



journal of biblical  
perspectives  
in leadership

## WHAT WAS PAUL THINKING? AN IDEOLOGICAL STUDY OF 1 TIMOTHY 2

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The primary battleground of the Church's clash over a woman's role in church leadership has been 1 Timothy 2. Using the ideological component of socio-rhetorical criticism, this work seeks to draw out of the text philosophies and beliefs of the Early Church as recorded by Paul. It is the goal of this work to deepen and strengthen the understanding of female leadership identification and development in the Early Church, as well as allow the text to critique and point possible avenues of future research for modern theory.

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The interpretation of 1 Timothy 2 and its impact on women in leadership roles has had a long and colorful history across many cultures.<sup>1</sup> The discipline of socio-rhetorical criticism can help to focus the message of this passage. Robbins described this hermeneutical process as four textures: (1) inner texture that describes the material's subtext, (2) inter-texture that describes the material's interaction with other texts, (3) social and cultural texture that describes the contemporary context of the passage, and (4) ideological texture that describes the underlying lessons of a text.<sup>2</sup> It is

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Frances Anders, "Role of Women in American Religion," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 18 (1976): 51-61; Sarah Frances Anders, "Women in Ministry: The Distaff of the Church," *Review & Expositor* 80, no. 3 (1983): 427-436; Bolaj Olukemi Bateye, "Forging Identities: Women as Participants and Leaders in the Church Among the Yoruba," *Studies in World Christianity* 13, no. 1 (2007): 1-12; Pamela Brubaker, "The History of Women in the Church," *Brethren Life and Thought* 30, no. 1 (1985): 9-16; Mary Luke Tobin, "Women in the Church: Vatican II and After," *Ecumenical Review* 37, no. 3 (1985): 295-305.

<sup>2</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society, and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 21.

by using the ideological texture that one is able to ascertain the answer to our modern questions in the textual clues given by Paul in his material. This work seeks to draw out of the text of 1 Timothy 2 philosophies and beliefs of the Early Church as recorded by Paul. It is the goal of this work to deepen and strengthen the understanding of leadership identification and development in the Early Church as well as allow the text to critique and point possible avenues of future research for modern theory.

## I. IDEOLOGICAL TEXTURE

Osborne noted three principles to follow when we come across commands that may have both a normative and cultural application: (1) didactic interprets historical texts, (2) systematic material interprets incidental references, and (3) context must form interpretation.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, as will be seen, this text in 1 Timothy 2 includes didactic and incidental material. Additionally, a contextual reading of the passage (which is why the researcher chose all of chapter 2 rather than the more contentious verse 12) includes many other components than women in leadership. The approach to understand the ideology behind these verses is a phrase-by-phrase analysis of the didactic and incidental material that underlies this passage. Obviously, chapter 2 is within its own context; the primary one being 1:18-20. Paul, in chapter 2, gives commands that are necessary to make sure that we “fight the good fight,”<sup>4</sup> with faith and good conscience. To reject good conscience will shipwreck one’s faith. Thus, the commands that he gives are critical to a lasting faith. However, the very need for Paul to give these commands to Timothy, who had been a long-time companion, and his church suggests circumstances behind the commands that sparked Paul mentioning them.<sup>5</sup>

### *The Command of Prayer for All People*

Paul begins by commanding that prayers be made for all people (v. 1). Significantly, he included both kings and those in high positions (v. 2). These people were not a prominent proportion of early Christianity. Thus, Paul included a command for prayer not only for believers but for nonbelievers as well. This prayer for those who are not yet believers leads to a “quiet and peaceable life” (v. 2) with godliness and dignity. These prayers for those in opposition to Christianity are actually the right and acceptable behavior in God’s sight (v. 3) because it is God’s “desire that everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth” (v. 4). Jesus Himself, who is the perfect mediator between God and humankind, is the proof of this desire on God’s part (v. 5). The perfect role of Jesus is attested in His life, death, and resurrection at the right time (v. 6). Paul has been called by God to broaden this proclamation throughout the world and specifically to Gentiles (v. 7). Paul’s emphasis, then, in this command is that the behavior of the Ephesians be such that they make possible the furtherance of the

<sup>3</sup> Carroll D. Osburn, “Authenteo (1 Timothy 2:12),” *Restoration Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (1982): 1-12.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Tim 1:18 (NRSV).

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church: Building Consensus on Christian Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2003).

gospel, which will be accomplished, at least in part, through God's answers to their prayers.

