

A Biblical Perspective on Women in Leadership: A Fresh Look at I Timothy 2:8-15

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Christians need to have a biblical perspective on all matters of leadership. Hillary Clinton's campaign for the Presidency of the United States presents a challenge for many in Christendom. We must first resolve the question as to whether it is biblical to have women in positions of leadership in the church before we can address whether or not a women should hold such a high public office. This article focuses on 1Timothy 2:1-15 in an effort to assist in moving the discussion of the place of women in leadership forward. 1 Timothy 2:8-15 has usually been used to explain why women should be excluded from the pastorate and other positions of leadership. Though much has been written on this topic there still seems to have been little progress in unifying the scholarly community with the central truths that do indeed lie within this passage.

Whether orthodox or unorthodox, Protestant or Catholic, liberal or conservative there should be central agreement on some basic truths surrounding this passage. We can all agree that it was not Paul's intention to bring confusion into the Body of Christ. In fact, the reason for Paul's writing Timothy and others was always to establish doctrine, encourage, bring clarity or correction etc. The fact that this passage seems unclear to so many in the scholarly community suggests that Paul's' original intent has been obscured some how. Our goal then is to find out what Paul was attempting to clearly communicate to Timothy.

We will apply some to the principles of socio-rhetorical criticism in our quest for the true meaning of this fascinating and controversial passage. There is no question that Paul is establishing doctrine within this passage. We begin by acknowledging various authors contributions to this discussion. We then cover some of the questions about various approaches to translation. We present the table which illustrates the repetitive progressive patterns which help to illuminate the truth. We then summarize our findings and offer suggestions for future research.

Benjamin L. Merkle states that, for many Bible students, pastors, and scholars the main reason for not allowing women to hold the office of pastor (i.e. elder or overseer)¹ is primarily based on Paul's arguments from creation in 1 Tim 2:13-14 (Merkle 527-548). According to Merkle, when Paul writes that 'it is shameful for a woman to speak in church', this does not mean the whole non-Christian community observes the behavior of Christian women in Corinth and takes offence at it. They would be quite unaware of what was happening in the divine service, for they did not participate in it. Paul simply means that the behavior is shameful in God's sight. (Merkle 51-65)

Another author writes that as we seek the will of God for the role of women in the church, it is appropriate to consider the witness of scripture as a whole. The Bible tells the stories of many women who actively work for the kingdom of God, stories in which women have authority over men, and stories in which women proclaim the gospel of Jesus. Yet there are other passages which say that a woman must be silent in church and a woman shall not teach or have authority over a man. How then are these passages to be interpreted? In seeking to find the will of God for the church today, those who support the ordination of women are guided by the Bible, the Confessions and long-standing principles of biblical interpretation (see for example Braaten, 1983) (Anonymous 39:37)

Still another scholar, Urs Von Arx offered the following, in the passage 1 Tim 2:8-15 it appears that the instructions for women are more comprehensive than those for men. The exhortation to avoid fashionable appearance (2:9f.) corresponds to an element of conservative Hellenistic ethos. The ban on teaching appears as a defining of the regulations in I Corinthians 14:33-36,24 whereby (married?) women had to be silent in the gathering of the congregation. Because such magisterial statements would also be addressed to men within the congregation, they would be seen as expressions of the domination of women over men. But the correct stipulation of the relationship between the sexes would require the silence of women. This may be understood in the framework of the conservative social ethos of the ancient world. Of the two reasons given for this in 2:13f., the first follows a widespread maxim in the ancient world, that the earlier is the superior; the second refers back to Genesis 2f. (2:7, 22ff. and 3:1ff.). Thus the view of Eve as the one seduced is a new element from the early Jewish tradition which interprets Genesis 3 in such a way that places the blame for the so-called fall on her alone (cf. Sirach 25:24; Apocalypse of Moses 14:2; 31, 6; Vita Adae et Evae 44:2; 2 Cor. 11:3; for another position see Rom 5:12-21). Behind this seems to be an exegesis of the fall-as Max Kichler has shown-that speaks of a sexual seduction of the woman by the serpent.²⁵ In this sort of interpretation the woman, who is sexually seducible and who turned away from God's warning-thus manifesting something like her essential character-is not fit to teach. She is to be saved as a Christian and as a mother, as 3:15 states in a way that mirrors the curse of Genesis 3:16c.²⁶ (Von Arx 519-554).

As should now be apparent there are a wide variety of interpretations and explanations of the passage under review. There are valuable elements in each of the offerings however there seems to be an absence of those whose approach addresses three concerns with respect to the translation of this passage. The first two issues are concerns with inconsistencies in the translation of words with

respect to gender and number. The third area of concern that seems to be problematic to the study of this passage is the seemingly random choice of word translation i.e. woman as opposed to wife.

At this time it seems appropriate to reiterate the fact that Paul's goal in writing Timothy was to impart greater understanding. With this in mind I have employed a different approach to the exegetical process based on Vernon K. Robbins contribution to socio-rhetorical criticism. This author and all those who utilize socio-rhetorical analysis are indebted to Vernon K. Robbins for his work as founder of the field of socio-rhetorical criticism.

