

1 TIMOTHY 2:9-15:  
A CASE OF DOMESTIC POLICY

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Commentators generally agree that 1 Tim 2:9-15 contains some of the most difficult statements made by the apostle Paul. These difficulties exist not only in vocabulary and syntax, but also in attempts to synchronize this passage with what Paul says about women in 1 Cor 14:34-36, and especially in 1 Cor 11:4-6. Then there is the problem of synchronizing 1 Tim 2:9-15 with the reported ministry of numerous women in Acts, all of whom Paul considers to be his fellow laborers. Modern Greek and English editions of the New Testament do not help when a paragraph break is made between vv 7 and 8.

In addition to the difficulties listed above, questions are raised as to what extent the cultural context of first century Ephesus impacts upon what Paul said. Are we to accept "the letter" of Paul's statement because it is Scripture, or do we interpret what he said for the twentieth-century church? Our interpretation must recognize that the popular worship of the sensuous, fertility goddess, Diana, has no impact on Christian worship today. There is no danger today that Christian women assuming an active role in public worship will be confused with prostitutes. An understanding of the socio-religious context of 1 Tim 2:9-15 will also save us from a position similar to that of A. T. Hanson, "Christians are under no obligation to accept his [Paul's] teaching on women."<sup>1</sup>

Paul's Desire

1 Tim 2:9-15 cannot be properly understood without considering the eight verses which precede it. The position of v 8 is of special importance. The paragraph break between vv 7 and 8 found in the Nestle and United Bible Society's Greek text, as well as in many modern English editions, raises a question about the interpretation of vv 9-15. Does Paul's statement about the prayers of "the men" (v 8) set the context for his instruction to women? Or does v 8 conclude vv 1-7 where Paul encourages prayer for all people, including kings and those in positions of authority?

If the paragraph break is placed after v 8, this verse concludes Paul's discourse on prayer. His expression of a strong desire that "the men" everywhere pray while lifting up devout hands climaxes his instruction. W. B. Wallis feels strongly enough about the position of the paragraph break to say, "Here Paul completes the paragraph on prayer."<sup>2</sup> Verses 9-15 then stand as a separate unit. Ἰουδαῖος (likewise), with which Paul begins his instruction for women, now takes on an important role in the interpretation of these verses. The impact of this word, as a result of the alternative paragraph division, will be discussed in a moment.

Generally, however, commentators accept the arbitrary positioning of the break, and see v 8 as an introductory statement leading into the topic which follows. The context, then, for Paul's statement about women is understood to be public prayer, or worship, which is set by the praying men in v 8.

There are three items that call for investigation in v 8. First, the word βούλομαι (desire, wish) in Hellenistic Judaism "is the courteous form for giving expression to the decree of a legislator or ruler."<sup>3</sup> Here it shows the authority that Paul possesses in the early church and the urgency of his instruction. Βούλομαι is one verb in a class of verbs that often requires an infinitive to complete its verbal idea. In v 8 the infinitive is προσεύχεσθαι (to pray). An infinitive, in turn, may have a "subject" (accusative of reference) of the action it expresses. The accusative of reference for προσεύχεσθαι is τοὺς ἄνδρας (the men).

Proper attention to these details is imperative. The first word of v 9 (ὡσαύτως- likewise) requires βούλομαι (desire), the verb of v 8, to be the understood verb in v 9. Therefore, Paul is desiring two things--one for "the men" and the other for women. The question is, must προσεύχεσθαι (to pray) be understood also in v 9 in order to complete the verbal idea of βούλομαι? Some commentators say yes,<sup>4</sup> and others no.<sup>5</sup> Those who say yes admit that Paul would thus permit women to pray in public. As "the men" are to pray uplifting devout hands, so women are to pray properly attired. This interpretation would be in agreement with 1 Cor 11:4-16 where Paul allows women to both pray and prophesy in church--with heads properly covered, of course.

For those who say βούλομαι (desire) is the understood verb of v 9 but προσεύχεσθαι (to pray) is not to be the understood completion of the verbal idea, a contradiction appears to exist. For v 9 would then deny women the right to pray in public, which is a position contrary to

that of 1 Cor 11:4-16. It is altogether possible that Paul permitted public prayer by women in Corinth but prohibited it in Ephesus.