### *Lifted Hands in Prayer*

Paul's command to the men of the churches is that they should raise their hands in prayer (v. 8). However, rather than suggesting that this has ritualized significance of some sort, Paul gives the rationale for this command in the context of anger or arguments. What this tends to suggest is that the men of Timothy's church were using their hands for something other than prayer, and perhaps even neglecting prayer. To keep their hands "occupied," Paul commanded the men to lift their hands in prayer rather than lifting them in anger or argument toward each other. Again, Paul's emphasis in this command is one of behavior which is linked back to the gospel proclamation that he has just noted.

### *Modest Dress*

Paul's command to the women of the church is to present themselves with modesty. He specifically identifies clothing, hairstyle, and jewelry (v. 9). Instead of outfitting themselves with articles that bring attention to themselves, Paul recommends that the women clothe themselves with good works (v. 10). Paul's reasoning for this is based on reverence for God (v. 10). The women of Ephesus seemed to desire bringing attention to themselves, which is completely at odds with bringing attention to or revering God. The good works that Paul recommended would be far more effective at diverting attention to God than would external beauty.<sup>6</sup> Once again, Paul's concern is with the behavior of the women and how that behavior would be understood within the context of their profession, presumably of the gospel.

### *Learning and Authenteo*

In this command, which is so often used as a directive for female leadership within the Church, Paul contrasted two statements.<sup>7</sup> On the one hand, a woman is permitted to learn in silence (v. 11). What this suggests is that the women of Ephesus were not learning quietly. To communicate the truth of Christianity in the Early Church, the entire hermeneutic of Jewish Scripture interpretation had changed, with Jesus placed in the center of the new hermeneutical key. This necessarily meant that the teachings of the Early Church required modification from what people had learned about the Old Testament (though, not so much "new" as "advanced beyond"). The women, who may have been receiving teaching from false teachers (perhaps those mentioned in 4:1-5), had found these new teachings difficult to accept. This caused them, in the midst of meetings to raise questions, which ultimately resulted in distraction for all learners. Given the lesser likelihood that women had received formal training, this

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<sup>6</sup> Osburn, "Authenteo."

<sup>7</sup> Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church*.

breach of learning protocol is understandable. Rather than barring women from a public learning environment, Paul encourages their presence as equal learners, so long as they (and, ultimately, anyone) observed the learning protocol of silence and submission to the teacher.

In contrast to this positive command, Paul followed up with a negative command—that no woman should teach or have *authenteo* over a man but instead, again, to remain silent (v. 12). As Sumner points out, the presumption behind Paul's statement is that someone thought that it was acceptable for women to teach.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps, Timothy accepted this within the Ephesus church because he had first-hand experience with Paul allowing a woman to have some part in teaching not only a man but an apostle (Acts 18:24-19:1, cf. 18:5, 19:22). The second command to remain silent suggests that the teaching in an *authenteo* context is what is at the heart of Paul's intent. Women were talking when they should have been listening.<sup>9</sup> Paul does not command that women should not teach in any context—most Christians recognize this since women do have teaching capabilities in many different contexts (children, books, radio, seminars, etc.).<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, within the context of 1 Timothy, male teaching does not seem to be any better protector of orthodoxy than female teaching (cf. 1 Tim 1:19-20, 2 Tim 2:16-18).<sup>11</sup> Rather, Paul commanded that women should not teach in the context of *authenteo*. If a woman was learning in an appropriate manner, then Paul encouraged the learning. However, if a woman was teaching in an inappropriate manner, she was forbidden from teaching.<sup>12</sup> *Authenteo*, then, and its translation has become the fulcrum point of study to understand this particular command. Unfortunately, *authenteo* is a *hapax legomenon* leaving the researcher with no other Scriptural contexts to compare its usage. Pre-Christian uses of this word tended to emphasize the idea of exercising authority and dominating.<sup>13</sup> Throughout Church history, this word has been interpreted as either having authority, exercising authority, or usurping authority.<sup>14</sup> Irrespective of the meaning of *authenteo*, it is clear that *authenteo* is not the focal point of verses 11-12, but instead the heresies of the false teachers.<sup>15</sup>

This becomes clear as the researcher moves beyond verses 11-12. Paul's reasoning for his command is that Adam was formed first and Adam was not deceived (vv. 13-14). Some have suggested that this points to an order of creation principle within the Church for gender relationships.<sup>16</sup> However, if order of creation suggests authority or superiority, one must wonder why animals do not have authority over mankind

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> David A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, & Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church*.

