

1 **PAUL, WOMEN, AND THE EPHESIAN CHURCH:**
2 **AN EXAMINATION OF 1 TIMOTHY 2:8-15**
3

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9 *Introduction*

10 To many the prohibition barring a woman from teaching and exercising authority over a
11 man in 1 Timothy 2:12 is nothing more than an historical example of the oppressive natural of
12 ancient patriarchy. From this perspective, Paul's views, whatever they originally meant, might be
13 of limited value to historians, but they ultimately have no real authority or significance for
14 determining the role of women in society today. As Christians who believe that Scripture
15 continues to be authoritative for all of life, Seventh-day Adventists cannot simply disregard
16 difficult passages like this to the rubbish heap of ideas from time past. Our belief in the authority
17 of Scripture requires that we do all we can to understand what this passage meant to its original
18 audience so we can faithfully apply it to our setting today. While this sort of investigation
19 requires a careful examination of the words of the passage itself, it also requires an awareness of
20 the connection the passage has to Paul's overall letter to Timothy, as well as both the greater
21 context of Scripture, and of the historical context that shaped the social world in which the
22 events in 1 Timothy occurred.¹

¹ I am indebted to Nancy Vyhmeister for her article "Proper Church Behavior in 1 Timothy 2:8-15" in *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives* (ed. N. J. Vyhmeister; Berrien Spring, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1998). Although this paper is based on a fresh analysis on 1 Tim 2:8-15 and goes beyond her original work, this paper nevertheless builds on her work and follows the basic structure of her article.

1 *The Purpose for Writing 1 Timothy*

2 All of the letters attributed to Paul in the New Testament, with the exception of Romans,
3 are ad hoc responses written to deal with specific problems. First Timothy is no exception.
4 Written perhaps around A.D. 64, 1 Timothy deals specifically with a series of problems that had
5 emerged among the Christians in Ephesus that threatened to undo the years of gospel labor Paul
6 had invested in building up the work of God in Ephesus.² Unable at the time to deal with the
7 situation in person, Paul appointed Timothy to act as his personal representative in Ephesus
8 (3:14-15; 1:3-7). A close reading of the epistle indicates the task Timothy faced was fraught with
9 difficulty.

10 Although Paul had encountered problems in Ephesus during his stay there years earlier,
11 the threat this time was different (Acts 19:8, 9; 21-20:1; 1 Cor 15:32; 2 Cor 1:8-10). The problem
12 was not external, but internal. And to make matters worse, the difficulty was not isolated to a few
13 individual members of the laity, but involved the local leaders responsible for the welfare of the
14 house churches scattered around Ephesus—the elders. Evidence of a crisis among the elders of
15 the church in Ephesus is implicit throughout the letter. The problem is alluded to from the very
16 outset as Paul instructs Timothy to make sure that certain individuals in the church not "teach
17 any different doctrine" (cf. 1 Tim 1:3-4; Gal 1:6). In stating this upfront, Paul is following his
18 custom of identifying from the start the primary issue he plans to develop more fully in the main
19 body of his letter (cf. Gal 1:1-5; Rom 1:1-7; 1 Cor 1:1-3, etc.) The problem in Ephesus is false
20 teachers whose teaching must be stopped. This concern with proper teaching runs throughout the
21 letter. It can be most clearly seen in Paul's use of the Greek word for teaching (*didaskalia*) and its

² The question of the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles is a controversial topic. Although there are difficult questions associated with the Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy, in the opinion of this author the difficulties related to the non-Pauline authorship are far greater. Accordingly, this paper assumes the Pauline authorship of these epistles.

1 cognates a total of 16 times (1:3, 7, 10, 2:7, 12; 3:2; 4:1, 6, 11, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:1, 2, 3 (2x), a use
2 that is more than double the amount used in any other of his epistles.

3 In addition to the emphasis on proper teaching, Paul also focuses on the character of the
4 false teachers. He describes them as arrogant and prideful (1 Tim 6:3-4), and merely out to make
5 a financial profit from their display of knowledge (1 Tim 6:5). While these verses do not
6 explicitly identify these teachers as local elders, the connection is more than implied in that Paul
7 specifically identifies teaching as the primary responsibility of the office of overseer/elder (3:2),³
8 and in the fact that the vices of the corrupt teachers are the very traits specified as unbecoming of
9 church elders (cf. 1 Tim 3:2-7; 1:7; 5:6; 6:4-5, 9-10). This connection is not accidental. It is the
10 faulty character of erring elders that prompted Paul to describe to Timothy and the church the
11 type of qualities that should define the life of a church leader (1 Tim 3:1-13). The lack of these
12 qualities in the lives of those responsible for the false teaching in Ephesus also stands behind
13 Paul's discussion of elders who deserve honor versus those who are to be faulted for their actions
14 (1 Tim 5:17-19). Paul singles out two of the ringleaders by name: Hymenaeus and Alexander (1
15 Tim 1:19-20).

16 The focus on teaching and the role of elders in 1 Timothy points to the activity of a group
17 of elders in Ephesus who were using their position as church leaders to disseminate a gospel that
18 was contrary to what Paul had taught. The work of these false teachers had to be stopped. It is
19 this single purpose that stands behind Paul's letter to Timothy.

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³ The terms "elder" and "overseer" are used interchangeably since in the New Testament they refer to the same office (cf. 1 Tim 3:1; Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7). See Benjamin L. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).

The False Teaching and the Ephesians

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The situation in Ephesus had not developed overnight. Several years earlier Paul had recognized that all was not well with the believers in Ephesus. While briefly stopping in Miletus on his way to Jerusalem in A.D. 57, Paul had requested a private meeting with the elders from Ephesus (Acts 20:17). After encouraging them to be faithful to their responsibility as elders, the apostle warned them that after his departure "fierce wolves" would seek to destroy the church (Acts 20:29). The startling nature of this warning is not that the church would face opposition, but in Paul's prophetic declaration that the "wolves" would arise from the ranks of the elders themselves: "from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). By the time of Paul's letter to Timothy prediction had given way to reality in Ephesus.

What was the nature of the false teaching disrupting the believers in Ephesus? Although little is said explicitly about the precise nature of the false teaching, a fairly clear picture still emerges from the handful of remarks Paul does make about it. At its core, the false teaching was rooted in a sensational and speculative reading of the Old Testament Scriptures. This is apparent for several reasons. In 1 Tim 1:7 Paul identifies the false teachers as those who want to be "teachers of the law" (*nomodidaskalos*). This phrase is used elsewhere in the New Testament only of individuals who handle the Old Testament Scriptures (cf. Lk 5:17; Acts 5:34). It is clear that it also refers to the Old Testament here since Paul states just after this that the proper use of the "law" is not fodder for the fanciful speculation of the false teachers, but as a moral agent to point out humans sinfulness (cf. Rom 5:20; 7:7-25; Gal 3:19-29). To prove his point, Paul then provides a list of sinners whose sins mirror the prohibitions found in the Ten Commandments, particularly the fifth to the ninth commandments (cf. 1 Tim 1:8-10; Exod 20:1-17).

1 Two additional indications that the false teachings in Ephesus were associated with a
2 misuse of the Old Testament Scriptures are found in Paul's description of their teachings as
3 consisting of "myths and endless genealogies" (1:4). Although these terms are not necessarily
4 connected to Judaism in themselves, they are clearly seen as having a Jewish sense to them in
5 their parallel use in Titus. Paul labels the false teachers in Titus 1:14 as those who are devoted to
6 "Jewish myths" (cf. Gal 2:14). Towards the end of this letter, he further describes their teaching
7 as "foolish controversies" that are associated with "genealogies" and "quarrels about the law"
8 (Titus 3:9). This terminology suggests the false teachers in Ephesus were misusing the Old
9 Testament by creating fanciful interpretations that were being used to justify their speculative
10 theological ideas.⁴

11 The false doctrines being promoted in Ephesus included elements of an ascetic lifestyle,
12 particularly abstinence from sexual activity ("forbid marriage") and the eating of certain foods
13 (4:1-5). These ideas appear to have emerged out of an over-realized eschatology, the belief that
14 the promised age of the Spirit had not only begun, but had arrived in all of its fullness—not
15 bodily, but in a spiritual sense. This explains why false teachers like Hymenaeus could claim that
16 the resurrection had already occurred (cf. 1 Tim 1:20; 6:20-21; 2 Tim 2:16-18). The "spiritual"
17 resurrection, so they claimed, had ushered in the fullness of the age to come, an age set free from
18 all the elements that define life in the material world. Paul had encountered similar ideas with
19 some of the believers in Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 7:1-7, 25-38; 15:12, 35). Instead of allowing God's
20 law to make them aware of their own sinfulness, these teachers had become "puffed up with
21 conceit" along with an "unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which

⁴ Philip Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 705.