The value of Robbins contribution should not be underestimated. Socio-rhetorical analysis brings cultural, social and contextual elements into the exegetical process. Prior to Robbins work socio-rhetorical criticism had not been seen as a viable scholarly tool. On his website Robbins generously provides a dictionary of socio rhetorical terms, a copy of the Introduction to his book *Jesus the Teacher*, the work that launched the field of socio-rhetorical analysis and many other scholar tools (Robbins).

I apply the concept of “open, middle and close” (Robbins) to 1 Timothy 2:1-15 and also analyze the repetitive-progressive pattern which Paul utilized in 1 Tim 2:8-15. This article presents a socio-rhetorical analysis of the middle and closing passages. This is not intended to be exhaustive analysis. It is intended to address the key words and phrases that seemingly have played a role in producing controversy.

The opening passage for purposes of this article is 1 Timothy 2:1-7. In these verses Paul explains his purpose for writing this particular passage and he reminds Timothy why it is important to him that prayer take place in the church. In the middle passage 1 Timothy 2:8-10 Paul goes into considerable detail as to how prayer should be conducted by both men and women. It is the closing passage 1 Tim 2: 11-15 which seems to garner so much consideration and with it great controversy.

I have included a table to make apparent certain repetitive and progressive patterns that will help illuminate this passage. Our goal is to understand the context within which Paul was establishing rules of conduct for men and women in the ecclesia. The only way to do this is to maintain the integrity of the translation. One part of this must include the consistent application of meaning based on word order. I have included the passage in Greek with its literal translation to aid in understanding the table (Aland et al). Finally we present an analysis of the leadership parameters set for women in this passage.

8 Βούλομαι οὖν προσεύχεσθαι τοὺς ἄνδρας ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ ἐπαίροντας

I desire (Louv and E. A. Nida) then to pray the men in all place lifting up on

δόσιους χεῖρας χωρὶς ὀργῆς καὶ διαλογισμοῦ . **9** ὡσαύτως [καὶ] γυναῖκας

holy hands without anger and reasoning Likewise also women

ἐν καταστολῇ κοσμίῳ μετὰ αἰδοῦς καὶ σωφροσύνης κοσμεῖν ἑαυτάς ,

in apparel respectable with modesty and sober mindedness to adorn themselves

μὴ ἐν πλέγμασιν καὶ χρυσίῳ ἢ μαργαρίταις ἢ ἱματισμῷ πολυτελεῖ ,

not in braids and gold or pearls or clothing much cost

10 ἀλλ' ὁ πρέπει γυναιξὶν ἐπαγγελλομέναις θεοσέβειαν, δι' ἔργων ἀγαθῶν .

But what is fitting to women ones promising godly reverence through works good

11 γυνὴ ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ μανθανέτω ἐν πάσῃ ὑποταγῇ· **12** διδάσκειν δὲ γυναικὶ

Woman in quiet let learn in all subjection to teach but woman

οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω οὐδὲ αὐθεντεῖν ἀνδρός , ἀλλ' εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ . **13** Ἀδὰμ

not I allow but not to dominate man but to be in quiet. Adam

γὰρ πρῶτος ἐπλάσθη , εἶτα Εὐά . **14** καὶ Ἀδὰμ οὐκ ἠπατήθη , ἡ δὲ γυνὴ

for first was molded then Eve. And Adam not was deceived, the but woman

ἐξαπατηθεῖσα ἐν παραβάσει γέγονεν· **15** σωθήσεται

having been thoroughly deceived in transgression has become she will be delivered

δὲ διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας , ἐὰν μείνωσιν ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀγάπῃ καὶ

but through the childbearing if they might stay in trust and love and

μετὰ σωφροσύνης .

holiness with sober mindedness.

Table

Singular or Plural	Masculine or Feminine	Imperative or negative	Verbs	Translation
8. Plural	άνήρ = men	Βούλομαι = I want	Προσεύχομα = to pray	I want men to pray
9. Plural 9. Plural	Γυνή= Women έαυτοῦ= themselves	ὡσαύτως = in like manner not	καταστολή=Dress καταστολή=Dress	Like the men women should dress (women) should not dress...
10. Plural	Γυνή=Women	ἀλλά= but	(implied Dress)	But women should dress...
11. Singular	Γυνή =Wife		μανθανέτω Let learn	Let a wife learn
12. Singular 12. Singular 12. Singular	(implied Wife) Γυνή= Wife (Implied wife)	οὐκ Not	Διδάσκω let teach οὐδὲ αὐθεντεῖν Dominate husband let Be quiet	Let a wife teach in all subjection I don't allow a wife to dominate her husband... Let a wife be quiet
13. Singular 13. Singular	Ἀδάμ=Adam ΕΕα=Eve		πρῶτος ἐπλάσθη Molded first ἐπλάσθη , εἶτα Then molded	Adam was molded first Then Eve was molded
14. Singular 14. Singular	Αδάμ=Adam Γυνή=wife	οὐκ not ἢ δέ	οὐκ ἠπατήθη Deceived ἐξαπατηθεῖσα thoroughly deceived	Adam was not deceived But the wife was thoroughly deceived

15. Singular	γυνή She		σωθήσεται	She will be delivered...
15. Singular	γυνή *She	*(Though singular this is often translated in plural form)	Delivered πίσται remains	If she remains...

