

Paul and Women Teachers: Understanding 1 Timothy, Chapters 1 and 2 By Dianne D. McDonnell

Paul has a problem. He left Timothy behind in Ephesus to deal with false teachers who threatened to destroy the church there. “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may **command certain ones** (“men” is not in the Greek text but “tisin” meaning ones) **not to teach false doctrines** any longer nor to devote themselves to **myths** and endless **genealogies**. These promote **controversies** rather than God’s work...” 1 Timothy 1:3-4, New International Version Bible quoted throughout.

The situation has gotten so bad that Paul writes the young minister Timothy that he must **command** some to stop their false teaching and devotion to “myths and genealogies”. He describes the situation--

1Tim 1:6-7 ”Some have wandered away from these (a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith) and turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but **they do not know what they are talking about** or what they so confidently affirm.”

Then Paul launches into a discussion of sin and the law that seems to be refuting concepts taught by these wrong “teachers of the law”. We see only Paul’s half of this communication; we do not have the message from Timothy that explains the current problems in Ephesus that Paul is responding to.

What was Ephesus like?

It is helpful to understand the setting. Ephesus was a wealthy Asian city that revolved around the massive Temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Understanding the religion of Artemis, also known as Diana, is very important in understanding the words Paul writes. Notice in the quotation below that Artemis, a fertility goddess, was believed to protect women during childbirth.

“Artemis of the Ephesians’ was not a Greek divinity, but Asiatic. This is shown by the fact that eunuchs were employed in her worship-- a practice quite foreign to Greek ideas. She was not regarded as a virgin but as mother and foster-mother, as is clearly shown by the multitude of breasts in the rude effigy. She was undoubtedly a representative of the same power **presiding over conception and birth** that was adored in Palestine under the name Ashtoreth. Her worship, frantic and fanatical after the manner of Asia, was **traced back to the Amazons**. Her temple at **Ephesus** was one of the wonders of the world, but its great glory was the ‘image which fell down from heaven’ <Acts 19:35>.” *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois, 1988.

Thousands of women died in childbirth or infections following childbirth. A goddess that promised protection had a very loyal following. Men were attracted to this religion of a multi-breasted goddess because sex was a part of the worship of Artemis. They believed sexual intercourse in the temple linked them with the gods. There were so many young female priestesses serving in the temple that they were called bees. A bee adorned one of their coins, and blatantly advertised their city's main attraction! Paul may be fighting

these sexual practices when in chapter 1:20 he addresses “adulterers and perverts” and urges Timothy to “fight the good fight (against wrong doctrines), **holding on to the faith and a good conscience.**” Paul names Hymenaeus and Alexander who rejected faith and a good conscience--meaning they engaged in sinful practices-- and taught blasphemy.

The name **Hymenaeus** is Latin for "Wedding Song" according to *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*. It may well be a female name as "Wedding Song" does not sound masculine, and is similar to a legendary Amazon woman warrior who was named Death Song. In 2Tim 2:17 we find that Wedding Song taught that the resurrection had already taken place, but we don't know all of the blasphemy being taught. If Wedding Song was female it would help explain Paul's concerns about wives or women teaching in Ephesus and would explain Paul using the word "tisin" in 1Tim 1: "charge **some** (tisin, 5100) that they teach no other doctrine" (KJV) rather than saying "some men".