1 relatively new sociological movement across the ancient world that scholars call the "new
2 Roman woman."

3 **The Cult of Artemis.** The worship of a powerful mother-goddess, who was eventually known
4 as Artemis of the Ephesians, played an important role in the history of the city of Ephesus. Long
5 before the Greeks founded the city in the 10th century B.C., the area had been an important
6 center for the worship of an Anatolian mother-goddess called Cybele. As the area came under the
7 control of one kingdom after another, the worship of the mother-goddess was assimilated into the
8 religious beliefs of each successive civilization and eventually associated with the Greek goddess
9 Artemis. The worship of Artemis at Ephesus, however, was not that of the Artemis of the
10 traditional Greek pantheon. Local images of Artemis with what appears to be many-breasts
11 suggests that at Ephesus Artemis was worshipped primarily as a life-giving fertility goddess.⁶
12 The influence of an all-powerful female goddess was so strong at Ephesus that local legends at
13 the time of the apostle Paul claimed that the city itself had been founded by powerful women, the
14 mythical Amazons, a group of dominant women warriors especially devoted to the worship of
15 the mother-goddess.

16 The worship of Artemis of the Ephesians centered in a magnificent temple built in her
17 behalf in 356 B.C. The temple, known as the Artemisium, was the largest building in the Greek
18 world at the time. It was so extravagant it became one of the seven wonders of the ancient world,
19 filling Ephesus with dutiful worshippers from all around the Mediterranean. Like other temples,
20 the Artemisium played an important role in both the economic and religious spheres of life in

⁶ Indication that Artemis was conceived of as a fertility goddess is the conspicuous multiple oval protuberances across her lower chest and belly. These objects have been interpreted as breasts, eggs, acorns, clusters of grapes, or even bull testicles, any of which would have served as a symbol of fertility.

1 Ephesus.⁷ In the economic sphere, it served as a bank and moneylender, as well as a landholder
2 of some seventy-seven thousand acres of rich farmland.⁸ As a religious institution, the
3 Artemisium encouraged devotion to Artemis through the celebration of feasts, public festivals
4 and sacrifice, banquets, and processions. Like all pagan religions, the cult rituals associated with
5 Artemis would have been extravagant public displays designed to impress local inhabitants
6 and worshippers with the great power of the mother goddess. Overseeing the affairs and
7 activities of the temple was a group of individuals made up of local city officials, a high
8 priestess, priests and priestesses, and other temple attendants who were responsible for managing
9 the daily affairs of the temple.

10 Although some have gone too far in suggesting that the influence of the cult of Artemis
11 made first-century Ephesus a "bastion and bulwark of women's rights,"⁹ at the same time we
12 should not underestimate the influence a woman high priest could have upon a local community,
13 particularly when it involved the worship of the city's patron deity. An example of this during the
14 first century A.D. can be seen in the life of a woman from Pompeii named Eumachia. Besides
15 being a wife and mother of a wealthy upper class family, Eumachia was the public priestess of
16 the cult of Venus. Since Venus was the patron deity of Pompeii, her priesthood was far more
17 important than any other in the city. In addition to providing for the financial support of the
18 Temple of Venus, Eumachia used her own wealth and social status to construct the largest
19 building in Pompeii next to the public forum. The fact that she could erect this building in such

⁷ The importance of the Artemisium for certain trades in Ephesus can be seen in the uproar caused by Demetrius the Silversmith when he felt his bottom line was being hurt by the spread of Christianity.

⁸ S.M. Baugh, "A Foreign World," in *Women in the Church* (2d ed.; eds. A. Köstenberger and Thomas Schreiner; Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2005), 19-20.

⁹ Marcus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 661.

1 an important location testifies to her influence among the local elite.¹⁰ In response to her
2 generosity, and symbolic of her power and social status, a local guild of fullers built a public
3 statue of Eumachia in her honor.¹¹ Upon her death the local authorities also honored her by
4 allowing her magnificent tomb, the largest in Pompeii, to be erected in one of the most
5 prominent sections of the city's necropolis. Although married, the dedicatory inscription on the
6 building Eumachia built, as well as the inscriptions associated with her statue and tomb, contains
7 no mention of her husband's name.¹² Eumachia was clearly important in her own right. She was
8 not merely riding on the coattails of her husband.

9 In the same way that Eumachia had a significant influence on Pompeii, it seems hard not
10 to believe that the worship of a dominant mother-goddess mediated through women priests
11 would not have also had some influence on the perception of the role of women in religious
12 matters in Ephesus. Regardless of how much actual power and authority the priestesses of
13 Artemis actually had over the affairs of the temple, their priesthood of the patron deity of
14 Ephesus was important and one of high public profile. With such a visible presence within
15 Ephesus, Gentile converts would not have needed to have been initiated members of the cult of
16 Artemis to have associated aspects of the role of women in the worship of Artemis along with
17 those of their new found faith in Christ. After all, the riot Demetrius the silversmith instigated
18 against the work of the apostle Paul in Ephesus indicates that we should not assume that
19 Christianity in Ephesus developed in complete isolation from the worship of Artemis (Acts
20 19:23-41).

¹⁰ Joanne Berry, *The Complete Pompeii* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 114.

¹¹ Eve D'Ambra, "Women on the Bay of Naples," in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World* (ed. Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon; Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell), 403.

¹² Steven Tuck, "Eumachia, Public Priestess," *Pompeii: Daily Life in an Ancient Roman City* (The Teaching Company, DVD).

1 **Judaism.** The description of women in rabbinic writings like the Mishnah has often led to the
2 assumption that the life of Jewish women during the first-century was severely restricted. Unlike
3 men who were free to be involved in all aspects of civil and religious life, women were thought
4 to have been uneducated and tied to the home with all the duties it entailed: cooking, cleaning,
5 raising children, and in an agricultural family, working in the fields. Recent scholarship has
6 discovered, however, that the situation of a woman, as with much of first-century Judaism, was
7 more diverse and complex than often assumed.¹³ While the domain of a woman was primarily
8 associated with the home in Judaism,¹⁴ for some women, particularly those of means, other
9 opportunities were available, including positions of power and leadership in a community.

10 An illustration of the diversity of roles that women assumed in early Judaism can be seen
11 in Hellenistic Jewish literature. While some women are tied to the traditional roles associated
12 with "women's work" (Tobit 2:11; 7:15-16; 8:19), others like Judith, the heroine of the
13 apocryphal book by the same name, exhibit a far greater sphere of influence and ability. Judith
14 embodies the most prized aspects of the ideal Jewish woman: she is beautiful, dedicated to her
15 deceased husband, and devoted to God. At the same time, it is not the men in the story who
16 rescue their city, but the quick-witted Judith who outsmarts the Assyrians, cuts off the head of
17 their notorious general, rallies the Jews to victory, and even leads a celebratory procession of
18 women and men singing hymns to God (Judith 15:13). Although the story is fictional, its

¹³ This can even be seen in the conflicting voices even within the Mishnah over whether a father should teach his daughter Torah. In the discussion of the suspected adulteress in *Sotah* 3:4, Ben Azzai states, "A man must give his daughter a knowledge of Torah." Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, however, argues the opposite: "If any man gives his daughter a knowledge of Torah it is as though he taught her lechery." See also, Ross Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 93-127.