Syntactically, βούλομαι (desire) is required as the understood verb in v 9. However, the infinitive προσεύχεσθαι cannot be transported from v 8 to v 9 to complete the verbal idea. Verse 9 has its own infinitive, κοσμεῖν (to adorn), and γυναῖκας (women) is its accusative of reference. Therefore, Paul is saying in v 9, "likewise, also, I desire women to adorn themselves...."

If v 8 is Paul's concluding instruction on prayer, and v 9 begins a new section dealing with women, and if προσεύχεσθαι (to pray) is not a part of the verbal idea in v 9, then Paul's instruction to women in vv 9-15 is removed from the context of public prayer/worship.

#### "The Men" Everywhere

The second item in v 8 that calls for attention is the articular noun τοὺς ἀνδρας (the men). Commentators are quick to point out that ἀνδρας (men) has an article and that γυναῖκας (women - v 9) does not. The conclusion is that "the men" are to pray in public and women are not. Again, if this position is adopted, this instruction would be for the Ephesians. Elsewhere, Paul permits women to pray and prophesy (1 Cor 11:4-16).

This interpretation of v 8 is based on two assumptions: (1) v 8 introduces Paul's instruction to women and thus the context is public prayer, and (2) τόπῳ (place), in the prepositional phrase ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ (in every place), means the church.

The presence of the definite article before "men" does make Paul's instruction specific. "The men" are to pray lifting up devout hands. That Paul has in mind "men" as opposed to "human kind"<sup>6</sup> in general is clear from the use of ἀνὴρ instead of ἄνθρωπος. However, the question can legitimately be raised, Is Paul denying women the privilege of entering into the experience of offering public prayer? If this is his intent, one could say it is possibly unique to Ephesus.

There is an alternative interpretation for this passage. Paul could be addressing husbands and wives. Ἄνθρωπος is translated "husband" as well as "man," and γυναῖκα as "wife" as well as "woman." An example exists in the instruction that immediately follows the passage we are examining. "A bishop then must be. . .the husband [ἄνδρα] of one wife [γυναῖκος]" (1 Tim 3:2).

The third item in v 8 raises the question as to whether Paul is talking about public prayer and the worship service at all. As noted above, those who say Paul is addressing the public worship service base their position on the assumption that the context of v 8 is public prayer. Therefore, ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ (in every place) must refer to the church. For example, J. E. Huther says regarding ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ, "It is to be taken generally, not in the sense of every place, 'where the religious mood, custom, or duty cherishes it' (Matthias), but to all places where Christian congregations assemble (Wiesinger)."<sup>7</sup>

There is another point of view on this prepositional phrase. Because ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ follows τοὺς ἀνδρας in the Greek text, the prepositional phrase is modifying "the men" wherever they may be--"the men in every place," rather than "the men ought to pray in every

place." This interpretation opens the possibility for prayer to be offered anywhere, and restricts the idea that ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ is the church. Adam Clarke says, "In every place. That they should always have a praying heart, and this will ever find a praying place. . . . In opposition to the [Jewish restricted idea as to where prayer may be offered], the apostle, by the authority of Christ, commands men to pray everywhere; that all places belong to God's dominions; and as he fills every place, in every place he may be worshipped and glorified."<sup>8</sup> That ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ (in every place) specifies the church service is an assumption that is not substantiated. Indeed, very few commentators, if any, even attempt to substantiate this assumption.<sup>9</sup>

It appears that v 8 is Paul's concluding comment on prayer. The use of the consequential particle οὖν (therefore) at the beginning of this verse supports this position. Although τοὺς ἀνδρας could be understood as "the men" in distinction from "women," it seems preferable to understand this term as "the husbands." This choice is based on the following, (1) ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ cannot be forced to mean the public worship service, (2) vv 9-15 deal with a domestic setting and not with public worship, and throughout vv 9-15 ἀνὴρ should be used as "husband" and γυνή as "wife," and (3) although the context changes from prayer (vv 1-8) to a domestic setting (9-15), ὡσαύτως (v 9) demands the verb βούλομαι (v 8). Thus there is a tie between vv 1-8 and 9-15, although it is not the context of public prayer/worship. The authority with which Paul counsels τοὺς ἀνδρας is the authority with which he counsels γυναῖκας.

With the elimination of public worship as the context of vv 9-15, wives are not relegated to an inactive role in church. They may pray and prophesy as in Corinth. Their deportment will be proper for women professing reverence for God. "The husbands" who pray by lifting up devout hands are the priest in this domestic setting.

