

EXEGESIS AND THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF 1 Timothy 2:8-15

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This study attempts to analyze the entire content of 1 Timothy 2:8-15, giving special emphasis to verses 11 to 15, which speak about woman's role in public worship.

THE CONTEXT

The **specific context** begins in chapter 2, verse 1. Paul ordains that, in public meetings of the church, Christians pray for all mankind, including kings and those who are vested with authority. He gives two reasons; the first is practical and the second, theological.

Practical reason: The result of these prayers will be a tranquil life, with godliness and respect for the church. Godliness (*eusébeia*) designates the deepest sense of religious attitude (compare with 1 Timothy 3:16, 4:7, 8; 6:3, 5, 6, 11; 2 Timothy 3:5; Titus 1:1). Respect (*semnōtes*) expresses a moral seriousness that affects internal intention and external conduct.

Theological reason: To pray for all mankind is acceptable to God our Saviour (verses 3-6). He desires the salvation of all human beings and wants all to come to a knowledge of the truth. This knowledge, *epignōsis*, includes a rational understanding of the complete revelation of God in Christ and accepting Him by faith.

Paul resumes his arguments about public prayer in the church and the necessity for Christians to pray for kings and rulers, ordaining that "men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1 Timothy 2:8).

After speaking about that which men should do in public worship, he refers to how women should conduct themselves in it. This is expressed in verses

9-15. The immediate context, then, is public worship and that which men and women should do in it.

Regarding the **general context**, or the content of the pastoral epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus), we can say that Paul writes about heretics, true doctrine, ecclesiastical organization and administration, Christian ministry and public worship, together with the conduct that is appropriate for it. The principal topics of these epistles, then, are doctrine, the church, ministry, worship and adoration.

The content of 1 Timothy 2:8-15, and especially verses 11 to 15, must be understood in its general context, the church, and in its specific context, public worship.

AN ORDER WITH APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY, 1 Timothy 2:8

"I will, therefore, that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting..."

The authority with which Paul expresses his orientation as to the conduct of men and women in worship appears in verse 8, in the verb **will**. The Greek word is **boúlamai**.¹ It is true that the New Testament uses this verb with the meaning "desires" or "intention."² But the three times it appears in the pastoral epistles³ it refers to "order with apostolic authority."⁴

In Hellenistic Judaism the word **boúlamai** was the courteous expression used by a legislator or ruler to express his decrees. The courteous connotation does not weaken the "order." On the contrary, the ruler maintained his position of authority and recognized the existence of a real necessity that demanded urgent attention. The apostle expresses his will and expects that it will be obeyed.⁵

The order affects both men and women. Paul says, "I will...that men pray ...in like manner also, that women..." Then he speaks of apparel, adornment and the conduct that women should observe in public worship (1 Timothy 2:8, 9).

The problem of apostolic authority arises from the very beginning of this paragraph, which has caused much discussion and even contradictory interpretations. Will we accept it or not? If we accept it, its content is obligatory. If we reject it, its content may be adapted to the social environment of the church at any given moment in history. Naturally, this brings up for discussion the authority of all Scripture, of which this paragraph is only a small part. Is it the product of divine authority or the result of human, individual or community action? The position of this article is that all Scripture is authoritative because it comes from God.

APPROPRIATE APPAREL AND ADORNMENT FOR WORSHIP, 1 Timothy 2:9, 10

"In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works."

The sequence of the thought contained in verse 8 and that which is in verse 9 appears to be difficult. Paul goes from public prayer to women's clothing and adornment. This seems to have no connection. However, the link between verse 9 and verse 8 is found in two elements. In the first place, it is in the adverb *hōsautōs*, which means "like that," "in the same way." It is related to the verb *boúlomai*, "I will." That which Paul ordains for women, together with that which he ordains for men, forms a part of the apostolic will. In the second place, that which Paul says here about clothing, adornment and the conduct of women refers specifically to the time of public worship.

The clothing should be decorous, modest and restrained. The Greek words that are translated "shamefacedness" and "sobriety" (*aidos* and *sōphrosunē*) seem to have sexual connotations. Shamefacedness implies discretion, or feminine reserve in sexual matters. Sobriety refers basically to perfect self-control in physical appetites.⁶ In accordance with this, it would be improper for women to use apparel in public worship that emphasized their physical charms.

Adornment should be determined by reverence (*theosébeia*). *Theosébeia* appears only this one time in the Bible. Its correlative, *theosebēs*, also

appears only once (John 9:31), and it means "worshipper," "one who fears God." The one who worships God does His will, and God hears him. Reverence implies that the one who is reverent has true religion.⁷ When they attend public worship, women who have true religion, who obey God and who are heard by God, should not adorn themselves with exaggerated hair styles, nor with gold, nor pearls, nor costly dresses, but with good works. It is not that Christianity is dependent on good works or that good works transform a person into a Christian. On the contrary. These women already fear God, participate in worship and have a true religion. They are modest, shame-faced and sober. Good works are merely an evidence of their true religious life.