¹⁴ Philo, reflecting on his perception on life in Alexandria, Egypt, argues that the place of Jewish women is at home (Philo *Spec. Leg.* 3.169-71; 4.225; *Quaest. In Gen.* 1.26; *Sacr.* 26-27). Other comments Philo makes about the way "some" women behave in public suggests his view of the "ideal" woman was not necessarily an accurate reflection of the life for all Jewish women (*Spec. Leg.* 3.172-75; *Sacr.* 21-24).

1 depiction of the heroine had to be somewhat accurate for the author's audience to have resonated
2 with the story like they did. Other interesting Jewish texts that describe a broader picture of the
3 influence, education, leadership, and religious roles associated with Jewish women include:
4 Joseph and Aseneth (21:4; 22:9; 28:8-16), the Testament of Job (46-51), Tobit (1:8), Susanna
5 (3), 4 Maccabees (15:24-31; 18:20), and Pseudo-Philo (33:1; 40:4).

6 The writings of the first-century Jewish historian Josephus reveal that the portrayal of
7 Jewish women in positions of influence and power in apocryphal texts was not entirely fictitious.
8 Although Josephus' own views of women were misogynistic,¹⁵ his writings contain the accounts
9 of several women who occupied positions of influence in the highest political circles.¹⁶ One such
10 woman is Bernice, the highly educated and strong-willed daughter of Herod Agrippa I, whose
11 political acumen almost raised her to the rank of Roman empress.

12 After the death of her second husband, who had been king of Chalcis, Bernice and her
13 brother Agrippa II acted as co-rulers of Chalcis.¹⁷ In addition to their kingdom, they had

¹⁵ According to Josephus, "Scripture teaches, 'A woman is inferior to her husband in all things.' Let her, therefore, be obedient to him; not so that he should abuse her, but that she may acknowledge her duty to her husband; for God hath given the authority to the husband" (*Ag. Ap.*, 2.201). No such passage exists in the Old Testament. The idea that women are inferior to men by nature mirrors the notions of Aristotle on gender instead of Scripture (cf. Philo *Spec. Leg.* 2.124; 4.223). See Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 4.4, 775a; Giulia Sissa, 'The Sexual Philosophies of Plato and Aristotle', in *A History of Women: From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints* (ed. Paula Schmitt Pantel; Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992), 46-81; N. Smith, 'Plato and Aristotle on the Nature of Women,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 21 (1983), 467-78.

¹⁶ Other remarkable women who demonstrate considerable influence, though Josephus certainly is not in favor of their less than submissive role, include Mariamme the Hasmonean, Herod's sister Salome, and especially Salome Alexandria, the Hasmonean queen who reigned as the sole ruler of Israel from 76 to 67 B.C. See Tal Ilan, "'Things Unbecoming a Woman' (*Ant.* 13.431) Josephus and Nicolaus on Women," in *In Integrating Women into Second Temple History* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2000), 85-125. When these women deviate from Josephus view' of the traditional role of a woman, he attributes to them masculine characteristics (cf. *Ant.* 13.430-32.)

¹⁷ The naming of Bernice's son as Berenicianus is the only known instance of a son in this period being named after in his mother (*Jos. Ant.* 20.104; *J.W.* 2.221). Laura S. Lieber, "Jewish Women: Texts and Contexts," in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, 333.

1 jurisdiction over the temple in Jerusalem, including the appointment of the high priest.¹⁸ It is in
2 this role that Bernice appears in the Acts of the Apostles. Unsure of what to do with the
3 imprisoned Paul of Tarsus, the newly appointed governor Festus consulted with a group of
4 influential individuals. The group consisted of Bernice, Agrippa II, as well as military officers,
5 and prominent men of the city (Acts 25:23). That Bernice is specifically mentioned indicates her
6 influence was "significant enough to warrant her participation."¹⁹

7 While visiting Jerusalem several years later to fulfill a religious vow at the temple,
8 Bernice made multiple attempts to persuade the Roman governor Gaius Florus to not rule the
9 Jews with such a heavy hand.²⁰ When her efforts proved unsuccessful, she wrote personally to
10 the Roman governor of Syria notifying him of the incompetence of Florus.²¹ When her brother
11 arrived in Jerusalem sometime later, she also joined him in attempting to persuade the Jews not
12 to retaliate against the Romans.²²

13 The abilities of Bernice were such that she was also known outside of Judaism. In
14 addition to a Latin inscription from Beirut that identifies her as queen, an honorific statue was
15 erected of her in Athens in 61 with an inscription praising her as a "Great Queen" and benefactor
16 of their city.²³ Noted for her beauty, generosity, and independent fortune, Bernice also appears in
17 Roman sources. Tacitus names her as a significant personal ally of Vespasian during his bid to
18 become Roman Emperor.²⁴ She also became romantically involved with Vespasian's son, Titus.
19 After the Jewish revolt was settled, Bernice joined Titus in the imperial palace in Rome as his

¹⁸ Jos. *Ant.* 20.104, 222; *J.W.* 2.223

¹⁹ Michael S. Vasta, "Titus and the Queen: Julia Berenice and the Opposition to Titus' Succession" (2007), 12. http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/grs_honproj/1

²⁰ Jos. *J.W.* 2:309-14.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.333.

²² *Ibid.* 2:402-05.

²³ Vasta, 10-11.

²⁴ Tacitus, *Histories* 2.81.

1 mistress, with the expectation she would eventually become his wife. Her interest and intrusion
2 into political events in Rome combined with Roman hostility toward Jews ultimately developed
3 in a political scandal that forced Titus to end his relationship with Bernice.²⁵

4 The wider influence that some Jewish women held in the ancient world has also been
5 corroborated by a number of intriguing inscriptions from Asia Minor that date from the second to
6 the sixth century. They describe Jewish women not only as significant benefactors of local
7 synagogues, but also with an array of intriguing titles: leader, elder, mother, father, and
8 priestess.²⁶ Of particular interest is a second-century inscription from Smyrna that identifies a
9 woman named Rufina as the head of her synagogue. The text reads:

10 "Rufina, a Jew, head of the synagogue (*archisynagōgos*), built this tomb for her freed
11 slaves and the slaves raised in her house. No one else has the right to bury anyone (here).
12 If someone should dare to do so, he or she will pay 1500 denars to the sacred treasury and
13 1000 denars to the Jewish people. A copy of this inscription has been placed in the
14 (public) archives."²⁷

15 Older scholarship discounted these titles as merely honorific of the unnamed husbands of
16 the women named. Modern scholarship had demonstrated, however, that there is no reason not to
17 assume that these women held the offices themselves.²⁸ Since synagogues could have multiple
18 individuals with the title of head of synagogue,²⁹ a woman like Rufina likely served as part of a

²⁵ Tacitus, *Histories* 2.2; Suetonius, *Titus*, 7.1-2; Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 65.15.3; E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule* (Boston: Brill, 2001), 385-388; E. Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (ed. G. Vermes and F. Millar; vol. 1; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973), 471-483.

²⁶ Bernadette J. Brooten, 'Female Leadership in the Ancient Synagogue,' in *From Dura to Sepphoris* (ed. L.I. Levine and Z. Weiss; Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology), 215-223.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 215.

²⁸ Susan Marks, "Women in Early Judaism: Twenty-five Years of Research and Reenvisioning," *Currents in Biblical Research* 6 (2008): 290-320; W. Horbury, "Women in the Synagogue," in W. Horbury, W.D. Davies and J. Sturdy (eds.), *Cambridge History of Judaism III* (Cambridge University Press), 358-401, 1118-123; T. Rajak, "the Synagogue within the Greco-Roman City," in S. Fine (ed.), *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue* (New York: Routledge), 161-73; Lieber, 336.

²⁹ Horbury, *Women in the Synagogue*, 392.

1 group of leaders whose primary duty was administrative, including the appointment of readers,
2 though it may have also included public reading and teaching. While the positions these women
3 held may have been more the exception than the rule, they serve as additional testimony to the
4 diverse roles available to some women in early Judaism.