#### Deportment of Women

On the basis of the popular assumptions described above, vv 9-12 are seen as dealing with women's conduct during worship services.<sup>10</sup> However, although ὡσαύτως (likewise) introduces the authority of Paul's word into v 9 by permitting βούλομαι (desire) to become the understood verb, syntactically προσεύχεσθαι (to pray) cannot be imposed upon this verse. Therefore, prayer cannot be the context of Paul's instruction. Also, the questionable rendering of ἐν παντί τόπῳ (in every place) as the Christian worship service is likewise a debatable context.

Therefore, it would seem that Paul's instruction concerning dress/deportment in vv 9 and 10 is not tied to the Christian worship service. Although one can be sure that proper deportment on the part of Christian women was expected in public services also.

Although Donald Guthrie follows popular opinion by saying that Paul is giving his observations on women's conduct during public worship, he is sensitive to the fact that the imposition of this context upon vv 9 and 10 makes these verses say more than Paul intended. "Grammatically this section continues the injunction in verse 8, i.e., it gives observations on women's conduct in public prayer. But it seems most unlikely that Paul intends to restrict

himself in this way, for no clear distinction can be drawn between what is fitting for public worship and what is fitting at other times. The advice given seems to be general and we must therefore suppose that Paul turned from his immediate purpose in order to make wider observations about women's demeanour."<sup>11</sup>

Guthrie's statement regarding the grammar (syntax) of v 9 can be successfully challenged, as we have seen above in our discussion of βούλομαι (desire), προσεύχεσθαι (to pray), and κοσμεῖν (to adorn). However, his uneasiness with the popular opinion is worthy of note. Likewise, F. D. Gealy, who also says Paul is speaking of the conduct of women at public worship, notes that, "In Greek the connection between vv 8 and 9 is rough."<sup>12</sup> The roughness appears only when these verses are forced to say something that Paul did not intend.

In vv 11 and 12, Paul admonishes women to be "silent" and submissive. He informs Timothy that he does not permit women to teach nor to lord it over men. As in vv 9 and 10, a public worship setting is assumed by commentators. Again, however some are uneasy with the popular opinion. For example, Hanson thinks Paul's remark that a woman should not lord it over a man really deals with the husband/wife relationship.<sup>13</sup> This position takes Paul's instruction to women out of the context of public worship. There would then be no restriction on women taking a leadership role in church affairs.

Concerning Paul's restriction on women occupying a teaching role, A. T. Robertson says, "And yet all modern Christians allow women to teach Sunday School classes. One feels somehow that something is not expressed here to make it all clear."<sup>14</sup>



Regarding the words ὑποτάγη (subordination) and αὐθεντεῖν (to dominate) Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann say, "It is questionable whether the phrases were originally intended as such an injunction for the worship service."<sup>15</sup> And again, "That within the scope of Paul's mission it was possible for women to teach is shown by Acts 18:26."<sup>16</sup>

Kenneth Kantzer says, "In fact, the remainder of Scripture provides a conclusive case against taking either the 1 Timothy 2 or 1 Corinthians 14 passage as a prohibition against women in leadership. From Miriam and Deborah in the Old Testament, to Priscilla who taught doctrine to a man (Apollos) and the many women who 'prophesied' in the New Testament, women have shared ministry responsibilities with men. The Bible simply cannot be construed as universally forbidding women to teach, to teach in the church, or to teach men."<sup>17</sup>

Regarding Paul's injunction that women should learn in "silence" (v 11), and to remain "silent" (v 12), it must be pointed out that he does not use the word form σιγάω, which means to hold one's peace or to remain silent. He uses, rather, ἡσυχία, which indicates a quiet, undisturbed spirit, or someone who is not unruly. So A. D. Liftin observes, "The word, hesychia, translated 'quietness' in 1 Timothy 2:11 and silent in verse 12, does not mean complete silence or not talking."<sup>18</sup>

Clarke says that on the basis of Joel's prophecy, one would expect women to take an active teaching role in the Christian Church. For "the Spirit of God was to be poured out on women as well as the men, that they might prophesy, i.e. to teach."<sup>19</sup> Then he asks, "But does not what the apostle says here [1 Tim 2:11, 12] contradict that state-

ment [1 Cor 11:5], and show that the words in chap. xi should be understood in another sense?...All that the apostle opposes here is their questioning, finding fault, disputing, etc., in the Christian Church, as the Jewish men were permitted to do in their synagogues. . . ."20