<sup>13</sup> Osburn, "Authenteo."

<sup>14</sup> Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church*.

<sup>15</sup> Osburn, "Authenteo."

<sup>16</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More than One Hundred Disputed Questions* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004); Alexander Strauch, *Men and Women Equal Yet Different: A Brief Study of the Biblical Passages on Gender* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1999).

instead of the other way around.<sup>17</sup> Others believe that Paul penned these words because the actions of the women in the church, though not implicitly sinful, became a stumbling block to unbelievers and thus should be avoided for the purpose of the gospel.<sup>18</sup> While closer to the overall thrust of the passage, such an approach does not take into account the difficult statement in verse 15. Still others believe that these verses apply only within the husband/wife relationship.<sup>19</sup> What must be remembered in these possible solutions is that Paul is not outlining a Church constitution in 1 Timothy, but is responding to the impact of false teachers on the church (4:1-5). Gnostic teaching tended to elevate women not only as God's primary means of revelation but also as the originators of true knowledge and, thereby, salvation.<sup>20</sup> Given its aversion to the material world, Gnosticism often would preclude women from sexual relations and child-bearing by attaching anathema to it.<sup>21</sup> Thus, Barron suggested that what Paul is fighting here is a group of women that were using Gnostic heresies to promulgate Gnostic myths which cut at the very heart of Christianity through a deception of the truth of Scripture.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps, though, an even more promising approach is presented by Perriman.<sup>23</sup> He noted that the emphasis in the passage is not on the women teaching as much as it is on the women learning. This can be seen in Paul's emphasis on Eve being deceived, which would suggest that Paul wanted the women of Ephesus to learn without being deceived. Their submission to authority is not a submission to male authority but rather to teaching authority just as Satan did not usurp the authority of Adam as much as he usurped the authority of the Word of God who was the one who taught Eve.<sup>24</sup> He stated it well: "Eve's mistake was not that she usurped Adam's authority but that, misled by the serpent's deception, she disregarded what she had been taught."<sup>25</sup>

### *Ideological Texture*

Taking all these components together, what is the ideological thrust of Paul's message especially as it relates to women in leadership? In order to determine the answer to that question, several aspects of Paul and this passage must be taken into consideration.

First, it is clear from other passages of Scripture, that neither Paul nor the other authors of the New Testament saw anything specifically unusual with women being in some degree of leadership within the Church. Cotter identified six different women of

<sup>17</sup> deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> John R. Master and Jonathan L. Master, "Who is the 'Woman' in 1 Timothy 2?" *McMaster Journal of Theology & Ministry* 10 (2008): 3-21.

<sup>20</sup> Bruce Barron, "Putting Women in Their Place: 1 Timothy 2 and Evangelical Views of Women in Church Leadership," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33, no. 4 (1990): 451-459.

<sup>21</sup> deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*.

<sup>22</sup> Barron, "Putting Women in Their Place."

<sup>23</sup> Andrew C. Perriman, "What Eve Did, What Women Shouldn't Do: The Meaning of Authentico in 1 Timothy 2:12," *Tyndale Bulletin* 44, no. 1 (1993): 129-142.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.; Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church*.

<sup>25</sup> Perriman, "What Eve Did," 131.

various levels of leadership within the New Testament Church. This openness to female leadership seems directly related to the way that Jesus treated women in His own ministry.<sup>26</sup> “A woman's elevation to a post of leadership . . . is compatible with the Scriptures, providing it has been given to her by God (through her being selected by other church leaders) and not a result of her own successful conflict in the arena of power politics.”<sup>27</sup> The modern preoccupation with women in roles of authority, however, does not seem to be the issue that Paul is dealing with in this passage or any other New Testament passage. As Franklin made clear, all of Paul's letters are written to the gathering of believers. Even in the case of 1 Timothy, the letter is written to Timothy as a representative to the Church as a whole. The questions of structure and authority are not the focus of the letters. Rather, the writers of Scripture focused on the gifting, guidance, and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Second, Paul's concern in this letter is primarily focused on the spread of heretical teaching. It seems to have included a misunderstanding of the Old Testament (1 Tim 1:6-10) and emphasized asceticism (1 Tim 4:1-5) that was particularly influencing the women of the church (2 Tim 3:1-9) who, in turn, were influencing others (1 Tim 5:13).<sup>28</sup> First Timothy 2:11-12 cannot be ripped out of this context and then applied to a modern preoccupation with structure and authority.