5 **Gnosticism.** Gnosticism flourished in the Mediterranean world from the second to the fifth
6 century.³⁰ The full-blown Gnosticism in the Nag Hammadi (Egypt) manuscripts suggests that an
7 incipient form of Gnosticism was already beginning to circulate in the first century. The presence
8 of incipient Gnosticism at Ephesus seems implied in 1 Timothy: Paul admonished Timothy to
9 “avoid the profane chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge [*gnōsis*]” (1
10 Tim 6:20). Two aspects of gnostic theology appear to be particularly relevant to Paul’s letter to
11 Timothy: Eve’s part in the Creation of Adam and the denigration of femaleness.

12 A sampling of gnostic statements on Eve’s part in creation shows the tendency to exalt
13 Eve. Adam addresses Eve: “You are the one who has given me life.”³¹ Eve is said to have “sent
14 her breath into Adam, who had no soul.”³² Eve (*Zoē*) is the one who teaches Adam “about all the
15 things which are in the eighth heaven”; she uncovers “the veil which was upon his mind.”³³
16 Finally Eve declares herself the “mother of my father and the sister of my husband, . . . to whom
17 I gave birth.”³⁴

18 On the other hand, other gnostic writings of Nag Hammadi repeatedly show a negative
19 assessment of femaleness. In the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (early second century), Jesus

³⁰ The following section of Gnosticism is largely taken from a revised form of Vyhmeister's chapter
"Proper Church Behavior in 1 Timothy 2:8-15," 339-40.

³¹ *Hypostasis of the Archons* 2.4.89.14-17.

³² *On the Origin of the World* 115.

³³ *Ibid.*, 104; *Apocryphon of John* 67-71.

³⁴ *Thunder, Perfect Mind* 6.2.13.30-32.

1 announces: “I came to destroy the works of the female.” He then points out that death will
2 prevail as long as women bear children, to which Salome responds: “Then I have done well in
3 bearing no children.”³⁵ According to the *Gospel of Thomas* (ca. A.D. 140), Peter wanted to send
4 Mary away, “because women are not worthy of life.” Jesus then offered to make her into a male,
5 “because every woman who will make herself male shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.”³⁶
6 Femaleness is seen as a defect; salvation comes through masculinity, or even better, through the
7 elimination of all sexuality.³⁷ Another gnostic writing called upon believers to “flee from the
8 bondage of femininity and to choose for themselves the salvation of masculinity.”³⁸

9 Epiphanius (ca. 315-403) tells of a gnostic who rejected marriage and were opposed to
10 childbearing, practicing *coitus interruptus* and going so far as to abort the fetus of a pregnant
11 woman.³⁹

12 **The New Roman Woman.** The examination of Roman legal sources and archaeological
13 evidence over the last two decades indicates that the transformation of Rome into an Empire
14 brought with it not only a new form of government under Caesar Augustus, but also the
15 emergence of what some scholars call the “new Roman woman.”⁴⁰ For the first time in Roman
16 history, pivotal legal, political, and social changes gave women an acceptable public persona.
17 These changes resulted in a generation of women whose lifestyles and opportunities varied
18 considerably from the traditional image of the modest Roman woman. As witnessed in other

³⁵ See Clement of Alexandria *Miscellanies* 3.45.

³⁶ *Gospel of Thomas* 114.

³⁷ *Dialogue of the Saviour* 90-95; *Gospel of Thomas* 27.

³⁸ *Zostrianos* 8.1.131.

³⁹ Epiphanius *Panarion* 26.3-5.

⁴⁰ See Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Roman Women in the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

1 Roman authors, this influence had spread around the Mediterranean. As the fourth largest city in
2 the Empire, it should be no surprise that it spread to Ephesus.

3 Before the societal changes implemented under Augustus were put into place, a woman
4 had little identity outside of her family; she was either someone's daughter or wife, and her
5 domain was the home. Evidence of this can be seen in the absence of a single statue of a woman
6 in either the Roman forum or other public spaces during the Roman Republic (509-27 B.C.).⁴¹
7 Without official public roles (other than religious), women did not need to be defined in the
8 public sphere.⁴² This all changed with the Empire. With the emergence of women in public
9 society, statues of Roman woman, like Livia, the wife of Augustus, and other notable women,
10 suddenly appeared across the Roman landscape modeling the type of woman the Roman
11 Emperor wanted propagated across the empire.

12 The higher profile women experienced was largely due to changes in Roman law that
13 provided wives with a measure of financial independence and security. During the Republic, a
14 Roman wife, and all that she had, was legally the property of her husband. If a marriage was
15 terminated, there was little hope that the wife could recover any portion of her all-important
16 wedding dowry. To protect wives from economic injustice, a new series of laws were
17 implemented. These laws gave a wife the legal right to own and administer property separately
18 from her husband. Not only did these laws give a wife an identity separate from her husband, but
19 it also provided a wife with a new degree of authority and power. A wealthy wife could do as she

⁴¹ Tuck, "Eumachia, Public Priestess."

⁴² Elizabeth Bartman, "Early Imperial Female Portraiture," in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, 416.

1 pleased, for she no longer need fear divorce. On the contrary, she now had the right even to
2 divorce her husband and receive a portion, if not all, of her dowry back.⁴³

3 The financial independence women experienced, particularly those of the upper class,
4 provided them with the resources to become involved in their local communities in ways
5 otherwise unavailable to them. Archaeological evidence has revealed that women were property-
6 owners, operating businesses,⁴⁴ loaning money, serving as priestesses, representing themselves
7 and others in courts, using their influence and patronage to support political candidates, and even
8 holding the office of magistrate themselves.⁴⁵ Examples of their influence and involvement can
9 also be seen in the erection of honorific statues of them, the depiction of their faces on coins, and
10 the dedication of buildings to them. The influence of Eumachia, the public priestess in Pompeii,
11 and Bernice, the wealthy Jewess described earlier illustrate the sort of new opportunities
12 available to some women. The pages of the New Testament also illustrate the ways in which
13 these sorts of women contributed to the spread of Christianity. The patronage of women like
14 Phoebe was of significant benefit to the ministry of apostle Paul (Rom 16:1), as were women
15 whom he identifies as co-laborers in the gospel (Phil 4:3), as well as others who allowed their
16 homes to serve as the place of worship for the newly organized followers of Jesus (Acts 16:14-

⁴³ E. Fantham, H. Peet Foley, N. Boymel Kampen, S.B. Pomeroy, and A.H. Shapiro, "The 'New Woman': Representation and Reality," in *Women in the Classical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 289; S. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), ch. 10 and p. 446.

⁴⁴ An example of the independence and opportunities available to a woman not from an elite Roman family is Julia Felix from Pompeii. An inscription identifies her as "the illegitimate daughter of Spurius." Following the earthquake in A.D. 62, Julia was operating her own rental business. Without the support of a wealthy family, Julia sought to make her living renting out a portion of her residence for either residential or commercial use. Since her name appears alone on the inscription, it is impossible to know if she was married. Eve D'Ambra, "Women on the Bay of Naples," in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, 405-09.

⁴⁵ E.g., Phile in Priene (first-century B.C.) and Plencia Magna (late first-century A.D.) in Perge. See Berry, 118-19; Winter, 174-193.

1 15; Col 4:15; 1 Cor 16:19). It was a new era in Roman history, and upper class women were
2 embracing the opportunities available to them.

3 While this cultural revolution had several positive impacts upon Roman society, it also
4 had its drawbacks. At the expense of the Roman family, some women used their new freedom
5 simply to enhance their own personal pleasure and gratification. Instead of emulating the
6 conservative dress, demeanor, and sexual propriety associated with the traditional Roman wife,
7 the new Roman woman lived a life of excess as did the men. Consumed with the beauty of the
8 physical body, she adorned herself with the sensual attire, cosmetics, expensive jewelry, and
9 elaborate hairstyles traditionally associated with courtesans and prostitutes. Many older women
10 with substantial endowments also sought to experience the sexual freedoms previously reserved
11 for men by seeking liaisons with younger men.

12 Seneca, the first-century Roman philosopher, decried these new social mores in a letter
13 he wrote his mother contrasting her modesty with that of "new Roman women."

