all history. Let there be some things in her reading which she does not understand. I hate the woman who is always consulting and poring over the grammatical treatise of Palaemon, who observes all the rules and laws of correct speech, who with antiquarian zeal quotes verses that I never heard of and corrects her ignorant female friend for slips of speech that no man need trouble about: let her husband at least be allowed to make his solecisms [slips in syntax] in peace.²⁵

²¹ Juvenal, *Satires*, 6.501-3.

²² Juvenal, *Satires*, 6.458-59.

²³ A. Dalby, “Levels of Concealment: The Dress of the *Hetairai* and *Pornai* in Greek texts,” in L. Llewellyn-Jones, ed., *Women’s Dress in the Ancient Greek World* (London and Swansea: Dujckworth and University Press of Wales, 2002), 115.

²⁴ McKnight, *Blue Parakeet*, 199.

²⁵ Juvenal, *Satires*, 6.448-56. Just several paragraphs before, Juvenal writes, “But most intolerable of all is the woman who as soon as she has sat down to dinner commends Virgil, pardons the dying Dido, and pits the poets against each other, putting Virgil in the one scale and Homer in the other. The grammarians make way before her; the rhetoricians give in; the whole crowd is silenced: no lawyer, no auctioneer will get a word in, no, nor any other woman; so torrential is her speech that you would think that all the pots

Since the *symposia* and the dinner parties were held in homes, it would be a concern among Christian leaders of this era that some women would behave in a similar fashion in the house churches.²⁶

Stoic philosopher, Musonius Rufus (30-100 A.D.), was a proponent of educating girls and women in philosophy. But he also knew this education was often being employed inappropriately; so he voices a concern:

Women who associate with philosophers are bound to be arrogant for the most part and presumptuous, in that abandoning their own households and turning to the company of men they practice speeches, talk like sophists, and analyze syllogisms, when they ought to be sitting at home spinning.²⁷

With the rise of women advocates in the public courts, Juvenal complains:

There are hardly any cases that were not set in motion by a woman. If Manilia is not the defendant, she's the plaintiff; she will herself frame and adjust the pleadings; she will be ready to instruct Celsus himself how to open his case, and how to urge his points.²⁸

Juvenal cites women asking rhetorically, "Do we as women ever conduct cases? Are we learned in the civil law? Do we disturb your courts with our shouting?"²⁹ Bruce Winter comments:

It is significant that in Roman law the term for the modesty (*pudicitia*) [=Greek *sōphrosunē*] of married women was linked with the inappropriateness of their undertaking the public function of arguing in court.³⁰

On the positive side, these new freedoms could be put to constructive use. Women became benefactors of worthy community improvements; and their wealth influenced commercial, civic, and provincial affairs.³¹ With their new freedom and mobility, women also began to occupy civic posts and bear the title of civic magistrates. This explains the important contribution some women played in the spread and support of early Christianity. No less than eighteen women are mentioned by name in NT churches—

and bells were being clashed together She lays down definitions, and discourses on morals, like a philosopher; thirsting to be deemed both wise and eloquent.

²⁶ Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 115; *idem*, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 153-157, where Winter makes a case for the women of Corinth aping secular customs. The women of Ephesus would be no different.

²⁷ Musonius Rufus, ll. 54-58, text and translation by Cora E. Lutz, "Musonius Rufus, 'The Roman Socrates'," *Yale Classical Studies* 10 (1947), 42, cited by B. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Women*, 114; cf. 65. The virtuous wife spinning wool in her house was a commonplace theme in ancient times.

²⁸ Juvenal, *Satires*, 6.242-45.

²⁹ Juvenal, *Satires*, 2.51-52.

³⁰ Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 178.

³¹ Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 4, 173-211.

among them, Lydia, Euodia, Syntyche, Phoebe, Junia, Priscilla. The reason these women could contribute so much to the Christian mission is not unrelated to the new freedoms and resources available to these women in the late Republican period and early Empire.

The Cult of Artemis

The temple of Artemis was the largest building in ancient times.³² One of the original seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Artemis was the center of the civic and religious life of Ephesus; and it was the greatest symbol of cultural identity for the people of Ephesus.³³ Luke depicts the Ephesian's ardent devotion to Artemis in their reaction to Paul's mission (Acts 19:28-37). Fearing the decline of Artemis' reputation and popularity as a result of the spread of Christianity, a riot broke out in which they shouted for two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:34).³⁴ The severity of this opposition to Paul may be inferred from Paul's references to encountering "wild beasts in Ephesus" (1 Cor. 15:32), "many adversaries" (16:9), and the "affliction to the point of death" (2 Cor. 1:8-9).³⁵

The women of Ephesus may have been influenced by the cult of Artemis in which the female was exalted and regarded as superior to the male. Linda Belleville, citing Sharon Gritz, describes how this was manifested in cultic practice:

It was believed that Artemis (and brother Apollo) was the child of Zeus and Leto (or Latin *Letona*). Instead of seeking fellowship among her own kind, she spurned the attentions of the male gods and sought instead the company of a human male consort. This made Artemis and all her female adherents superior to men. This was played out at the feast of the Lord of the Streets, when the priestess of Artemis pursued a man, pretending she was Artemis herself pursuing Leimon.³⁶

Even though S.M. Baugh claims that the impact of the Artemis cult on the local situation gives us no significant clues to help us interpret our target passage,³⁷ it is difficult to believe that the epicenter of this powerful cult had no effect on the women, and perhaps also the men, of the Ephesian church.³⁸ But since the evidence in this area of research is still very controversial, the interpretation we offer will not depend upon it.

³² Pausanias 4.31.8; 7.5.4. According to Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* 36.96), the temple measured 220 x 425 feet and contained 127 columns, with some rising to a height of 60 feet.

³³ Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 37.

³⁴ Linda L. Belleville, "Teaching and Usurping Authority: 1 Timothy 2:11-15," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, gen. eds. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2005), 205-206.