Next Paul urges prayers for peaceful lives. Paul's violent conflict with Demetrius, a silver craftsmen making shrines to Diana, is recorded in Acts 19:24-41 and the city-wide riot that followed. Paul probably has this specific episode in mind when he urges church members at Ephesus to offer “prayers...that we may live **peaceful** (Greek-hesuchios) and quiet (Greek-eremos) lives...” 1Tim 2:1-2. The word he uses for peaceful, (heesuchion from hesuchios, Strong's 2272), is the male form of the word and it translates as “peaceful”. The feminine form of the same word (hesuchia, hay-soo-khee'-ah, 2271) is used twice in 1Tim 2:11-12 describing the atmosphere in which a woman should learn and what Paul feels should be a woman's attitude. The same word used in the same chapter should have the same translation, “**peaceful**”—a peaceful learning atmosphere—the same atmosphere Paul urges them to pray for so that they might have undisturbed lives! Yet instead of being translated “peaceful” as it is in the male form, the female form of the same word is translated as “**silence**”! Note that female and male forms of the same word are normally given the same meaning and Strong's number--but not here! There are many clues in the second chapter of 1Timothy that an angry dispute has occurred, and **peacefulness** is the exact attribute that Paul advocates for women and men.

So in 1Tim 2:11-12, when Paul uses the female form of the same word, he is requesting a peaceful atmosphere free of anger and disputing, not silence! But let's go on with our understanding of the beliefs that Paul and Timothy were fighting at Ephesus.

Myths and Genealogies

Remember Paul argued against “myths” in 1Tim 1:4. It was widely believed at Ephesus that the original founders of their city were Amazons, and that some of the present residents were descendants of Amazons. Padraic Colum writes, “AMAZON, was one of a race of warlike women who made slaves of the men they captured. According to ancient Greek tradition, ...The largest city they built was Ephesus. There they built many magnificent temples for ...Artemis.” *The World Book Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, pg. 344.

The Amazons are believed by some historians to have been real women whose exploits were magnified into myth. These **Amazons** are reported to have believed they were not only equal to men, but **far superior to men!** Therefore, proponents of the Amazons'

goddess Artemis taught female superiority, and this background caused marital problems for the Christian couples of Ephesus! Paul addresses this problem in Ephesians 5:22 as he urges wives to defer to their Christian husbands. Many Ephesian women were told tales of Amazon battles and exploits in their pre-Christian days and taught that they were descended from Amazons-- a superior female race! This would explain the false teachers devoting themselves to “**myths** and endless **genealogies**” mentioned in 1Tim 1:4. The long genealogies linked them to their Amazon predecessors, whom they believed to be real people that founded Ephesus. Paul was convinced that they were mythological.

There is another hint that there were some angry confrontations going on in the Ephesus church when Paul inserts in 1Tim 2: 8, “I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, **without anger or disputing.**” Would this comment be necessary if there hadn’t been some anger and some disputing going on? Paul is correcting the men who participated in these angry outbursts, urging prayer not anger or arguments!

What was the likely cause of these disputes? The next verses tell us. Some women were dressing immodestly, even indecently, and were replete with gold and pearls like the priestesses of Artemis. These women were very likely advocating many pagan beliefs of religion in Ephesus! Paul upbraids them for their indecent clothing and tells them to “dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls...but with good deeds, appropriate for **women who profess to worship God.**” Did you notice his sideways swipe at “women who **profess** to worship God”? Paul felt these women weren’t truly worshipping God, only **professing** to worship God!

A Dilemma of Unconverted Wives?

On the day of Pentecost both men and women miraculously spoke foreign languages, Acts 1:14, 2:4. Acts 2:7 should read, “...are not all **these** who are speaking Galileans?” The Greek word “men” is not in verse 7, 8, 13, or 15, despite translations that add it. Because women were speaking also, Peter felt the day of Pentecost fulfilled the prophecy of Joel 2:28-30. “...Your sons and daughters will prophesy....” On the day of Pentecost God did not keep His women silent! Since women spoke languages during Pentecost services, and following Pentecost, both men and women members could use their God-given spiritual gifts during church services. **Women were praying and prophesying during services**, 1Cor 11:5, and a controversy arose over women wearing veils in public.

In this setting, men bringing unconverted wives to services could create problems. Were these wives allowed to participate as converted women did? If so, would they teach false doctrines? Was this the case with the wealthy women with low-cut dresses, gold and pearls, who “profess” to worship God, but still are so loyal to Artemis and the Amazons? Notice especially 1Tim 4:7, "Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly." Paul links “godless myths” directly to old wives! **The Greek word for "woman" is the same word used for "wife"** and this is confusing. Thus the exact same word is translated "wife" in 1Cor 7:3 and "woman" in 1Tim 2:12!