14 "Unchastity, the greatest evil of our time, has never classed you with the great majority of
15 women. Jewels have not moved you, nor pearls...you have not been perverted by the
16 imitation of worse women that leads even the virtuous into pitfalls; you have never
17 blushed for the number of children, as if it mocked your age.... You never tried to
18 conceal your pregnancy as though it was indecent, nor have you crushed the hope of
19 children that were being nurtured in your body. You have never defiled your face with
20 paints and cosmetics. Never have you fancied the kind of dress that exposed no greater
21 nakedness by being removed. Your only ornament, the kind of beauty that time does not
22 tarnish, is the great honor of modesty."⁴⁶
23

24 With influence, power, and wealth, the "new Roman woman" was often thought of as
25 brash and outspoken in her speech. Traditionally, in Greek and Roman culture women were to

⁴⁶ Seneca, *Consolation to his Mother*, 16:3-4.

1 be seen and heard as little as possible outside the home. Musonius Rufus, a first-century Stoic
2 philosopher, wrote:

3 Women who associate with philosophers are bound to be arrogant for the most part and
4 presumptuous, in that abandoning their own households and turning to the company of
5 men they practices speeches, talk like sophists, and analyze syllogisms, when they ought
6 to be sitting at home spinning.⁴⁷
7

8 These men were not alone in their objection to certain aspects associated with the new
9 Roman woman. The pages of Roman literature are filled with similar voices, and are even
10 echoed in the New Testament (cf. 1 Tim 2:9-10; 1 Pet 3:2-5). In fact, the Roman Emperor
11 Augustus was so outraged himself that he passed a series of laws designed to counter what he
12 felt was a promiscuous tendency in the Empire. These laws included making extramarital sexual
13 intercourse by a free woman a crime, and requiring a husband to divorce his wife if there were
14 clear evidence she had committed adultery. Legislation was also passed that attempted to
15 regulate the type of clothes a woman could wear—policing a woman's clothing, of course, was
16 difficult to enforce.⁴⁸ The situation had become so troubling that Augustus was even compelled
17 to banish his own daughter Julia for her openly promiscuous lifestyle. In addition to legislation,
18 Augustus also sought to promote what he felt was the proper attire of the ideal Roman woman
19 through statues of women erected in public forums across the empire depicting women clad in
20 the modest three-layered garment of the traditional Roman wife.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Musonius Rufus, ll. 54-58, text and translation by Cora E. Lutz, "Musonius Rufus, 'The Roman Socrates'," *Yale Classical Studies* 10 (1947), 43.

⁴⁸ Judith P. Hallet, "Women in Augustan Rome," in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, 373. Thomas A. J. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality and the Law in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 162.

⁴⁹ E. Fantham, H. Peet Foley, N. Boymel Kampen, S.B. Pomeroy, and A.H. Shapiro, "Women, Family, and Sexuality in the Age of Augustus and the Julio-Claudians," in *Women in the Classical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 294-329.

1 To a certain degree, the various cultural currents discussed in this section interacted and fed
2 upon each other, with the rise of the new Roman woman likely serving as a foundation for all the
3 others. From this mixed environment came the women in the Ephesian congregations. Those
4 from pagan backgrounds would need to learn that the excesses associated with the new Roman
5 woman, along with its sensual practices and outspokenness, were inappropriate for Christian
6 women. On the other hand, those from a Jewish background would also need to learn that the
7 new opportunities available to women were not opposed to a woman's traditional role in the
8 home, nor did they eliminate the importance of a wife treating her husband with respect.

9 **The Context of the Passage**

10 After charging Timothy to be faithful to the gospel and to oppose the falsehoods
11 circulating among the Ephesian believers, Paul gives specific instructions in 1 Tim 2:1-3:16 on
12 how these problems should be handled. He first instructs Timothy on how to deal with the
13 problem in the context of church worship (2:1-15), and then to prevent further problems in the
14 future, he stipulates the characteristics that should guide the church when choosing new leaders
15 (3:1-13). Since our interest in Paul's counsel regarding women occurs at the end of this first
16 section, I'll briefly summarize Paul's counsel leading up to that section.

17 Paul's first response to the problems ravaging the believers in Ephesus is to encourage the
18 church to pray for all people (2:1-2). The repetition of the word "all" (2:1, 2, 4, 6) indicates that
19 the focus is not on prayer in general, but specifically prayer for *all* people. In the midst of
20 theological infighting the church had lost sight of its responsibility to those outside its walls. In
21 calling the church to pray for *all people*, the apostle is attempting to change the orientation of the
22 church from being inward looking to outward looking. In its essence this was the fundamental

1 problem in Ephesus. Theological infighting among the believers had caused the church to lose
2 sight of the reason for its existence—its mission to share the gospel of Christ with a dying world.

3 In order for the church to regain its focus on mission, Paul encourages Timothy to
4 address two particular problems that were undermining the unity of the church: the behavior of
5 men and women in worship.⁵⁰

6 **Men and Women in Worship (1 Tim 2:8-10)**

7 I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or
8 quarreling; 9 likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with
9 modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, 10 but with
10 what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. (ESV)
11

12 Paul first addresses the behavior of men.⁵¹ He urges that they "should pray, lifting holy
13 hands without anger or quarreling" (v. 8). The fact that the apostle singles out men does not
14 mean that his counsel does not also apply to women in general (e.g., 1 Cor 11:5). It merely
15 indicates that in the context of the specific situation in Ephesus it was the believing men who
16 were struggling with inappropriate attitudes during prayer. The reference to anger and quarreling
17 likely reflects the dissension between believers that had arisen due to the heretical teachings
18 dividing the church. The arrogant and quarrelsome spirit of the false teachers (6:4-5; 3:3, 6) was
19 poisoning the spirit of patience, love, and forgiveness necessary for genuine prayer to be
20 effective (cf. Phil 2:14; Eph 4:31; Col 3:8).

21 Having addressed the attitude of men in prayer, Paul turns his attention to the disruptive
22 demeanor of women within the church. The use of the word "likewise" that introduces the shift

⁵⁰ The conjunction "then" (*oun*) indicates his counsel on men and women is organically connected to his previous counsel on the universal mission of the church.

⁵¹ Although the word translated as "men" (*andres*) can refer to either a single or married man, Paul's adaptation of the household code and the discussion of women in what follows suggest that he primarily has husbands in mind. This would certainly not have been a surprise since the vast majority of men at the time would have been married.

1 from men to women coupled with the issue of adornment suggests Paul's comments in this
2 section are best understood in the context of a household code—societal rules that governed
3 husband/wife, parent/child, and master/slave relationships.⁵² Further confirmation of this is seen
4 in how this account parallels the contrast between outward and internal adornment in the
5 household code in 1 Peter 3:3-5.

6 As we have already seen, a woman's dress became a highly important issue in the first-
7 century. Liberalizing cultural trends had influenced a generation of women/wives to reject the
8 traditional modest attire of a Roman matron for the more sensual and expensive dress of the
9 courtesan. One of the problems with the women/wives in Ephesus was their breach of the
10 traditional household dress code. In an age when a woman's dress would "signal either modesty
11 and dignity or promiscuous availability,"⁵³ the situation among the believers in Ephesus was
12 hardly trivial. Flouting the traditional dress-code was considered to bring shame on these
13 women's husbands, but it also had the potential of severely damaging the reputation of the
14 church in the eyes of the unbelievers in Ephesus—the very people the church wanted to reach
15 with the gospel.

16 In addressing the situation, Paul does not harangue these women/wives, nor does he deny
17 them the right to adorn themselves. In fact, he says they *should* adorn themselves (v. 9). The
18 problem was the way they were going about it. Instead of following secular fashion trends, Paul
19 urges them to dress modestly, and to avoid wearing clothing that is deliberately suggestive and
20 expensive—two standard characteristics associated with the self-indulgent new "Roman"
21 woman. On the contrary, Christian women are to dress with "modesty" (*aidōs*) and with "self-

⁵² Paul's use of *hosautōs* (2:9; 3:8, 11; 5:25; Titus 2:3, 6) is equivalent to the use of *homoiōs* in the household code of 1 Pet 3:1, 7; 5:5).

⁵³ Towner, 205.