³⁵ Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 38-39.

³⁶ Belleville, "Teaching and Usurping Authority," 219; Sharon Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers and the Mother Goddess at Ephesus: A Study of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 in Light of Religious and Cultural Milieu of the First Century* (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1991), 31-41.

³⁷ S.M. Baugh, "A Foreign World: Ephesus in the First Century," in A.J. Köstenberger et al., eds., *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 13-52.

³⁸ We see how profound the influence of Artemis is by the unsurpassed cosmic power attributed to her by her worshippers in Ephesus, who called her *prothronia*, supreme in divine power and place. She was a

II. LITERARY CONTEXT

Purpose of 1 Timothy: Stop the False Teaching

The body of the letter of 1 Timothy begins with 1:3:

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain persons not to teach false doctrines any longer. (TNIV)

In fact, the letter both begins (1:3-7) and ends (6:20-21) with a charge from Paul to Timothy to stop the false teachers and counteract their teaching. This expresses both the occasion and the purpose of 1 Timothy.³⁹ The opening charge to Timothy, with accompanying instructions concerning the false teachers (1:3-7), is resumed in the last paragraph of the first chapter (1:18-20)—composing the first major literary unit of the letter.⁴⁰

The theme of opposing false teaching or heresy is referenced both explicitly (1:3-7, 18-20; 4:1-5, 6-10; 6:2b-10, 20-21) and implicitly or latently (2:1-7, 11-15; 5:15) in the letter; and the verbal markers are “false teaching” (1:3; 6:3), content labeled as “myths and genealogies” (1:4) or “myths” (4:7) or “demonic doctrines” (4:1-2). There is even an explicit reference to opposition leaders, Hymenaeus and Alexander (1:20). 2 Timothy probably refers to the same opposition at a later stage of development (2:14-26; 3:1-9; 4:1-5).⁴¹

Effects of False Teachers

The effects of these opponents’ influence are described in terms of disruption, arguments, and disputes (1 Tim. 6:4; 2 Tim. 2:14; cf. Tit. 3:9). Paul morally describes the opponents as liars and hypocrites (1 Tim. 4:2), impious and immoral (2 Tim. 3:1-5; cf. Tit. 3:1-5), and motivated by greed (1 Tim. 6:5-10; cf. Tit. 1:11). It seems clear from about fifty percent of 1 Timothy’s contents that false teaching is Paul’s predominant concern. In relation to this, Linda Belleville asks the question, “Is there any connection between false teaching and the fact that women receive a great deal of attention in 1 Timothy—more than any other New Testament letter?”⁴² And with reference to our

goddess of the underworld invoked to wield magical power and sorcery; and her power was considered to be superior to that of other deities, astrological fate, and evil spirits. See Clinton Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 20-24, 38-40; idem, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul’s Letters* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992).

³⁹ Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 7-8; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 16.

⁴⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 56, n. 7 and idem, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 57, points out that the resumptive nature of these verses is made clear by the language (*parangeiles*, “command” 1:3; *parangelias*, “command” 1:5; *parangelian*, “instruction” 1:18—which is not transparent in the English translations. Note how easily vv. 18-20 reads right after v. 7.

⁴¹ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 41; Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 12-13.

⁴² Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” 205-206.

target passage, 1 Timothy 2:8-15, Gordon Fee raises the issue, “The question is why does Paul give such a disproportionate amount of space in this passage to women in comparison to men?”⁴³

Moreover, Fee has helpfully drawn our attention to the close relationship between 1 Timothy 2:9-15 and 1 Timothy 5, esp. verses 11-14.⁴⁴ According to 1 Timothy 5, the young widows under discussion “live for pleasure” (verse 6), “their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ” (verse 11), “going about from house to house” having become “gossips”⁴⁵ (NIV; TNIV “idlers”) and “busybodies, saying things they ought not to” (verse 13); by doing so, they bring the gospel into disrepute (verse 14); and some have “already turned away to follow Satan” (verse 15; cf. 2:14 and 4:2).

Paul’s counsel is similar in both passages. They should marry and have children (5:14; cf. 2:15; *contra* 4:3); and they should take care of their homes so as to deny the enemy cause for scandalizing the gospel and the church (5:14). Fee concludes,

Within that context, both the instructions on modest dress and on neither teaching nor having authority over men, as well as the illustrations of Eve, who was equally deceived by Satan, plus the final instruction in verse 15 on bearing children, can all be shown to make sense.⁴⁶

So, by bringing 2:9-15 within the wider literary context of 5:11-15, Fee offers a clearer view of the problem and solution that Paul has in mind.

Another factor in the literary context within the Pauline correspondence to Timothy gives us a more complete picture, i.e., 2 Timothy 3:5-9. From this passage we learn that these false teachers are finding their best audience among “gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to come to a knowledge⁴⁷ of the truth.” The heretical teachers found their inroads into the house churches likely hosted by well-endowed though vulnerable and unstable women, who helped them spread their teachings (2 Tim. 3:6-9; cf. 1 Tim. 2:11-15 and 5:3-16, esp. 11-15). They were ruining whole house churches by teaching heresy, being divisive, and targeting vulnerable women out of greed (1 Tim. 6:5-10; cf. Tit. 1:11).⁴⁸

Conclusion

⁴³ Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 70.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; followed by McKnight, *Blue Parakeet*, 200-201.

⁴⁵ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 58, n. 11, “There is no known instance in Greek where the word *phylaroi* [*sic*; the Greek text reads *phluaroi*] means ‘gossips.’ In fact it means to talk foolishness and is often used in contemporary philosophical texts to refer to ‘foolishness’ that is contrary to ‘truth.’” But, F.W. Danker: Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. F.W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), hereafter, *BDAG*, 1060, *phluaros* “gossipy 1 Ti 5:18.”

⁴⁶ Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 70.