In this line of argument, Paul takes it for granted that women should participate in worship. Actually, he is not discussing whether or not the Christian church should bar women from worship or let them participate. In another place Paul expresses very clearly that all should participate (1 Corinthians 14:26), but without confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33, 34).

On the other hand, it is evident that in worship there were women who were engaging in that which Paul prohibits in this text. If that were not so, perhaps the apostle would not have given these instructions. But to arrive at the conclusion that Fred D. Gealy presents in his commentary seems to be going too far. He believes that there was a strong feminist movement working toward the objective of obtaining a vocation and status for women. It was a feminine reaction, with masculine support, against the established practice in which only men prayed and taught doctrine in public. This was in evidence in the Ephesian church, where Timothy was pastor, and possibly also in other churches. In opposing this group, Paul had written that which appears in 1 Timothy 2:9-15.⁸

The most controversial part of this section of the epistle is found in verses 11 to 15, where Paul ordains that women remain in silence in public worship, and that they not be permitted to teach or have authority over men.

PARTICIPANT IN SILENCE, 1 Timothy 2:11, 12

"Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."

The content of verses 11 and 12 seems to be ruled by the idea that in worship women must "be in silence." This concept is repeated in the two verses. A rapid reading might give the impression that the apostle ordains that women have an absolutely passive presence in worship. An analysis of the few texts in which the word "silence" (**hesuchía**) appears, reveals the act of hearing with understanding (Acts 22:2) and of concentration in order to produce (2 Thessalonians 3:12). In the latter text it is used as an antonym of **atáktōs**--"disorderly," "in an irregular way"--and of **periergázomai**, "to do things carelessly or with anxious concern," "to be meddlesome" and "gossipy."

To work in silence does not mean to stop working. It means to work in an orderly way, with dedication, without carelessness, without anxious concern and without spending time meddling in the lives of others nor dedicating one's self to gossip. To hear in silence does not mean to stop hearing; it means to hear with understanding.

This silence does not signify passiveness. It indicates full participation. That is why Paul ordains that women learn "in silence" (1 Timothy 2:11). Their participation in worship should be orderly, with understanding, without carelessness, without talebearing and with the definite objective of learning.

This learning is expressed by the verb **manthánō**. It indicates the idea of "becoming accustomed to something," "obtaining an experience," "learning to know." It does not define the acquisition of an intellectual kind of knowledge. It indicates the process through which the human being is subject to God's will and knows that which he will ultimately practice and perform. Six verses in the pastoral epistles contain the word **manthánō**.⁹ All of them present a knowledge with purpose and they always refer to a practical experience, positive or negative, such as piety at home (1 Timothy 5:4), idleness, talebearing from house to house (1 Timothy 5:13), having convictions (2 Timothy 3:14), doing good and helping in cases of need (Titus 3:14).

This same verb is also used to refer to those who are always in the process of learning, without ever arriving at a knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 3:7).

Paul says that women should learn piety; not an intellectual piety, such as had already extensively penetrated the Christian church, especially among the women (2 Timothy 3:6, 7; 1 Timothy 5:13); nor a legalistic piety, insistently taught by some false teachers; but a piety that would keep them in a personal relationship with Christ and true unity with God.¹⁰

In their search for godly knowledge, women should abstain from two specific activities: teaching (**didáskein**) and exercising authority (**authentein**) over men (1 Timothy 2:12).

This prohibition to teach is not general. The verb that Paul uses in the phrase, "I suffer not a woman to teach," is **didáskein**. As to its meaning, the exegetes take different positions. They say that it refers to (1) the official teaching within the church; (2) an authorized proclamation of the Word with ecclesiastical authority; (3) a public discourse; (4) the formulation of doctrine; and (5) an informal teaching service.¹¹

In any case, it seems that the emphasis is more specific in relation to the teaching of doctrine. Possibly it refers to an intellectual teaching that is gradual, systematic and authoritative.¹² This requires proper personal qualifications. A lack of such preparation is seen in those rebels who teach **that which they ought not**, with the false objective of earning money. The result is confusion of the people (Titus 1:11).

The authoritative character of this teaching is supported by other texts in the pastoral epistles in which the verb **didáskein** appears.¹³ Once it appears together with the verb "to command" (**paraggélein**, 1 Timothy 4:11) and another time together with the verb "to exhort" (**parakalein**, 1 Timothy 6:2).