1 control" (*sōphrosunē*), a standard phrase in connection to women that referred to sexual
2 propriety—the cardinal virtue of a wife. In place of the elaborate hairstyles, jewelry, and
3 expensive clothing⁵⁴ associated with the sort of woman who wanted to attract the attention of
4 men to her outward beauty, Paul says, true beauty is internal, rooted in the godly character of a
5 life lived in loving service to God and others.

6 **Women in Learning (1 Tim 2:11)**

7 Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. (ESV)
8

9 Paul's continuing admonition of the women/wives in Ephesus indicates he saw the
10 manner of their dress as merely a symptom of a deeper spiritual problem. In adopting the dress
11 associated with immoral women, these women/wives demonstrated that they still had much to
12 learn about the gospel. They had completely failed to understand on the most basic level the
13 implications the gospel has on how the Christian life should be lived. A wider reading of 1st
14 Timothy indicates Paul realized that the trouble facing these women was not isolated to the issue
15 of adornment alone. At the same time, they also appear to have bought into the ideas of the false
16 teachers in regards to adopting an ascetic lifestyle, including the rejection of the institution of
17 marriage itself (cf. 4:2-3; 5:14-15).

18 To help remedy the situation Paul first takes the positive step of instructing that these
19 women become "quiet learners." What sort of instruction does Paul have in mind? The word is
20 *manthanō* in Greek. The word means "to learn." In this context it "envisages Christian
21 instruction" that occurs under a teacher (Rom 16:17; 1 Cor 14:31, 35; Eph 4:20; Phil 4:9; Col

⁵⁴ The "costly" (*polutelēs*) attire" identified here does not refer to clothing that is a little more expensive than others, but to that which is "extremely" expensive. The same word is used to describe the quality of the alabaster ointment poured on the head of Jesus that cost a year's wages (Mark 14:3).

1 1:7) as part of a "Christian meeting"⁵⁵ (1 Cor 12:7-11, 28-30; 14:1-33). As such it "encompasses
2 both formal instruction and practical learning"⁵⁶ in the gospel.

3 Paul also states that the environment in which this learning should occur is one of
4 quietness (*hēsychia*) and submission (*hypotagē*). The word *hēsychia* and its cognates can refer
5 either to absolute silence (e.g., Acts 21:14; 22:2) or to a quiet demeanor (e.g., 1 Thess 4:11; 2
6 Thess 3:12; 1 Pet 3:4). Paul's use of *hēsychia* in this passage and elsewhere (1 Tim 2:2; 1 Thess
7 4:11; 2 Thess 3:12) and his preference for the word *sigāō* when requiring complete silence (1
8 Cor 14:28, 30, 34) indicate he has in mind the respectful demeanor these women are to show
9 toward their teachers. This would not have prohibited these women from asking questions. It just
10 stipulates the attitude they were expected to have while learning.

11 Along with a respectful demeanor, these women were also to learn with "all
12 submissiveness." Paul expected the same of men who were not exercising a teaching function
13 within the church (cf. 1 Cor 16:16; Heb 13:17; 1 Peter 5:5). Apparently, like the men, the
14 women were having trouble with dissension and quarrelling, and Paul gave culturally appropriate
15 counsel to each. While the terminology again mirrors the language of the household code, its use
16 here does not appear to specifically refer to the husband-wife relationship (cf. 1 Cor 14:34). The
17 context suggests it is instead an application of the household code to the teacher/student
18 relationship described in the passage.⁵⁷ As the wife was expected to be submissive to the
19 authority of her husband, so in the context of the instruction occurring within the church, as
20 students these women/wives were expected to accept the authority and the teaching of the

⁵⁵ I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 452.

⁵⁶ Vyhmeister, 342.

⁵⁷ Marshall, 454; Towner, 215-16. Of course, it is possible that the woman's teacher might be her husband (cf. 1 Cor 14:34), but that is not explicitly stated in this passage. It appears, rather, to refer more generally to anyone who occupies the role of teacher.

1 teacher. Once again, what Paul requires of these women would have also been expected of men
2 who were learners.

3 If the same attitude was expected of all learners, why did Paul need to specifically require
4 it of these women/wives? The answer is twofold: (1) the track record of these women was
5 anything but quiet. In fact, that was part of the problem. Paul describes them later as "gossips
6 and busybodies, saying what they should not" (5:13). They needed to do less talking, and more
7 listening. (2) In the context of a house church, these women would have likely felt far more
8 comfortable expressing their opinion in a house than they would have in a more public setting—
9 particularly if the believers were meeting in their own homes for worship. Moreover, as we saw
10 earlier, one of the influences of the new Roman woman was a spirit of outspokenness, including
11 even challenging men. Influenced by these trends, Paul may have been trying to avoid further
12 confrontation with in the church by restricting these women from engaging in argumentation
13 during the teaching of Scripture. Paul desired an atmosphere in Ephesus where learning could
14 take place, not more controversy and theological infighting.

15 **Women, Teaching, Authority, and Quietness (1 Tim 2:12)**

16 I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain
17 quiet. (ESV)
18

19 On the basis of this verse, evangelical scholars like Douglas Moo claim: "In every age
20 and place: Women are not to teach men nor to have authority over men because such activity
21 would violate the structure of created sexual relationships and would involve the woman in
22 something for which she is not suited."⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Douglas Moo, "1 Timothy 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance," *Trinity Journal* 1 (1980), 82.

1 While Paul is clearly restricting women in Ephesus from engaging in a teaching ministry
2 within the church, the claim that this proscription is a universal and timeless injunction is hard to
3 reconcile with what is said elsewhere in the New Testament about the work of women in
4 connection to the gospel. In his letter to Titus, the apostle admonishes older women to teach and
5 train the younger women (2:3, 4). In fact, several years earlier in Ephesus itself, Priscilla and her
6 husband Aquila are credited with explaining to Apollos "the way of God more accurately," a
7 clear reference to a teaching ministry (Acts 18:26). In his letter to the Philippians, Paul identifies
8 two women, Euodia and Syntyche, as coworkers who "labored side by side" with him "in the
9 gospel" (Phil 4:2-3). Paul's recognition of several of his female coworkers by name in Romans
10 16 suggests that these women were far from silent (16:3, 6, 12). Even more significantly, in 1
11 Corinthians 11:5 Paul specifically acknowledges the right of women to pray or prophesy in
12 church, activities that certainly were done aloud.

13 Paul's prohibition against women teaching follows his affirmation of the right of women
14 to be instructed in the gospel (v. 11). This verse divides into three basic units that need to be
15 examined individually and in relation to each other: (1) the verbal phrase "I do not permit," and
16 two infinitives that complete the prohibition, "to teach" and "to exercise authority."

17 (1) "I do not permit." The verb "to permit" (*epitrepō*) in Greek is in the present indicative
18 tense. Some claim that the present tense indicates that Paul merely has a temporary injunction in
19 mind, as in "I am not permitting women to teach at the present time." While this may be true, it
20 claims a far more limited function of the present tense than is the case. It also ignores the fact
21 that Paul can also use the present tense to indicate a timeless truth (cf. 1 Cor 7:10; 1 Thess 4:1;
22 5:14). For this reason no firm conclusion can be drawn regarding the extent of time Paul has in

1 mind on the basis of the tense of the verb alone; the context of the passage would be the primary
2 indication.

3 What is more significant in this prohibition is its relation to a similar expression Paul uses
4 in 1 Corinth 14:34. In response to a group of women who were continuously interrupting the
5 worship service with questions, Paul states that these women were "not to speak in church," but
6 if they want to learn they should ask "their husbands at home." Paul anchors his ruling in this
7 matter on church custom: "As in all the churches of the saints, it is not permitted for a woman to
8 speak." Although the context is different in 1st Timothy, it seems significant that in dealing with
9 the women/wives in Ephesus, Paul does not refer to the authority of church tradition ("it is not
10 permitted"). Instead he relies upon his own perspective ("I do not permit").⁵⁹ This seems to
11 suggest, as Towner notes, that Paul is either expressing "a new command that does not rely on
12 tradition (cf. 1 Cor 14:34) or an ad hoc solution to a newly encountered situation."⁶⁰ In either
13 case, this seems to imply that the situation in Ephesus is unique.