⁴⁷ *epignosis*, knowledge, recognition, *BDAG*, 369.

⁴⁸ Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 70.

From our survey of the historical-cultural and literary contexts we have found a number of highly significant factors that should influence our interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:8-15. A combination of cultural and heretical elements resonate with the words of our text to yield a compelling interpretation. Some women of high social standing, both married and widowed, were swept up in a socially and morally revolutionary movement granting greater economic, sexual, and public freedoms. This gave rise to the “new Roman woman.” This emerging movement was so upsetting to the status quo that Emperor Augustus Caesar legislated against it and certain Stoic and Neo-Pythagorean philosophers inveighed against it.⁴⁹

The “new Roman woman” was characterized, first, by the rejection of the conventional dress code (apparel, adornment, hairstyles) which symbolized traditionally valued sexual modesty, respect, and faithfulness to one’s husband. Second, the woman of means sought to experience the sexual freedoms previously restricted for men. The pursuit of these liberties caused many women to want to be unencumbered with children; so the ancient sources discuss the practices of contraception and abortion. Third, another area of revolutionary change was the mobility of women to function publicly in commercial, political, legal, and rhetorical matters. The latter took the form of women speaking up boldly if not brashly before men and husbands asserting opinions, teachings, and philosophizing.⁵⁰ In summary, the three conspicuous characteristics of the “new Roman woman” were: (1) extravagant adornment, (2) sexual license, and (3) brash outspokenness. Having probed the historical-cultural and literary contexts, we are now ready to examine our passage.

III. INTERPRETATION OF 1 TIMOTHY 2:8-15

We will approach our passage in five natural smaller units: verses 8, 9-10, 11-12, 13-14, and 15.

1 Timothy 2:8

Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.

Both verses 1 and 8 of this chapter begin with the conjunction “therefore” (*oun*) implying a result or inference from what has been previously stated. We have already noted that the major concern in chapter 1, as well as the overall letter, is with false teaching and the need to stop it. Therefore, what Paul writes about in the next two units, 2:1-7 and verses 8-15, will directly follow on that concern.

In 2:1-7, Paul urges the Ephesians to pray for all people, especially those in authority, for the purpose of living “peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness,” because God desires all to be saved. The basis for this prayer is that “there is one God and one mediator between God and human beings, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave

⁴⁹ Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*; Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 48, 196, *passim*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

himself as a ransom for all people.” (TNIV) This is also the basis for Paul’s conscription into the divine mission (1 Tim. 1:12-17; cf. 2 Tim. 1:8-12).

As a result of first, God’s redemptive mission in Christ, second, his conscription of Paul into this mission, and third, Timothy’s assignment to stop the false teaching leading to practices threatening to destroy the public reputation of the gospel and the church, Paul tasks Timothy to facilitate prayer and worship in the Ephesian house churches in such a manner that enhances rather than discredits the gospel. This is, in fact, a Pauline principle that operates as an interpretive key for understanding Paul’s letters—i.e., what advances the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23; succinctly, verses 22b-23a).⁵¹ We will argue that Paul’s advice will line up with what advances the gospel in a given place at a given time.

The first problem Paul addresses is with the manner in which the men⁵² were praying. Praying with uplifted hands was common for Jews and early Christians.⁵³ The adjective “holy” should indicate readiness to pray and minister; but in this church Paul detects hostile feelings (anger) leading to hostile actions (arguing/disputing).⁵⁴ Towner fits this activity within in its historical and literary context well:

This is almost a certain reference to the *modus operandi* of the false teachers, whose false doctrines and teaching style engendered disputes and division in the community. But in the nearer context a reference to some kind of volatile interaction between men and women (who teach) may also be in mind.⁵⁵

Could this be a reaction of some of the men to the “new Roman women” exerting themselves with the backing of the false teacher—approving of and exploiting their new morality as part of their agenda to subvert the church?⁵⁶

⁵¹ “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the Gospel.”

⁵² The Greek word for “men,” *andres* (man, *aner*) is ambiguous because it can also be translated “husbands.” Typically something modifies the word man/men like a possessive pronoun or similar device to indicate “husband,” or something else in the context will support that meaning. However, in this passage there are no explicit markers; and the commentators are divided whether the context supports “men” or “husbands.” The same is true concerning “women/wives.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 112, reasons: “A large part of the problem in Ephesus has to do with the widows (1 Tim 5:3-16; 2 Tim 3:6-7). If Paul is thinking of wives, then this large group would be omitted, perhaps the very group to whom he is speaking ...”

⁵³ 1 Kgs. 8:54; Pss. 63:4; 141:2; 2 Macc. 14:32; Philo, *Flaccus* 121; Jos. *Antiquities* 4.40; Tertullian, *On Prayer* 17.

Scholars disagree whether “everywhere,” literally “in every place” (*en panti topo*), means in all the house churches in the area of Ephesus or universally throughout the church.

⁵⁴ Greek *dialogismos*: in the negative sense, as here—Rom. 14:1; Phil. 2:24; cf. Lk. 24:38; in the positive sense of “reasoning, thinking”—Rom. 1:21; 12:1—but that sense does not fit this context.

⁵⁵ Philip Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 202-203. Regarding the *modus operandi* of the false teachers cf. 3:3, 8, 11; 5:13; 6:11; 2 Tim 2:24; Tit. 1:7; 2:3; 3:2.

⁵⁶ When one thinks of the heretics working through vulnerable women, their attack on the institution of marriage (4:3) and the sanctity of widowhood (5:15), it makes sense that Paul addresses unsanctioned activities among some women in 2:9-15; 5:15; 2 Tim. 3:6.