In the former text, Paul says "these things command and teach." The verb **paraggélein**¹⁴ is used in the Synoptic gospels to indicate the orders that Christ issues under His authority as God's Anointed (Matt. 10:5), to specify the instructions that He gives to His disciples when He sends them to preach to those who are possessed by demons (Mark 6:8) and to refer to the orders that He gives to the unclean spirits when He commands them to come

out of the demon-possessed persons. In the Acts of the Apostles it always refers to the directives that come from an authoritative source.¹⁵ In the Pauline epistles the authoritative source is usually the Word of the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:10). That which Paul prohibits for woman is the exercise of teaching which defines doctrine and transmits it with authoritative orders.

Teaching is united with exhortation in Paul's second order. In the pastoral epistles he uses the verb **parakaléo** in eight places.¹⁶ It refers to doctrines (1 Timothy 1:3), to worship (1 Timothy 2:1), to spiritual orientation of the elders (1 Timothy 5:1), to instruction for church members (1 Timothy 6:2), to the preaching of the Word (2 Timothy 4:2), to the teaching of correct doctrine (Titus 1:9) and to pastoral authority (Titus 2:15). Paul uses this text in the pastoral epistles to refer exclusively to apostolic exhortation (1 Timothy 1:3; 2:1), to pastoral exhortation (1 Timothy 5:1; 6:2; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 2:6), to spiscopal exhortation of the elders of the church (Titus 1:9) and to pastoral authority (Titus 2:15).¹⁷ It seems clear that Paul prohibits women from exercising authoritative teaching as a function of the pastoral office.

This is confirmed in other Pauline texts where he authorizes women to teach specific groups--young women (Titus 2:3-5) and individuals (Acts 18:26). Paul refers to women as apostolic fellow laborers (Phillipians 4:2, 3) and as prophetesses who publicly take part in worship (1 Corinthians 11:5), but never as pastors nor elders (bishops).

Such a position is in harmony with the content of the sentence, "I suffer not a woman...to usurp authority over the man" (1 Timothy 2:12). The word that Paul uses to identify this authority is **authentéo**. This verb appears only this once in all the New Testament. It means to exercise dominion over someone, to act with one's own power or authority. From it comes the word "autocrat."¹⁸ If Paul were to grant this type of authority to woman, he would be in open contradiction to that which God said to her after the first sin: "He shall rule over thee" (Genesis 3:16). Neither Paul nor any other person has the authority to confer upon woman a position of supreme authority over man, whether it be in the home or in the church. An order of authority seems to exist in society, in the church and in the home, which

comes from God (Romans 13:1), and whoever resists it "resisteth the ordinance of God" (Romans 13:2).

Paul does not prohibit woman's praying or prophesying in public (1 Corinthians 11:5), but he does prohibit her exercising pastoral authority and authoritative teaching which defines doctrines and orients the life of the church. She can teach good things (*kalodidáskalein*) to small groups, especially to young women (Titus 2:3-5) and can explain (*extithēmi*) with exactness the way of God (Acts 18:26).

TWO THEOLOGICAL REASONS, I Timothy 2:13, 14

"For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."

After defining the function of woman in the teaching and pastoral authority of the church, Paul proceeds with the presentation of two theological arguments that support his instruction in this regard. He does not offer any sociological argument. On the contrary, he returns to the creation of the human family, when society did not yet exist, and draws his arguments from the priority given at its origin and from the capacity to discern deceit.

The first argument is in verse 13. "Adam was first formed, then Eve." In speaking of the order of authority for man and woman, Paul uses a similar argument in 1 Corinthians 11. He says that man is the head of woman (verse 3). "For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man" (verses 8, 9). Since the woman was created after the man, comes from him by creation and was created because of him, Paul concludes "for this cause ought the woman to have power on her head" (verse 10).

This position of the woman, based on the phrase in Genesis 3:16, is not just whimsical. There must be a social order. In the Trinity itself there is an order of authority. "The head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3). There is nothing strange nor degrading for woman in the fact that there is an order of priority in authority between the man and the woman, since man is her head. The sequence in this natural order is the following: God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, man is the head of woman (1 Corinthians 11:3).

This order of authority does not insult any of its members. Christ does not feel slighted because He has the Father as head, nor should man feel diminished by having Christ as head, nor the woman, by having man as head. This is especially true because "neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God" (1 Corinthians 11:11, 12). The authority of man is derived from God. Ultimately the only supreme authority is God and it is God who defines the order of authority. It would be incorrect to invert it and place woman in the place not granted to her by God.

The second argument is in verse 14, "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." Paul does not attempt to say that man did not sin. His argument for not granting functions of authoritative teaching to woman is not based on the fact that she sinned, for on that basis this function could not be granted to man either. Rather, it is based on the capacity of discernment. The woman did not know how to distinguish the presence of deceit and she permitted herself to be deceived.