After dealing with the immoral appearance of these women, Paul launches into his instructions. The chart on the next page deals with each Greek word in its original order.

THE GREEK WORDS of 1Tim 2:11-12 together with English meanings
(Simplified, unaccented Greek, English transliterations, English translation and Strong's numbers)

γυνη <i>Gunee</i> 1) Wife/Woman 1135	εν <i>en</i> in 1722	ησυχια <i>heesuchia</i> peacefulness 2271	μανθανετω <i>manthanetoo</i> 2) I let learn 3129
εν <i>en</i> in 1722	παση <i>pasee</i> all 3956	υποταγη <i>hypotagee</i> obedience 5292	διδασκειν <i>didaskain</i> 3) to teach 1321
δε <i>de</i> 4) but 1161	γυναικι <i>gunaiiki</i> wife/woman 1135	ουκ <i>ouk</i> not 3756	επιτρεπω <i>epitreproo</i> I am allowing 2010
ουδε <i>oude</i> nor 3761	αυθεντειν <i>authentein</i> 5) to sexually seduce 831	ανδρος <i>andros</i> man 435	αλλ <i>all</i> but 235
ειναι <i>einai</i> to be 1511	εν <i>en</i> in 1722	ησυχια <i>heesuchia</i> 6) peacefulness 2271	

- 1) "Gunee" can be translated either **wife or woman**, *Strong's Greek Hebrew Dictionary*, 1135, "a woman; ...a wife." For example, it is translated "**wife**" in 1Cor. 7:3 and 27.
- 2) The Greek ω ending indicates "I" just as "I am allowing" two lines below, and expresses his practice. *Basis Greek in 30 Minutes a Day* by Jim Found, Page 84.
- 3) **Jesus** uses a form of the same verb, "didasko" 1321: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching** ("didaskontes" 1321) **them** to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20.
- 4) In Greek usage the particle "de" modifies the word that comes directly before it, and becomes "but to teach" in this case.
- 5) *Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament* 1Tim 2:12 "The King James Version 'usurp authority' is a mistake." Strong's, to dominate. In the fourth century John Chrysostom used the same word, *authentia* to express "sexual license" or wrong sexual practices! Clement linked the word with **women involved in sexual orgies**.
- 6) The male form of the same word is translated "peaceful" or "peaceable" in 1Tim 2:2.

"A wife, in peacefulness, I let learn in all obedience (not causing disputes), but I am not allowing (a) wife to teach, nor to sexually seduce (a) man but to be in peacefulness."

Paul uses the Greek verb form that indicates **present** action, **not a command** verb form, **for the present** he is not allowing these women or wives of Ephesus to teach.

“Paul does not command the women not to teach. He employs the **present active indicative** for 'allow'.” The present tense in Greek principally denotes continuous present action. It can refer to present necessity and obligation and to potential action. Greek has its own imperative mood which is not here employed. Commands can also be phrased in the aorist or the future indicative. Neither of these tenses is here used. Nor does Paul use the perfect tense to denote an action in the past which has changed the state of affairs. **Paul is saying: ‘I am not presently allowing a woman to teach.’”** *Beyond the Curse*, Aida Besancon Spencer, Pg. 84-85.

An already established universal rule on women not teaching would already be understood by Timothy. Paul would not be writing in the present active indicative mood.

“Paul does not assume that Timothy already knows this rule. Had this rule been established and universal, is it possible that Timothy, who had worked many years with Paul, would not have known it already? Paul often reminds readers of traditions they should know by saying, ‘You know,’ or ‘Do you not know?’ or ‘According to the traditions which I delivered to you.’” *Paul, Women and Wives*, Craig S. Keener, Pg. 112.