1 Timothy 2:9-10

I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

It is here that we see the congruence, even in terminology, between our target passage and the historical-cultural context of the “new Roman woman.” It is with these women that Paul is most concerned within this passage. They receive the disproportionately large treatment because they are being used by the opponents to subvert the church; and their dress and demeanor is threatening the integrity of the church’s witness with outsiders. Perhaps the most significant symbol of the “new Roman woman” is her apparel and adornment which transgressed the boundaries of traditional respectability.⁵⁷

After the transitional verse 8, the literary unit of verses 9-15 is framed by the ethically all-important term in that time and culture, *sōphrosunē* (translated “modesty” in verse 9 and “propriety” in verse 15). This is the term that governs the cultural expectation of an honorable woman.⁵⁸ To dress modestly (*kosmios*) is to dress with “decency” (*aidos*: modesty, discretion, propriety) and “propriety” (*sōphrosunē*: also, self-control, chastity, respectability) (verse 9). These are the culture-current terms used in the Roman world for the chaste and respectable woman.

In the first century a woman’s outer dress signaled either chastity and fidelity or promiscuous availability. Elaborate hairstyles, jewelry, and extravagant clothing were the uniform of the “new Roman woman” conveying her sexual availability, freedom of expression, and insubordination.⁵⁹ Pearls were highly treasured and gold was the preferred metal of elegance, as well as the dress code of highly paid prostitutes.⁶⁰ Rounding out the description is “expensive clothes.” William Mounce describes what “expensive” means:

[*polutelēs*] “Expensive,” carries the connotation of being extremely costly. This word is used to describe the ointment costing a year’s wages that was poured on Jesus’ head (Mark 14:3-5). Its cognate adjective describes the pearl of great worth for which the merchant sold everything he owned (Matt. 13:46). The clothing Paul is considering is not slightly expensive but extravagantly expensive

⁵⁷ Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 196.

⁵⁸ Winter, *Roman Wives*, *passim*.; Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 190; U. Luck, *sōphrōn*, *sōphrosunē*, in Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, eds., trans. Geoffrey Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971):7:1097-1104; hereafter, *TDNT*; S. Wibbing, *sōphrosunē*, in Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, 1986):1:501-503; hereafter *NIDNTT*.

⁵⁹ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 57-58; idem, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 76; Juvenal, *Satires* 6.458-459: “There is nothing that a woman will not permit herself to do, nothing that she deems shameful, when she encircles her neck with green emeralds, and fastens huge pearls to her elongated ears So important is the business of beautification; so numerous are the tiers and storeys piled one upon another on her head! ... Meantime she pays no attention to her husband”; 1 Enoch 8:1-2; Test. Reub. 5:1-5; Ps-Phintys 84-86; Perictione 135; Seneca *Helvia* 16:3-4; Plutarch *Conj. Praec.* 26:30-32.

⁶⁰ Dalby, “Levels of Concealment,” 115; Winter, *Roman Wives*, 104-106; Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 208-209.

as suggested by the use of gold jewelry. A.H.M. Jones says clothing could cost as much as 7000 denarii, which equaled more than nineteen years' wages for an average laborer.⁶¹

The simple link between extravagant dress and marital infidelity is spoken of plainly in the *Sentences of Sextus* 235, "A woman who likes adornment is not faithful."

Paul precisely critiques the dress of the "new Roman woman"; and since in first century Rome "You were what you wore,"⁶² your outward adornment and inward character were considered the outer and inner dimensions of the same reality. For this reason, Paul can abruptly shift ("but," *alla*) to the (metaphorical) adornment of "good deeds" fitting for women "who profess to worship God" (*theosebeia=eusebeia*, denoting the integration of faith in God and the behavior that demonstrates this) in verse 10.⁶³ Doing good deeds is an important concept in the Pastoral Epistles.⁶⁴ Theologically, good deeds becomes shorthand for the observable dimension of an authentic faith bearing fruit.⁶⁵

1 Timothy 2:11-12

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be silent.

A number of translations render *en hēsychīa* ("in quietness" NIV) "in silence."⁶⁶ Paul does not use *hēsychion* this way nine verses earlier (2:1-2), where he instructs the Ephesians to intercede for those in authority for the purpose of leading "peaceful and quiet (*hēsychion*) lives" presumably for an unhindered ministry because God desires all to be saved. Nor does Paul use this term to mean "silence" elsewhere (1 Thess. 4:11; 2 Thess. 3:12). When Paul wants to say "silence," meaning absence of speech, he uses *sigao* (Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:28, 30, 34).⁶⁷ In other words, Paul is commanding the woman to learn (*manthanetō* is imperative) in a quiet, peaceful demeanor. Given the background of the "new Roman woman," Paul was counteracting her brash verbal

⁶¹ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 114-115.

⁶² T.A.J. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality and the Law in Ancient Rome*, 162, cited by Winter, *Roman Wives*, 5.

⁶³ Commentators generally note the ellipsis whereby the infinitival phrase from verse 9, "to adorn themselves" (*kosmein heautas*) is supplied to verse 10 to complete the thought—granting the sense, "to adorn themselves with good deeds." For excursus on *eusebia*, see Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 171-174.

⁶⁴ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 116: "Titus is to be a role model of good deeds (Titus 2:7). Paul also spells out what constitutes a good work: a widow supported by the church must be wisely recognized for her good deeds such as raising children [1 Tim. 2:15; 5:10, 14; *contra* 4:3], showing hospitality, washing the feet of saints, helping the afflicted..."

⁶⁵ Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 212.

⁶⁶ Linda Belleville, "Teaching and Usurping Authority," 208, lists KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, CEV, NIV, JB; cf. "keep quiet" TEV; "remain [or be] quiet" BBE, NAB, NJB, TNIV. She includes NIV and TNIV in these lists; more specifically, the NIV (1984) and TNIV (2005) I consulted both read "in quietness" at the beginning of verse 11, but "be silent" in the NIV and "be quiet" in the TNIV at the end of verse 12.