14 (2) "To teach" (Gr. *didaskain*). The first prohibition Paul states is that Christian women in
15 Ephesus are not to "teach."⁶¹ What sort of teaching is Paul proscribing? The answer to this
16 question is fairly straightforward. We have already seen that Paul's overriding concern in
17 Ephesus has been the issue of teaching. He wants the spread of false doctrine to cease, and the
18 true authoritative gospel to be proclaimed. Paul uses the cognate noun of the verb "to teach"
19 seven times in 1st Timothy to describe the proclamation of the true apostolic gospel (Gr.
20 *didaskalia*; 1 Tim 1:10; 4:6, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:1, 3). Within this context the "teaching" Paul opposes

⁵⁹ Of course, the use of the person pronoun "I" does not diminish the authority inherent in Paul's words. As an apostle of Christ Jesus, Paul expects his personal judgment to be absolutely binding for the situation in Ephesus (cf. 1 Tim 2:8; 5:21; 6:13-14; 2 Tim 1:13; 4:1-2).

⁶⁰ Towner, 217.

⁶¹ The placement of this verb at the beginning of the sentence in Greek, a syntactical technique called fronting, indicates the prominence of this prohibition in Paul's thought ("To teach I do not permit...").

1 clearly points to "the task of conveying authoritative instruction in a congregational setting."⁶² It
2 should not be overlooked, however, that the fact that Paul had to issue a proscription against
3 women teaching implies that at least some Christian women in Ephesus had been involved in a
4 teaching role in the church. This should be of no surprise, of course. For we have already seen
5 that women were involved in various aspects of ministry in Pauline churches.

6 Why did Paul reverse his own practice and prohibit Christian women from engaging in a
7 teaching ministry in Ephesus? Although the evidence is not entirely clear, at least two forces
8 seem to have prompted Paul's prohibition: (1) a large number of the women in Ephesus were
9 mesmerized with the false teachings dividing the church, particularly a group of wealthy
10 women/widows. As noted earlier, these women appear to have been caught up with the false
11 teachers' claims that the age to come had arrived in all of its fullness, including the idea that the
12 promised resurrection had occurred spiritually (cf. 1 Tim 6:20-21; 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17-18). This
13 spiritual resurrection had ushered in a spiritual age free from the material concerns of this world
14 and its traditional ordering of society. As such, their new spiritual identity had led some women
15 to reject the domestic role of bearing children, while widows preferred to remain single rather
16 than remarry. (2) Not only were these women embracing these false teachings, but they also
17 were using their influence and means to advocate for them themselves (cf. 1 Tim 5:13; Rev
18 2:20). Their support of the false teachers had become so disruptive to the spread of the true
19 gospel that Paul finally had to take drastic measures if the heresy in Ephesus was going to be
20 stopped: the Christian women in Ephesus had to be restricted to the role of learner.

21 (2) "To exercise authority" (Gr. *authenteō*). In addition to teaching, Paul prohibits the
22 women/wives in Ephesus from "exercising authority over a man." What sort of "authority" is

⁶² Marshall, 455.

1 being prohibited? Those opposed to women holding leadership positions in ministry argue that
2 *authenteō* refers to the normal exercise of authority. This interpretation can hardly be the case,
3 though. It is far more probable that Paul had a more negative form of authority in mind, as in "to
4 domineer" or "to usurp." The evidence suggesting this is considerable: (1) Paul's choice of the
5 verb *authenteō* instead of the usual word for authority (*exousia*); (2) the negative connotations
6 associated with the *authenteō* word-group; (3) the translation of *authenteō* in the ancient versions
7 as "to dominate"; and (4) the immediate context of the passage.

8 If Paul simply had the normal exercise of authority in mind, he would have used the word
9 *exousia* rather than *authenteō*. Along with its verbal form, *exousia* is the standard word for
10 "authority" in the New Testament, occurring a total of 116 times in the New Testament. In the
11 Gospels it describes the "authority" of secular rulers to issue orders (Matt 8:9; Luke 7:8; 19:17;
12 20:20), to the extent of a ruler's "authority" or jurisdiction (Luke 23:7), and it can even refer to
13 the governing authorities themselves (Luke 12:11; Titus 3:1). It is also Paul's term of choice
14 when discussing authority in his letters. He uses it, for example, to refer to the "authority" a
15 potter has over his clay (Rom 9:21), the "authority" of a ruler over his subjects (Rom 13:3), and
16 even of his own "authority" over the churches (2 Cor 13:10; 2 Thess 3:9). Yet when proscribing
17 the activity of the women in Ephesus, Paul avoids his customary use of *exousia*. In its place he
18 uses the relatively rare verb *authenteō*—a word that is so unusual that it not only occurs nowhere
19 else in the New Testament, but it also known to occur only four times in all of Greek literature
20 before the Christian era. Why did Paul deliberately choose such an unusual word? He must have
21 seen a particular nuance associated with the meaning of *authenteō* that fit the circumstance in
22 Ephesus far better than did the normal use of authority implied in *exousia*.

1 In order to elucidate the meaning of such an uncommon word, scholars have examined
2 every occurrence of *authenteō* and its cognates in the *Thesaurus Lingua Graece (TLG)*, an
3 electronic database of nearly every extant literary text written in Greek from Homer to the fall of
4 Byzantium in A.D. 1453. The most recent study conducted by Henry Baldwin produced 314
5 references, including 85 uses of the verb itself. Baldwin identified a range of four basic
6 meanings of the verb: (1) to rule/reign; (2) to control, to dominate; (3) to act independently; and
7 (4) to be the originator of something.⁶³ From these categories, Baldwin argued that the root
8 meaning of *authenteō* is authority without any particular negative connotation.⁶⁴

9 Baldwin's conclusions, however, have been rightly challenged for a number of reasons.⁶⁵
10 First, he not only too quickly discounts the nuance of exercising autocratic power as not
11 applicable to 1st Timothy, but he also discredits Chrysostom's clear use of the *authenteō* to mean
12 "to domineer" or "play the tyrant" by labeling it as a "unique usage."⁶⁶ Such a use is hardly
13 unique. Contrary to Baldwin's conclusions, an examination of the four verbal forms of *authenteō*
14 that are either contemporary with or prior to Paul's use of the verb all have an element of force
15 associated with them.⁶⁷ It is hardly reasonable to discount the way that this verb was used by the
16 literature and speech of Paul's time and insist on interpreting the meaning based on later usage.

17 In an attempt to avoid any negative connotations associated with *authenteō*, Baldwin also
18 refuses to acknowledge the domineering abuse of power that would have naturally been

⁶³ See, Henry S. Baldwin, "An Important Word" in *Women in the Church*, 49-51.

⁶⁴ Baldwin, 49-51, n. 47.

⁶⁵ Marshall, 456-58; Towner, 221.

⁶⁶ Baldwin, 47. Chrysostom, *Homily 10 on Colossians*.

⁶⁷ See Linda Belleville, "Exegetical Fallacies in Interpreting 1 Timothy 2:11-15," *Priscilla Papers* 17 (2003), 5-6; "Teaching and Usurping Authority," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 214-15. Baldwin's claim that Belleville's translations are "unsatisfactory" is hardly convincing (See Baldwin, n. 50, 202-03). While the individual use of *authenteō* may not have an overly pejorative tone, the context in each of the four earliest uses of the verb indicates an element of force or compulsion is in mind in each case.