In connection with Paul's prohibition on teaching, it must be noted that the infinitive διδάσκειν (to teach) does not have a direct object. But this prohibition on teaching is joined to a second prohibition by οὐδέ (nor) where the object of the infinitive αὐθεντεῖν (to dominate) is ἀνδρός (man). As shown above, ἀνδρός can just as well be translated "husband," and serve as the direct object of διδάσκειν as well as αὐθεντεῖν. If ἀνὴρ and γυναῖκα are understood to be husband and wife in vv 8 and 9, these two words may be understood in the same way in vv 11 and 12. And if in v 8 the husband is to function as the priest of the family, holding up devout hands, then Paul's restrictions in vv 11 and 12 are against the wife assuming the priestly role in the family. She is to learn God's Word in a spirit of quietness. She is not to usurp the priestly role and assume to teach her husband, nor is she to lord it over him.

Paul then appeals to the relationship that existed in the first family (v 13) and points out that if Eve had stayed under the tutelage of her husband she might not have been led astray (v 14). However, Paul does not discuss the implications of the fact that Adam was not deceived into transgressing, but stepped through the forbidden door with all deliberateness. N. J. D. White observes, "But the intellectual superior who sins against light may be morally inferior to him who stumbles in the dusk."21

Saved by Childbearing

There is no question but what v 15 is the most difficult verse in this passage which is already filled with problems. Three difficulties present themselves. (1) Σωθήσεται (shall be saved) is singular with no expressed subject, (2) μένωσιν (remain) is plural with no expressed subject, and (3) τεκογονίας (childbearing) has a definite article.

Verse 15 is a conditional sentence of probable future. If what is stated in the "if clause" ("if they remain in faith and love and holiness with modesty") is accomplished at some time in the future, then what is stated in the result clause will be realized ("she will be saved by the childbearing"). Without trying to identify the subject of the singular verb (shall be saved), three suggested interpretations for the result clause follow: (1) saved by fulfilling the role given by God to bear children, (2) saved through the birth of "the child," and (3) brought safely through childbearing. Paul's firm position on salvation by faith would prohibit the first solution. Robertson, however, suggests that this statement means women will be saved in the "function" of childbearing and "not by means of it."<sup>22</sup> Logic would exclude the third solution, for throughout history many godly women have died in childbirth.

Those who appeal to the articular noun in v 8 (τοὺς ἀνδρας--the men) in defense of men being given the privilege of praying in public while women are excluded, should not dismiss the significance of the article before τεκογονίας (childbearing). Although τεκογονίας is not a monadic substantive (the only such thing that exists) the presence of

the article tends to identify a unique experience in childbearing, i.e., the incarnation of Jesus. For this reason such commentators as Clarke,<sup>23</sup> Lock,<sup>24</sup> Vincent,<sup>25</sup> and Wallis<sup>26</sup> lean toward the second solution.

The subject, then, of the singular verb "shall be saved" would be a generic "she." Women are saved through the results of the incarnation, as, we might add, are men. The subject of the plural verb "remain" would be all women who in modesty endure in faith, love and holiness.

#### Conclusion

After an examination of 1 Tim 2:8-15, the following conclusions may be drawn.

1. The imposition of public worship as the context for the interpretation of this passage appears to be arbitrary and artificial.
2. A paragraph break between vv 7 and 8 will not help the cause of public prayer/worship because it is impossible syntactically to impose προσεύχεσθαι (to pray) upon v 9. Κοσμεῖν (to adorn) completes the verbal idea of the understood βούλομαι (desire) borrowed from v 8.
3. Verse 8 concludes Paul's statement on prayer. Τοὺς ἀνδρας should be translated as "the husbands" and vv 9-15 deals with the home in which the husband is priest and how the wife is to relate herself to this spiritual role of her husband.
4. Paul's counsel for women concerns deportment in general and fits into the sequence of counsel on deportment given to bishops and deacons (1 Tim 3:1-13). Paul's counsel after v 8 does not deal with

public worship, but how women should behave themselves in the Christian community, as Paul's summary remarks in 3:14, 15 show, "I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God. . . ." This passage is not speaking of behavior inside a building during worship service. It is addressing interpersonal relationships within the household of God--the living community of Christ.

5. To say that ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ (in every place) is the church service stretches this prepositional phrase almost to the point of breaking.

6. The unique phrase, "the childbearing," speaks of the incarnation which has made possible the salvation of all who believe, not only women.

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