⁶⁷ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 117-119; Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 212-216; Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 72; Belleville, "Teaching and Usurping Authority," 208; etc.

aggression with a command to take on a quiet demeanor so as to learn. This would not curtail other verbal expressions involved in the exercise of other spiritual gifts.

Her learning is further qualified as being in “full submission” (*en pase hypotage*), offsetting the insubordination of certain women. However, “quietness and submission” are not negative qualities in the context of learning. Young men receiving rabbinic training were to learn in the same way.⁶⁸ The emphasis is on the phrase “with a quiet demeanor” (*en hēsychīa*), since it is both the first thing said about women in verse 11 and the last thing said about them in verse 12.

This is further confirmed by the whole passage being bracketed by *sōphrosunē* (self-control, modesty) in verses 9 and 15. Paul’s order for meek and submissive behavior probably finds its setting with women who were disrupting worship⁶⁹ by commandeering the teaching and authority of the meetings. Moreover, since the meetings of the house churches were open to the public,⁷⁰ Paul had to restrict what was considered inappropriate to the wider culture so as not to bring the church and the gospel into disrepute. Again, we see Paul’s principle at work: what advances the gospel.

Verse 12 is the crux of the controversy over this passage: “to teach or to have authority over a man,” especially with reference to the meaning of the Greek term *authentēin* (“to have/exercise authority” or “to dominate/domineer”). Not only is there a war of the lexicons over *authentēin* but there is a contest over the most precise grammatical analysis that properly construes the relationship between “teach” and “have authority over”/“dominate” (*didaskēin ... oude authentēin*). First, we will look at the meaning of *authentēin*; then, we will treat the grammatical question.

The semantic range of *authentēin* has been charted with some accuracy in recent times due to the help of *TLG*.⁷¹ The word group covers a range broadly characterized as: to rule/reign; to control/dominate; to act independently; to be the originator of something; to murder.⁷² Most contemporary interpreters settle on “the exercise of authority.”

⁶⁸ Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 107-108, cited by Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 118.

⁶⁹ Belleville, “Teaching and usurping Authority,” 209.

⁷⁰ 1 Cor. 14:22-24; see the construction of the Roman villas owned by the wealthy who hosted the churches in Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, Good News Studies 6 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983), 153-172.

⁷¹ *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, CD-ROMs containing digitalized versions of all extant Greek texts from Homer (8th cent. B.C.) to 600 A.D. and most texts up to the fall of Byzantium in 1453 A.D. Recent studies using this tool: H.S. Baldwin, “A Difficult Word: αυθεντε, w in 1 Timothy 2:12,” in A.J. Köstenberger, et al., eds., *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 65-80; idem, “Appendix 2: αυθεντε, w in Ancient Greek Literature,” in Köstenberger et al., eds., *Women in the Church*, 269-305; L. Wilshire, “The TLG Computer and Further References to AUFENTE W in 1 Timothy 2:12,” *NTS* 34 (1988):120-34; G.W. Knight III, “AUFENTE W in Reference to Women in 1 Timothy 2:12,” *NTS* 30 (1984): 143-57; I.H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 456-460; B. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Women*, 116-119.

⁷² Baldwin, “A Difficult Word,” cited by Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 220; see interaction of Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 456.

Belleville cites a long history of translations before WWII conveying the meaning of dominance.⁷³

Biblical lexicographers J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida place *authentēo* into the semantic domain “to control, restrain, domineer” and define the verb as “to control in a domineering manner”—thus yielding the meaning, “I do not allow women ... to dominate men.”⁷⁴ Wayne Grudem cites recent research to demonstrate that *authentēo* conveys no connotation of dominance.⁷⁵ At the end of the day, given the possible range of meanings for *authentēo*, the meaning will have to be determined by its context.

Marshall contextualizes *authentēo*, within the setting involving the women in question, as follows:

In the context it seems most likely that through their being “deceived” there was a false content to their teaching and that this element included some kind of emancipatory tendency, especially by wealthy women (cf. 2:9f.), expressed in what was a socially unacceptable way in that time and culture. There may well have been a misreading of material in Genesis as part of the speculative use of “myths and genealogies” practiced by the writer’s opponents If this interpretation is sound, it means that the “silencing” of the women can and must be placed alongside the other references to the prohibition and refutation of false teaching by men (1.3; 4.7; 6.3f, 20; 2 Timothy 2.16, 23; Titus 1.11, 13; 3.10f.). It is probably to be understood, therefore, as mainly motivated by the author’s opposition to heresy in the church.⁷⁶

So, as Marshall sees it, this is not an exclusively “women” issue, but a false teaching issue. Paul restricts the women in question to counteract the heresy in Ephesus. Mounce, who concludes with an interpretation of the passage that is restrictive to women, concedes:

If it [*authentēo*] means “to domineer” in a negative sense, then it is prohibiting a certain type of authoritative teaching, one that is administered in a negative,

⁷³ Linda L. Belleville, “Teaching and usurping Authority: 1 Timothy 2:11-15,” 209-210: Old Latin (2nd-4th century); Vulgate (4th-5th century); Geneva (1560 ed.); KJV (1611); Goodspeed (1923)—just to name a few.

⁷⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988-1989), 91. The gold standard for lexicons determining the meaning of New Testament words has been Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker (BAGD), now updated by F.W. Danker: Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. F.W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). According to Danker and Bauer the term *authentēo* means “to assume a stance of independent authority, give orders to, dictate to,” 150. They follow H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. H.S. Jones and R. McKenzie, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1940; 1996), 275, “to have full power or authority over [someone].”

⁷⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 304-318.