Wives Dominating Husbands or Wrong Sexual Behavior?

The fourteenth Greek word in this passage, “authentein” is used only this one place in the entire New Testament so there is much controversy about its rightful interpretation. Several sources say that the KJV “to usurp authority over a man” is not accurate. *Vincent’s Word Studies of the New Testament* states of 1Tim. 2:12, “The King James Version ‘usurp authority’ is a mistake.” Strong’s defines “authentein” 831, “to act of oneself, to dominate”.

In his book, *Who Said Women Can't Teach*, Charles Trombley argues convincingly that **"authenein" had a sexual meaning**. He states on page 176 that at the time of Paul "Authentein had not yet taken on the meaning 'to usurp authority'." He links the word to temple prostitutes that "believed fornication brought believers into contact with deity", page 177. He argues the word "authenein" meant **to engage in sexual immorality as in a pagan religious setting** and quotes John Chrysostom, the patriarch of Constantinople, (345-407) who used "authentia" to express "sexual license". Clement of Alexandria (d. 215) used the same word, "authentia" for a group of women who turned Christian love feasts into sexual orgies! Our passage uses authenein-- a verb form of this same word.

Remember, the entire phrase "to usurp authority over the" is translated from one mystery word--authentein, a rare word which is used only once in the entire New Testament. If Charles Trombley and others are right, **Paul's use of "authentein" is urging these women (or unconverted wives) not to teach others nor "to sexually seduce" men!**

So Paul is either saying that wives shouldn't teach "to dominate" husbands or he is saying that they shouldn't teach "to sexually seduce" men! Paul is also arguing against the teaching that Eve was formed before Adam, and that Eve received "special knowledge" by eating the forbidden fruit. Both were bedrock Gnostic beliefs and were widely known.

Paul refutes these by saying, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve," verse 13. Paul continues to refute the portion about Eve having special knowledge in the next verse. "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." Eve couldn't receive special knowledge because she was deceived!

Remember that Artemis, "Safe" in the Ephesian language, promised wives protection during the dangerous process of childbirth? Paul deals with this next in 1Tim. 2:15, "But women (literally "she") will be saved through (dia) childbearing (actually, **safe** throughout the childbearing)..." Wives will be kept safe throughout the dangerous process of childbearing-- "if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety." The Greek word Paul uses normally translated "saved" is "sozo" and means literally "safe"! Paul is using a play on words to allude to God keeping the woman "safe" rather than the "safe" goddess! *The Phillips Bible* translates this, "Women will come **safely** through childbirth..."

Note also that the word translated "through"-- "dia" is translated "throughout" in "Acts 9:32, and would be better translated "throughout" here also. Also Paul uses "the" which doesn't get translated. Paul promises "she will be safe throughout **the** childbearing if they (both the husband and the wife?) continue in faith, love, holiness and sobriety".

Some believe that this passage refers to spiritual salvation, or is an analogy to the church bearing converts, but Paul taught that we are saved only through Jesus Christ, and never referred to the church as Eve! The literal translation is "But she (the wife) shall be safe throughout the childbearing, if..." Paul is encouraging these women, "You don't need a 'Safe' goddess during childbirth, God will keep you safe if both husband and wife stay in faith, love and holiness!" This **reference to a safe childbirth** is another strong proof that he is dealing with wives influenced by Artemis whose name meant "safe".

Notice that **childbirth was normally for wives**, not for all women. Paul is concerned with wives who were teaching wrong concepts of female superiority and teaching others pagan sexual practices. Since he says in verse 10 that the women in question "**profess** to worship God," Paul has misgivings about their real intentions. They claim to worship God, yet he implies that these particular elaborately dressed women with the ornately braided hair may not really be worshipping God. Paul seems to be dealing with problems arising from unconverted wives still clinging to pagan myths and teachings, and these wives are passing myths and false doctrines on to others in the congregation. It is important to remember that **Greek uses one word for both "wife" and "woman"** as explained earlier. Those receiving his letter would know exactly whom he meant!