In 1 Timothy 2:1-7 Paul emphasizes the need for men and women to pray. In 1 Timothy 2:8-10 Paul is giving direction and correcting clothing, conduct and mind sets that are unbecoming members of the Body of Christ in the house of prayer.

Paul's instructions in the next passage have in most cases been defined as being direct toward women. This is not actually true. Paul was writing in this portion of the passage to a specific group of women. Paul is talking specifically about wives. In verses 1 Timothy 2:11-15, Paul establishes doctrine with respect to the appropriate public conduct of wives and husbands in church. Paul used the husband and wife team of Adam and Eve as a parallel to husbands and wives in the church.

There is nothing new under the sun. Some men are very passive by nature they are not natural leaders. Some women are very aggressive by nature. Paul issues a doctrine for the public conduct within these personal relationships. This doctrine is especially needful for those husband and wife relationships where the dominant and submissive personalities may be out of balance.

Paul does not leave the conduct of wives in church up to the personalities of the husband and wife. Paul is calling wives to get back in order regardless of their personalities. He is calling husbands even those who may be naturally timid to stand up and take their God ordained rightful places as the heads of their families. Paul emphasized the importance of Gods orders being maintained in the husband and wife's relationship especially in public.

It is shameful for a wife to speak out as if she is the family representative. This passage is a call for wives to be quiet in public worship. The idea is that by wives speaking out in public it becomes obvious to both their shames that they do not have a biblically sound marriage.

A husband who is not respected in public by his wife will not be respected by anyone else. The wives who were speaking out in public were acting as if they were single. We know that this portion of the passage is directed at wives as opposed to women in general because of the words chosen to speak of women in this passage. This passage was written about grown women of marrying age, not virgins and not widows.

In general *gynē* denotes a. "the female" (as distinct from the male), b. "wife" (Dt. 13:6 ; Mal. 2:14 ; Lk. 1:5 ; 1 Cor. 7:2 , 27 ; Eph. 5:22-23 ; Col. 3:18-19 , etc.). By Semitic law a fiancée is already called

gynḗ (cf. Gen. 29:21 ; Dt. 22:24 ; Rev. 21:9 ; Mt. 1:20). *gynḗ chḗra* means “widow” in 1 Kgs. 17:9 ; Lk. 4:26 .¹ Paul is clearly not speaking of a young virgin, the word for virgin is to παρθένος (Louw and E. A. Nida).

If a single woman or widow speaks out in public who does she shame? She shames no one. She has no husband. Her husband is dead. She has no one to protect her or represent her. However, a wife who speaks out in church is disrespecting her husband. She is behaving as if she either does not have a husband or does not trust and/or respect him enough to allow him to represent her.

This is very disrespectful to a husband. So, Paul tells Timothy that he should not allow these wives to rebel against their husbands and openly disrespect them in church. He says if they want to know something they need to wait until they get home and demonstrate submission to their husbands by asking them to clarify what they want to know.

Look closely at the word order in the passage. Everywhere the word not appears it is referring to the words that follow not those that precede it. We must remain true to Paul’s instructions and intent and not manipulate the word order to read what may be suit our agendas. Paul said, I allow women to learn and I allow women to teach but I do not allow them to usurp authority or dominate their husbands. This I submit is the meaning of this very controversial passage. Wives are to submit to their husbands in public by deferring to them and not taking it upon themselves to represent the family in church.

In Romans Paul writes the following, ¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon^a of the church at Cenchreae, ² so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. ³ Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, ⁴ and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Romans 16:1-4 (New Revised Standard Version).

Paul did not prohibit women from teaching or exercising authority over men. He only prohibited wives from teaching and dominating their husbands. If Paul wanted to assert that women were not allowed to teach or exercise authority over men in general he would never have acknowledged the church in Priscilla and Aquila’s home giving Priscilla first order of mention or instructed the church to assist Phoebe and do whatever she asked when she arrived.

cf. *confer* , compare

¹Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. 1995, c1985. *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. Translation of: Theologisches Worterbuch zum Neuen Testament. W.B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Mich.

^a Or *minister*

To those who still insist on refusing to ordain women, acknowledge women Pastors and/or otherwise promote women it should be noted that 1 Timothy 2: 1-15 or any portion thereof can no longer be used to give you any biblical standing. Galatians makes it clear, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷ As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:24-28 New Revised Standard Version)

Now that we have established that based on 1 Timothy 2: 8-15 one can not exclude women from church leadership we must also conclude that from a biblical perspective one should not exclude a woman from any position of authority solely because of gender. Eliminating gender as an issue in leadership then allows us to focus on other legitimate leadership flaws which should guide our decisions of whether to support a particular candidate or even participate in a particular political party. In the future the researcher may choose to examine the 1 Corinthians 14:33b-38 and others like this. I am confident that closer scrutiny of all apparent Biblical contradictions will disappear. Our ultimate goal must be unity in the Body and gaining the gaining of greater biblical perspective.

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