⁷⁶ I.H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 441. It is interesting that although Marshall wrote his commentary before Bruce Winter and Phillip Towner applied the research on the “new Roman Woman” to 1 Timothy, he intuited the direction toward which the primary sources he consulted were pointing.

domineering, coercive way, thus leaving the door open for women to exercise teaching authority in a proper way over men.⁷⁷

Liefeld queries the interpreter, “The exegete of 1 Timothy 2:12 must ask why, if Paul was writing about authority in the usual sense, he chose a most unusual word that had a history of very strong meanings.”⁷⁸ Moreover, in Paul’s discussions concerning authority elsewhere, the noun *exousia* and the verb *exousiazo* are the normal terms.⁷⁹ Even if Paul wanted to vary his vocabulary in any standard manner, Belleville notes:

If Paul had wanted to speak of an ordinary exercise of authority, he could have picked any number of words. Within the semantic domain of “exercise of authority,” biblical lexicographers J.P. Louw and Eugene Nida have twelve entries and of “rule,” “govern” forty-seven entries. Yet Paul picked none of these. Why not? The obvious reason is that *authentēin* carried a nuance (other than “rule” or “have authority”) that was particularly suited to the Ephesian situation.⁸⁰

I.H. Marshall concurs:

The fact that so unusual a word (only four significant references before the Christian era) is used here is surely significant and suggests that there is a nuance not conveyed by more common words. There appears to be a tendency on the part of Knight and others to play down the nuance of exercising autocratic power, which is present in several examples. This meaning fits best into the context, which is characterized by argumentation and dogmatic intimidation.⁸¹

Verse 8 told us that the men were angry and argumentative; and this is likely the result of encountering certain women promoting heresy who were inappropriately outspoken and domineering. In a word, Paul uniquely chose a rare verb, *authentēo*, over the standard choices available to him because of a particular circumstance.

Regarding the grammatical relationship between “teach” and “have authority over”/“dominate” (*didaskein ... oude authentēin*),⁸² Köstenberger argues that the Greek correlative (*oude*) pairs synonyms or parallel words, not antonyms. Since “teach,” according to Köstenberger, is always positive, *authentēin* must also be positive (i.e., “to exercise authority over”).⁸³ Mounce examines the grammatical relationship, as well, and decides to follow Köstenberger.⁸⁴ Köstenberger’s search through the parallel

⁷⁷ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 128.

⁷⁸ Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy/Titus*, 99. *authentēo* is a *hapax legomena*, i.e., a one-time occurrence in the New Testament.

⁷⁹ Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 221-222.

⁸⁰ Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” 211.

⁸¹ Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 458.

⁸² NIV reads “have authority over”; and either this translation or, alternatively, “exercise authority over” are usually given within the debate over the term *authentēo*. TNIV, however, changes it to “assume authority over” in order to apparently take a neutral position in the debate.

⁸³ Köstenberger, “A Complex Sentence Structure in 1 Timothy 2:12,” in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, 81-103.

⁸⁴ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 128-130.

grammatical constructions of the New Testament and contemporary Greek literature is impressive. However, his research is based on two questionable assumptions: (1) That “to teach” always refers to a positive content; (2) The grammatical parameters of his computer-assisted search are: “neither” + verb 1 + “nor” + verb 2.

The first assumption seems somewhat artificial. The New Testament can use “to teach” in a negative sense—e.g., Jesus says, “Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19). Without the content being made explicit in a given passage, one would have to rely on the context to determine its implicit meaning—whether positive or negative.

The second assumption seems to be narrowly construed to reach a pre-determined outcome. Belleville points out that the infinitives, “to teach” and “to domineer”/“to exercise authority over,” are verbal nouns and function grammatically in this sentence as nouns, not verbs.⁸⁵ The main verb in this sentence is *epitrepo*, “I permit.” The infinitives “to teach” and “to domineer”/ “exercise authority over” modify the noun, “a woman,” making the *authentein* clause the second of two direct objects.⁸⁶

This opens up the options beyond what Köstenberger and Mounce have in view, allowing for the usage of defining a purpose or goal.⁸⁷ Thus, the text would read: “I do not permit a woman to teach so as to gain mastery over a man,” or “I do not permit a woman to teach with a view to dominating a man.”⁸⁸ This is also a good grammatical fit for the contrast or abrupt shift back to the second part of the verse (*all' einai en hēsuchīa*: literally, “but let her be in quietness/calmness”),⁸⁹ thus echoing the beginning phrase of verse 11 and indicating the major concern—the meekness of a teachable spirit.

With the opponents’ heretical reading of the Old Testament, prohibition of marriage (4:3), and greed (6:5-10), they likely befriended and beguiled a circle of wealthy wives and liberated widows caught up in the trends of the “new Roman woman” resulting in inappropriate dress and the expression of dominance over men (whether they be husbands or elders; cf. 3:1-7; 5:17). These women were to take on the role of learners not teachers by assuming a quiet demeanor in full submission (verse 11).

This interpretation fits the broader context of the New Testament. Paul could not have been referring to an absolute prohibition on women teaching. Older women were to teach the younger ones (Titus 2:3-4); Priscilla, as well as Aquila, taught the eloquent

⁸⁵ Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” 217, citing Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, vol. 3 of *Grammar of New Testament Greek*, ed. Nigel Turner (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963), 134, who classifies infinitives as “noun forms.”