There had been an angry dispute in the Ephesus church causing Paul to urge the men in

1Tim 2:8 “ I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, **without anger or disputing.**” Paul has obviously been asked to mediate in a fight over women in Ephesus teaching female domination and even sexual misconduct, and his answer was to stop allowing those Ephesian women or wives to teach! At the start of Paul’s letter he had urged “command certain ones not to teach false doctrines any longer”. Some of these false teachers were female--either teaching formally or teaching behind the scenes.

Paul tells Elder Women to Teach

Yet in Titus 2:3, Paul tells Titus that elder **women should be teachers of the right way of life**, “Likewise, teach the older women (elder women) to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but **to teach** what is good,” (or, to be a “teacher of the right” way of life).

Paul instructs that elder women should be teachers using the Greek phrase “kalodidaskalos” Strong’s 2567, meaning **a teacher of the right**. He suggests they start with instructing the younger women, but he does not limit them to teaching only females!

Paul was not against all women everywhere teaching, he was against Ephesian women teaching pagan concepts. Paul argues that Adam was formed before Eve, and thus Eve wasn't created first as Gnostics taught, and being deceived she didn't receive special knowledge. Also he reassures either a worried local pregnant woman or each woman, "she will be safe throughout the childbirth" if "they" live righteously.

Paul is reacting to a local problem of false teachers who may have been unconverted wives. The Greek language of Paul's day had no way to differentiate "wife" from "woman" as one word was used for both. Obviously he is not dealing with dedicated Christian women teaching the Ten Commandments and true doctrines.

Paul’s second letter to Timothy, 2 Tim 2:2, states, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses **entrust to reliable** ‘anthroopois’ (**men and women**, Strong’s 444-- defined by *Thayer’s Greek Definitions* as ‘a human being, whether male or female’) who will also be **qualified to teach others.**” If a person, male or female, is reliable, sound, qualified-- then Paul says he/she should teach others God’s truth!

There are **many instances of Paul praising women who teach** the truth such as **Priscilla**, see Acts 18:2,18,26; 1 Cor. 16:19; and Romans 16:3; **Phoebe**, a “diakonos” servant/minister in Romans 16:1, **Junia** in Romans 16:7, “outstanding among the apostles” **Nympha**, and “her house church”-- the only leader mentioned by name in Laodicea, Col. 4:15. Also **Euodia and Syntyche** who “contended at my side in the cause of the gospel” verbally wrestling with unbelievers, Phil. 4:1-3. He hails many other women as co-workers in Christ Jesus. If Paul had issued a blanket edict against all women teaching everywhere **Paul would have reprimanded these women** instead of praising them!

The Words of Jesus

Jesus tells us plainly "...**whoever** practices and **teaches** these commands (the Ten Commandments), **will be called great** in the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 5:19. Jesus put no gender restrictions on teaching, but said "whoever" and promises **greatness** for both men and women who teach the Commandments! Women who practice and teach the Ten Commandments of God look forward to greatness! That is a promise from Jesus himself!

Paul was not in opposition to Jesus Christ! He was not dealing with dedicated Christian women teaching the true gospel-- he repeatedly praised such women! He was dealing with false teachers teaching myths and pagan ideas learned from the religion of Artemis and Gnostic false doctrines.

Jesus praised the woman of Samaria who publicly preached the words of Jesus to the men and women of her village. **He didn't tell her to stop teaching the men** because she was a woman! Jesus praised her and told the disciples that they were harvesting where she had sowed. As a result, "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony," John 4:39. Her public witness --her teaching-- resulted in conversions, and **Jesus praised her** and held her up as an example for the disciples!

The words of Jesus are clear commands for **all of us to teach the true gospel**, and we must never be misled by anyone who contradicts Jesus Christ.

For more on this subject, see, "Let the women keep silent, What did Paul mean?" "Junia, a Woman Apostle", and "Traveling Through Time", all by this same author.

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