Paul uses the word **exapatáo**, to deceive, a total of six times in all his epistles.¹⁹ He affirms that the person who is deceived does not understand (Romans 7:11, 15); is ingenuous (Romans 16:18); believes himself to be wise, but the only thing he possesses is the wisdom of this world, which is foolishness with God (1 Corinthians 3:18, 19); possesses misleading thoughts that lead to impurity and spiritual and doctrinal rebellion (2 Corinthians 11:3, 4); is moved by this own manner of thinking, by evil spirits and by false teachers (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3); and falls into transgression (1 Timothy 2:14). Whoever permits himself to be deceived is not able to define doctrine.

The designation of pastoral functions, as well as the determination of the order of authority, belongs to God. He decides which functions each one will fulfill and no one has the right to be offended because of this distribution. The Father has His own functions, the Son has His and the Holy Spirit has His. Man has his specific functions and woman has hers. God decides them and all are capable of fulfilling them. Functionally speaking,

no one is lesser and no one is greater. All complement each other and all contribute to the order of the universe and the salvation of the human race.

Eve, who was created after Adam, in permitting herself to be deceived, permitted her mind to be controlled by thoughts and authorities that were foreign to the Word and authority of God. Taking Adam and Eve as archetypes of the human race, Paul applies their situation to all men and women. Woman cannot have supreme authority in the government of the church nor in the definition of doctrine because that would require a reversal of the order of authority established by God and it would impose a revision of the distribution of functions that He determined.

God's reasons in determining the order of authority and the distribution of the functions do not impede woman's salvation. On the contrary, the apostle affirms categorically that "she shall be saved." But it will not be outside her own functions, nor in her attempts to be what she is not. The conditions that Paul establishes are twofold: the fulfillment of her functions, and spiritual excellence (1 Timothy 2:15).

First, "she shall be saved in childbearing." The verb *sōthesētai*, shall be saved, is singular and it agrees with the subject *gunē*, woman, which in turn agrees with Eve. From Eve it passes to woman in general. The meaning of the verb *sōzō*, to save, means more than simply "to be preserved," as some commentators have indicated.²⁰ In the pastoral epistles it appears seven times.²¹ All of them refer to the salvation of sinners in Christ Jesus and by God's grace. If Paul refers to woman in general, there can be no direct relation to Eve as a person. Neither would it be possible to apply this text to Mary, taking her as the second woman, the prototype of the feminine sex. Paul does not refer to the birth of Jesus in this text. The context has nothing to do with this topic. Rather, we would have to apply it, according to the argument that Paul develops, to feminine functions in relation to and in contrast to these same functions of man in the home and in the church. The function of bearing children is possibly the most typical characteristic of woman. It is very appropriate for Paul's argument. Since he places her in second place in authoritative

teaching and in pastoral direction in the church, he mentions one of the functions that places her in an exclusive place, that of bearing children. No man could compete with her in this field. On the other hand, it would not be correct to take the position adopted by the false teachers who were in the church and struggle to grant functions to woman that God had entrusted to man (1 Timothy 1:3-7). But the salvation of woman depends on something else. The sole requirement of fulfilling the functions that God established for her in the home and in the church would be too formal. Salvation has a dimension that is basically spiritual, and Paul brings it into focus.

The second requirement for salvation is in the phrase, "she shall be saved ...if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety." The Greek text has the word "continue" in plural, "they continue" (*meinōsin*). This creates a slight textual difficulty which has given place to various interpretations.²² However, it can be explained by the sequence that Paul follows in his argument. He begins with Eve, then passes on to woman in general, including all women. That is why the first verb, "shall be saved" agrees in gender and number with the noun "woman." But in the next step, in referring to all women, he uses the verb "continue" in plural, without having changed the subject "woman." In any case, that which is important here is the requirement that is established for her salvation. He refers to the need for continuing in the spiritual excellence of faith, charity and holiness with sobriety.

Both woman and man have their places in the order of authority. They each have specific functions in society and in the church, holding the majority of them in common and having the same possibility for salvation. Regarding the order of authority and the distribution of functions, the same thing occurs in the Trinity. The Father rules, the Son executes and the Holy Spirit preserves. They can engage in many other functions without distinction. None of them is offended by the differences. On the contrary, they act in complete harmony and in perfect unity because the activity of each of them is complementary to the action of the others and therefore is indispensable for the general order of the universe, for the happiness of created beings and for the redemption of the human family.

Sin resulted in confusion and conflict between man and woman. But salvation

in Christ Jesus and incorporation into the body of Christ, the church, should lead them to an acceptance of their specific complementary functions, to a complete integration into functions they have in common and to a perfect adaptation to the place that corresponds to them in the order of authority. In summary, the reality of salvation should lead man and woman into an experience similar to that of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in their Trinitarian life: peace, effectiveness, integration, complementarism, harmony and unity.

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