⁸⁶ Belleville, *Ibid.*, cites Turner’s observation, in *Syntax*, that the infinitive used as a direct object with *verba putandi* (e.g., “permit,” “allow,” and “want”) is peculiar to Luke, Paul, and Hebrews in the New Testament.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*; Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 224, n. 97.

and educated Apollos (Acts 18:26); Junia was an apostle (Romans 16:7); women prophesied God's current word to their congregations (1 Cor. 11:5; 14:31⁹⁰; Acts 21:9); Paul designated not only Silas, Timothy (Rom. 16:21; 1 Thess. 3:2), Titus (2 Cor. 8:23), and Mark (Col. 4:10f.)—who exercised various gifts of inspired speech—as “co-worker” (*synergos*), but he so designates Priscilla, Euodia, and Syntyche (Phil. 4:3),⁹¹ as well; Paul calls Phoebe a *diakonos*, a term he uses to refer to Christian workers engaged in teaching and preaching⁹²; and there are no gender distinctions made in the exercise of gifts, including that of teaching (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28; 14:26).⁹³

1 Timothy 2:13-14

For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

Paul illustrates his main concern with a couple of points from Genesis 2-3. He begins by merely stating the order of creation: “Adam was formed first, then Eve.” He does this without elaboration; so the application Paul wants his audience to draw from this bare assertion is implicit and thus subject to debate. However, Paul does elaborate his second assertion, “Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner”—which will lead right into his conclusion in verse 15. Paul's elaboration of his second assertion is based on Eve's confession in Genesis 3:13b, “The serpent deceived (LXX: Greek OT: *epatēsen*) me, and I ate.” When Paul says the woman “became a sinner” (TNIV, literally, “came to be in transgression”), he employs a term not determined by the language of Genesis 3 (LXX), but one that depicts her sin as “overstepping an established boundary” (*parabasis*).⁹⁴

Paul's point is not a general principle that women are more easily deceived than men; for Paul uses the exact same terminology for “deceived” (*exapateo*) in 2 Corinthians 11:3 when he addresses his concern to the men and women of Corinth: “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.” Nor is Paul trying to teach that Eve is solely responsible for introducing sin into the world. Elsewhere, Paul teaches that sin and death entered the human race through the man, Adam (Romans 5:12-21; e.g., verse 17, “For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man ...”). Paul is addressing something particular to the Ephesian situation.

⁹⁰ Paul says that all (within his guidelines of etiquette) may prophesy so that the others in the congregation may learn or be instructed and thereby be edified.

⁹¹ E. Earle Ellis, *Pauline Theology: Ministry and Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 65-67 and n. 45 on those pages.

⁹² *Ibid.*; idem, “Paul and His Co-Workers,” in E. Earle Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1978), 5-13.

⁹³ See also Craig Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives*, 237-257; McKnight, *Blue Parakeet*, 186-207; Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 218; Gordon Fee, “The Priority of Spirit Gifting for Church Ministry,” in Ronald Pierce and Rebecca Groothuis, *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 241-254. See also the equality statement of Gal. 3:28 and the equal access to the Spirit for gifting in 1 Cor. 12:13 cf. vv. 7-11, 28-30, and Col. 3:16.

⁹⁴ Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 229; Rom. 2:23; 5:14; 14:15; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2; 9:15; J. Schneider, *TDNT* 5:736-744.

Just as Eve was deceived by the serpent to disobey God (cf. 2 Cor. 11:3), in the same way some women of Ephesus are being deceived by false teachers propagating “things taught by demons” (1 Tim. 4:1) so that some women have “already turned away to follow Satan” (5:15). By saying that “Adam was not the one deceived,” Paul notes that it was not Adam who was deceived by the serpent, but rather Eve, the “representative” woman here.⁹⁵ Paul references Eve’s deception as a pertinent illustration of the current situation in Ephesus.⁹⁶ The deception of woman by Satan has been repeated in the church of Ephesus.⁹⁷

It seems that Paul is targeting women who teach (2:12) and disrupt (2:9-12) by using the illustration of Adam and Eve as a corrective.⁹⁸ Since it is apparent that Paul is adapting his argument for the situation in Ephesus, we should review how the historical and literary context informs the use of his examples. First, there are the speculations of the heretics based on a distorted use of Genesis (1:4; 4:1-7); second, we have the influence of the heresy on the women and, consequently, their role in propagating it (2 Tim. 3:6-9; 1 Tim. 6:5-10; 5:6, 11-15); third, certain features of the traditional role of women, especially marriage and childbearing, were being abandoned on the basis of the false teaching (4:3); fourth, the influence of the “new Roman woman” trend (seductive dress; immoral behavior; insubordinate demeanor; abandonment of domestic duties); and fifth, the influence of the cult of Artemis in Ephesus (the female was exalted and considered superior to the male).⁹⁹

Some women, influenced by the Artemis cult, may have believed that Artemis appeared first, then her male consort.¹⁰⁰ Paul’s implicit point in 2:13, “For Adam was formed first, then Eve,” may have been the assertion that just the reverse was true. Worse than that, Eve was deceived (2:14). This is not much to base an ideology of female supremacy on.¹⁰¹ A probable point of convergence between the heresy and the “new Roman woman” was the avoidance of marriage (4:3) and pregnancy by contraception and abortion.¹⁰² This leads us finally to verse 15.

1 Timothy 2:15

⁹⁵ Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 74.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 77; Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” 223; Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 231-233.

⁹⁷ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 59.

⁹⁸ Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” 209.

⁹⁹ Points 1-4 made by Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 231-232; point 5 made by Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” 219-220.

¹⁰⁰ Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” 219-221; Sharon Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers and the Mother Goddess at Ephesus*, 31-41. The conclusions of Richard C. Kroeger and Catherine C. Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:12 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), are overreaching and anachronistic because their evidence is based on post-first century Gnostic sources. This is a lesson already learned by most New Testament scholars who had to jettison the theories of Bultmann, Schmittals, et al. regarding the Gnostic background of 1 Corinthians, Colossians, and other Pauline and New Testament writings. See Edwin Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences*.

¹⁰¹ Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” 219.

¹⁰² Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 232.

But women will be saved through childbearing-- if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Based on all the historical-cultural research and literary context we have seen, we can exegete this verse in the form of an interpretive paraphrase: Even though the “woman” (*gunē*) was deceived and became a transgressor (verse 14), “she” (bridging from the Genesis narrative about Eve to the Ephesian woman) “will be saved” (*sōthēsetai*) from her deception and consequent transgressions¹⁰³ provided that “they” (Ephesian women) eschew the seductive false teachers, the new morality of the “new Roman woman,” and the ideology of the Artemus cult, by living decent and chaste (*en sōphrosunē*: “with propriety”) lives of marrying and childbearing (one of the good works urged in verse 10 in light of 5:9-10) as a result of continuing “in faith,” producing “love, and holiness.”