Finally, a strong case can be made that Paul is not declaring ontological principles when he quotes Genesis but instead is using the Eden account typologically.<sup>29</sup> Paul's emphasis is not on the culpability of Eve but in the fact that transgression came about through deception. Adam is not deceived because he is less prone to deception but because Satan did not attempt to deceive him.<sup>30</sup> In the same manner, Paul's concern with the heretical teachers is that they will seek to deceive the women of the church so that they might fall into transgression and influence others to do the same.<sup>31</sup>

Paul, then, seems to be dealing in this passage with events that are specific to the Ephesus church. He is a pragmatic church leader. If the actions of individuals will diminish their integrity and/or limit the spread of the gospel, then those actions must be constrained or stopped altogether.<sup>32</sup> For Paul, the priority is that the gospel must go forth and the people carrying the gospel must be living testimonies to it. In the case of the women in Ephesus, their character as expressed in their dress and assertive behavior in obtaining influence within the church did not lead to a clear presentation of the gospel.<sup>33</sup> So, Paul would not permit them to have the *authenteo* that they sought. His command is to remove them from the ministry of teaching, not because of an

<sup>26</sup> Alan Padgett, “Wealthy Women at Ephesus: 1 Timothy 2:8-15 in Social Context,” *Interpretation* 41, no. 1 (1987): 19-31.

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth O. Gangel, “Biblical Feminism and Church Leadership,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140, no. 557 (1983): 55-63.

<sup>28</sup> Padgett, “Wealthy Women at Ephesus.”

<sup>29</sup> Perriman, “What Eve Did.”

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Patrick S. Franklin, “Women Sharing in the Ministry of God: A Trinitarian Framework for the Priority of Spirit Gifting as a Solution to the Gender Debate,” *Priscilla Papers* 22, no. 4 (2008): 14-20.

<sup>33</sup> Osburn, “Authenteo.”

ontological order of authority but because their actions and character did not align with the message of the gospel. However, outside of that context, Paul and other New Testament writers seemed more than willing to allow women to exercise the gifts that the Holy Spirit had conferred upon them,<sup>34</sup> which seems to clearly include all the Word ministries of teaching (Acts 18:26), preaching (Mk 16:15), and prophesying (Acts 21:9).

Interestingly, none of the commands in this section, apart from the command to pray for all, is taken as a literal command in modern contexts (in other words, other exceptions are added to the command to make it “work”). Most Christians agree that it is not prescriptive that men lift their hands when they pray (v. 8); most Christians agree that it is not prescriptive that women be banned from wearing nice clothes, jewelry, or braided hair (v. 9); most Christians agree that the context of verse 15 alludes to a heretical teaching within the Ephesus context.<sup>35</sup> If everything surrounding it is to be taken as alluding to local issues, then does it not seem practical to suggest that verses 10-14 apply locally as well?

## II. APPLYING THE IDEOLOGICAL TEXTURE

Applying the lessons of Paul in 1 Timothy 2 into our modern time has not been an easy endeavor. Even those who see these passages as excluding women from the role of teaching or preaching often nuance their position to allow women to teach men through books, radio, seminars, and other nondirect “authority” roles. Specifically, the issue for many of the most conservative interpretations of this passage seems to be in women preaching.<sup>36</sup> Though not within the scope of this work, many of these prohibitions rest on the change in semantical meaning of words like teaching, preaching, and prophesying from the Biblical time to today.

That 1 Timothy 2 is not taken as prescriptive is obvious in the many ways that women *have* been allowed to minister throughout Church history. Many times, their ministry required women to give up any hope of exercising their gifting of leadership in “Jerusalem” and move into “Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.”<sup>37</sup> It is clear from even a cursory glance at the history of missions that without women, the gospel would not be as widespread as it is today.<sup>38</sup> It is a rather odd dichotomy that women are not allowed to be in roles of leadership at home, but are encouraged, prayed for, and supported financially if they do the same thing in someone else’s country.<sup>39</sup> “It is sometimes said with reference to the bequests of men and the living offerings of consecrated women, that the missionary operations of some societies have been largely sustained by dead men and live women!”<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, the world has perhaps

<sup>34</sup> Anders, “Women in Ministry”; Franklin, “Women Sharing in the Ministry of God.”

<sup>35</sup> Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church*.