So, we have in verse 15, as well as verses 9-15, both the root and the fruit of salvation for these women at Ephesus. The root is nourished by continuing “in faith”—always the basis of salvation for Paul—that produces the fruit of “love and holiness.” What does the fruit look like in this context? That is what most of this passage talks about: for the women to comport themselves with all modesty and to avoid the peril of the false teachers.

Fee concludes, “This, then, is the point of the whole—to rescue these women and the church from the clutches of the false teachers.¹⁰⁴ To bring back the Ephesian female believers from the brink of destruction, Paul exhorts them to conform to the cultural ideal of “modesty” (*sōphrosunē*). We see this by the way Paul frames his instruction about the women with the use of this term in verses 9 and 15 (and emphasizing the term by giving it its own phrase to end the passage: ... *meta sōphrosunēs*). If the women draw on the power of Christ to exhibit the virtue of modesty (i.e., chastity, self-control, respectability), they will help facilitate rather than hinder the reputation of the gospel and the church. This will result in the spread of the gospel.

In so doing, the women will also separate themselves from the influences of the heretics, the mores of the “new Roman women,” and the false empowerment of the cult of Artemis. As long as they continue in their faith that activates love and holiness, they will be saved. What that looks like in this setting is fidelity in marriage, bearing and raising children, learning in the quiet and submissive demeanor of a good student, and serving others, i.e., producing good works.

IV. APPLICATION

When confronting any text of Scripture, we must ask ourselves which words apply to us today and which words are limited to their particular historical contexts. For example,

¹⁰³ A. Köstenberger, “Saved Through Childbearing?” *CBMW News* 2 (1997): 1-6 views “saved” as being kept safe from being deceived, i.e., from Satan; cited by Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy/Titus*, 103, n. 18.

¹⁰⁴ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 59.

even though Jesus tells his disciples to wash each others' feet (John 13:14-15),¹⁰⁵ most evangelicals do not believe this applies to them in most circumstances. Rather, they consider this an example of the principle of serving others with the result of not washing feet but perhaps doing other acts of service. Even though Paul commands believers to "Greet each other with a holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26), we feel free to apply this differently in our culture (possibly, a warm handshake).

More to the point, there are verses in 1 Timothy that evangelicals with a high view of Scripture feel free to ignore because of lack of cultural relevance to us. How many evangelical churches support their widows over sixty years of age who are distinguished by good works but have no family to support them (1 Tim. 5:3, 9-10);¹⁰⁶ and how many of them bring members under discipline for not providing well for relatives in this category (5:8, 16)? In addition, how many require their younger widows to remarry, have children, and manage their homes well?¹⁰⁷ I think there are significant differences in our culture and means of provision in our current society that justify applying the text differently in most cases. Furthermore, it is embarrassing how long it took Bible-believing Christians to realize that they were not to literally follow 1 Timothy 6:1-2 anymore: for believers to respect those who held them in slavery—all the more when their slave masters were fellow believers.

To put a finer point on it, let's look at our target text, 1 Tim. 2:8-15. It would seem strange, if we weren't so accustomed to doing it, to gloss over Paul's other injunctions—for men to lift up holy hands in prayer (verse 8), to restrict women's hairstyles, jewelry, and expensive clothing (verse 9), and to assert that women's respectability and salvation depend on their childbearing—and then turn with all vehemence to verses 11-12 and insist on literal compliance without any regard to the particularity of the historical-cultural situation. By what principle of interpretive consistency and fair play do we invoke literal compliance here and not elsewhere, even in the immediate literary context?

Note how specific to this particular context Paul's instructions are regarding the women at Ephesus. In Ephesus at this time, it is critically important for widows of childbearing age to marry, have children, and manage their households. In Corinth, several years earlier, Paul writes, "Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: it is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am" (1 Cor. 7:8; cf. 7:20, 24, 26-28, 34-35, 39-40). Could the restriction of women teaching in Ephesus at this time also be particular to that setting because of special local concerns? The rest of Paul's ministry and his teachings on spiritual gifts¹⁰⁸ show us that this is indeed the case. The instructions of 1 Timothy 2:11-12 were aimed at the "new Roman women" and the young widows in Ephesus who were led astray to follow Satan and disrupt the church.

¹⁰⁵ "You also should (Greek *opheilete* 'ought,' expressing human and ethical obligations, *TDNT*; *NIDNTT*) wash one another's feet."

¹⁰⁶ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 61.

¹⁰⁷ Paul discourages widows from remarrying in 1 Cor. 7:39-40. Surely this testifies to how Paul can give different advice for the needs of different settings.

¹⁰⁸ See Gordon Fee, "The Priority of Spirit-Gifting for Church Ministry," in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 241-254; Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives*, 237-257.

In line with Paul's principle of what advances the gospel, women were indispensable co-workers with Paul in spreading the gospel, church-planting, evangelizing, and in praying, prophesying, teaching, and doing other Spirit-empowered activities in his other churches. The role of women in ministry and leadership in Paul's ministry stood out over against the traditional norms of Jewish and Greco-Roman culture. It was only tempered by special circumstances that could have hindered the advancement of the Gospel.

Today, if we consider what non-believers value in Western societies, restrictive policies towards women in ministry and leadership are more likely to hinder than advance the Gospel. Paul was concerned with the impact of the gospel on the non-believing society around him. He was not taking a poll on how the church felt about this; he was making the policies for the church in light of what advanced the Gospel. So should we. Can we allow God to gift and call those whom He chooses and affirm the fruit of the ministries He blesses? We find that "God is no respecter of persons" and He will not use gender as a disqualifier any more than race or social class (Acts 2:17-18).

The title of the piece on pages 1-2 is "Columbus Discovers America."