<sup>36</sup> Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth*; Strauch, *Men and Women Equal Yet Different*.

<sup>37</sup> Anders, “Role of Women in American Religion.”

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Linda McKinnish Bridges, “Women in Church Leadership,” *Review & Expositor* 95, no. 3 (1998): 327-347.

<sup>40</sup> Albert B. Simpson, “Object Lessons of Christian Service” in *The Christ in the Bible Commentary*, vol. 5 (Camp Hill, PA: Wing Spread Publishers, 2009), 141-150.

recognized in women the image of God in the form of leadership better than the Church. While much of modern organizational leadership recognizes the unique and organizationally beneficial role of women in leadership, the Church still tends to miss these giftings from God. The higher one goes in nearly any ecclesiastical structure, the more male-dominated it becomes.<sup>41</sup> As Western Christianity has such an influence on Christianity throughout its history, this approach to women leadership has been promulgated wherever it has gone. Many different cultures and denominations still wrestle with understanding God's role for women gifted in leadership.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps a biblical approach lies in a different emphasis for leadership. Rather than defining modern functional positions within the Church, the Biblical path may be to encourage the development of spiritual giftings within the context of service, or *diakonos*, and allow the Holy Spirit to lead where He does through those whom He has gifted.<sup>43</sup> This seems to be the practice of the church in Acts.

Bilezikian encapsulates the study of Paul's ideological approach in 1 Timothy 2 with nine summations: (1) Christian leadership is not first and foremost defined by either tradition or secular leadership models—it is defined by the gifting of the Holy Spirit; (2) a distinctiveness of Christian leadership is it is servant-based, not authority-driven; (3) New Testament leadership is always within the context of community; (4) New Testament models of congregations were flexible enough to change within different cultural and historical contexts; (5) a Christian leader's final effectiveness is based upon their heart, not their production; (6) authentic servant leadership shares authority and develops others; (7) Christian leadership submits itself to the scrutiny of the community; (8) the importation of modern secular leadership methods into the Church, while not sinful, also may change the Biblical model of leadership; and (9) strong leadership is not strong management skills, but rather a nurtured leading of the Holy Spirit.<sup>44</sup> These points are all presented since they all pose starting points for further research into the role of women within the Church. If Bilezikian's points are accurate, then there is much still to be unearthed in our understanding of gender roles within the Church.

However, as research continues to understand more deeply God's role for women in leadership, Frantz and Silver provide helpful counsel that may guide that research:

As women come to stand before God, asking what God's will is for their lives (and no longer directing that question to men), the church will indeed begin to change. No longer will doing the will of God by acting for the church be symbolically carried by men only. And therefore, submitting to the will of God will not be able to be symbolically carried by women alone. Submitting to the will of

<sup>41</sup> Anders, "Role of Women in American Religion."

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.; Bateye, "Forging Identities"; Jeannine Gramick, "Catholic Women: A Contemporary Style of Leadership," *Muslim World* 91, no. 1-2 (2001): 19-29; Torstein Jorgensen, "Women's Mission Groups as Religious Entrepreneurs in International Network Building," *Svensk Missionstidskrift* 95, no. 3 (2007): 285-294; Pyong Gap Min, "Leadership in Korean Immigrant Community in the United States," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 2 (2008): 225-241.

<sup>43</sup> E. Glenn Hinson, "The Church: Liberator or Oppressor of Women?" *Review & Expositor* 72, no. 1 (1975): 19-29.

<sup>44</sup> Gilbert Bilezikian, "Church Leadership that Kills Community," *Priscilla Papers* 21, no. 4 (2007): 5-7.



God will need to be symbolized by both men and women. We all must learn submission through submitting to each other; we all must learn to act in God's name by leading each other. Our mistake of the past has not been to emphasize submission but to put one person always in that stance (the woman), and the other person always in the stance of authority (the man). This has encouraged men in the sin of pride and self-exaltation, and it has allowed women to avoid hearing and responding to God's call.<sup>45</sup>

May the further study of this contentious issue in leadership not lead to either pride or self-exaltation, but instead to a Holy Spirit empowered proclamation of the gospel in Jesus Christ that reflects the glory of the Father as expressed in the submission and authority within the Trinity.

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<sup>45</sup> Nadine Pence Frantz and Deborah L. Silver, "Women in Leadership: A Theological Perspective," *Brethren Life and Thought* 30, no. 1 (1985): 37-40.