1 associated with the verb due to the negative meanings of its related nouns. For example, the
2 cognate noun *authentēs* was used in early Greek literature to refer to a (1) "murderer."⁶⁸ During
3 the Hellenistic age, it also came to refer to an (2) "author, perpetrator,"⁶⁹ as in the "original
4 authors" behind a murderous plot,⁷⁰ or as in an (3) absolute "master."⁷¹ The cognate *authentia*
5 also means "absolute authority." It seems difficult to believe that the basic idea of the verb would
6 have been entirely free from the idea of violence and force associated with these cognate
7 nouns.⁷²

8 Would Paul have been aware of the any negative connotations associated with *authentēō*?
9 It appears likely. The noun *authentas* occurs in the Wisdom of Solomon, an early Jewish text
10 written in the mid-second or early first century B.C. to encourage Jews living outside the land of
11 Israel, like Paul's family, to be faithful to God. In chapter 12:6, the Wisdom of Solomon
12 describes the detestable practices of the Canaanites including parents who "murder" (Gr.
13 *authentas*) their own children. Was Paul familiar with this passage? While it is impossible to
14 know for certain, it is highly probable. Paul was raised in the exact setting addressed in the
15 Wisdom of Solomon, and we know that Paul was widely read. Moreover, the nearly 40 allusions
16 to the Wisdom of Solomon in the Pauline Epistles⁷³ indicate at the very least that Paul was
17 familiar with the book. The likelihood of his knowledge of this particular verse seems even more

⁶⁸ Herodotus 1:117; Thucydides 3.58; Euripides, *Her. Fur.* 1359; Clement, Philo, *Worse* 78; *Strom.* 2.38.3.

⁶⁹ Polybius 22.14.2; Diodorus Siculus 16.61.1; Jos. *J.W.* 2:240; 1.582.

⁷⁰ Jos., *J.W.* 2:240.

⁷¹ Euripides, *Supp.* 442; Hermas, *Sim.* 9.5.6.

⁷² A third cognate *authentikos* occurs frequently in non-literary materials with a more distinct meaning of something that is shown to be "authentic," "original," or "warranted" (Marshall, 457, Belleville, "Exegetical Fallacies," 5).

⁷³ Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 873-74.

1 probable since he makes a strong allusion to Wisdom on Solomon 12:12 in Romans 9:19, a
2 passage just six verses later than the reference to *authentas* in 12:6.

3 Another indication that *authenteō* refers to a domineering form of authority is the
4 testimony of the earliest translations of the Greek New Testament into other ancient languages.
5 These early translations are known as "versions." They indicate that early Christians from across
6 the ancient world understood that the intended meaning of *authenteō* was one of domination.
7 Missionaries were responsible for the earliest versions of the New Testament. Two of the earliest
8 versions were for people who spoke Latin and Syriac. These versions are especially helpful to
9 scholars who study the Greek New Testament for they provide an additional line of evidence in
10 cases where there is some question about the wording of the Greek.

11 How do the earliest Latin and Syriac versions treat *authenteō*? In each case, the versions
12 clearly indicate they understood *authenteō* to refer to a domineering form of authority. The Old
13 Latin, dated to the 4th century in the Pauline Epistles, translate *authenteō* with the Latin verb
14 "*dominari*" meaning "to rule over." The later Vulgate also translates the passage the same way.
15 This same word is used to translate other New Testament words where a negative or absolute
16 form of authority is in view (e.g., 1 Pet 5:3; Acts 19:16; Mark 10:42; Rom 6:9, 14). It certainly is
17 not neutral. The same is true in the earliest Syriac copies of Paul's letter. Dated to the 5th century,
18 the Peshitta translates *authenteō* with the verb "*mrah*." It means, "to venture, dare, be rash,
19 hasty" or "headstrong."⁷⁴ In relation to 1 Tim 2:12, *mrah* is defined as "to lord it (over)."⁷⁵

20 In light of the uses of *authenteō* and its cognate nouns in Paul's time, and the additional
21 insights revealed in the Latin and Syriac versions, it is no wonder that modern lexicographers

⁷⁴ J. Payne Smith, ed., *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1902), 300.

⁷⁵ William Jennings, *Lexicon to the Syriac New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), 131.

1 like Louw and Nida classify *authenteō* into the semantic domain "to control, restrain, domineer"
2 and define it as "to control in a domineering manner."⁷⁶ In the definitive Greek Lexicon on the
3 New Testament, Frederick Danker also agrees with the negative nuance associated with it. He
4 defines *authenteō* as "to assume a stance of independent authority, give orders to, dictate to."⁷⁷

5 The final indication that *authenteō* conveys more than just an ordinary use of authority is
6 its immediate context. The correlative conjunction "neither ... nor" indicates the two prohibitions
7 are closely related. This type of "neither ... nor" construction in the New Testament can be used
8 to contrast two separate items, as in "neither Jew nor Gentile" (Gal 3:23). If this were the case
9 here Paul would be prohibiting women from both the act of teaching and the act of exercising
10 leadership. At other times, however, the second of the two terms in this sort of construction can
11 serve as a closer definition or further explanation of the first, as in "where thieves neither break
12 in nor steal" (Matt 6:20). Understood this way, Paul's prohibition would be against a form of
13 teaching that was domineering in nature. While both constructions are possible, the latter is more
14 likely the case here due to the parallelism between verses 11 and 12. The contrast Paul is making
15 in these verses is between "learning" and "teaching." He emphasizes the submissive and
16 respectful demeanor in learning that should characterize the women/wives in Ephesus in verse
17 11. This demeanor is so vital to the current situation that Paul mentions it again at the end of
18 verse 12. Why? Because the teaching these women were involved in had been anything but
19 submissive. A domineering and overbearing spirit characterized it, or it was at least perceived in

⁷⁶ J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2 vols., (2d ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1989).

⁷⁷ Bauer, Walter, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (3rd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

1 that manner. Paul's emphasis on a "quiet" spirit hardly makes sense if the second infinitive is
2 seen merely as the exercise of authority.

3 The outspokenness that characterized the Christian women/wives in Ephesus provides yet
4 another indication that the values associated with rise of the "new Roman woman" were likely at
5 work behind the challenges Paul faced. The emergence of well-to-do married women in the
6 Forum and the courts, in addition to the high public profile of women associated with the
7 Artemis cult would have easily encouraged the women in Ephesus, perhaps through the false
8 teachers, to overstep the boundaries of the freedom and equality that was rooted in Paul's gospel
9 message. Under such influences, the women/wives were exercising their spiritual gifts in a way
10 that was overbearing and disrespectful of men in general and of their husbands in particular. The
11 danger posed to the church required Paul to take drastic action. The Christian women in Ephesus
12 could no longer continue teaching at this time. They had to return to the role of a learner and be
13 grounded in the truth of the gospel.

14 **Adam, Eve, and Childbearing (1 Tim 2:13-15)**

15 For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was
16 deceived and became a transgressor. 15 Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they
17 continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. (ESV)
18

19 What relationship does the story of Adam and Eve have to Paul's prohibition against
20 women continuing to teach within the Ephesian church? A common explanation is that the story
21 provides the *reason* for Paul's probation: Women must not teach *because* the order of creation
22 teaches that God created men to lead and women to follow. However, this sort of "first-then"
23 terminology hardly demonstrates that Adam was the only one able to teach. It does nothing more
24 than to define a sequence of time. A clear example of its use in Paul's epistles can be seen in the
25 sequence of events associated with the Second Coming. The fact that dead in Christ rise first

1 does not indicate they have any sort of functional headship over those who are then caught up in
2 the air (cf. 1 Thess 4:16-17).

3 It is also claimed on the basis of this passage that Paul refers to Eve's deception as proof
4 that women are not fit to lead because the female gender is more susceptible to falsehood than
5 men.⁷⁸ This interpretation is unlikely for several reasons. First, although women were often
6 portrayed as inferior to men in Jewish and Greco-Roman literature,⁷⁹ Paul's comments betray no
7 such attitude. He is far too supportive of women and their role in ministry (e.g., Titus 2:3; Acts
8 18:26; Rom 16:1; Gal 3:23, etc.) to have held such views himself. Secondly, the use of the
9 conjunction *gar* ("for") in Greek "typically introduces an *explanation* for what precedes, not a
10 cause."⁸⁰ An illustration of how *gar* functions in an explanatory role occurs just a few verses
11 earlier (v. 5). In verse 4, Paul states that God wants all people to be saved and to come to the
12 knowledge of the truth. The *gar* ("for") that begins verse 5 does not provide the theological
13 grounds (cause) for God's desire is to save everyone, but it explains why God has established
14 only one way of salvation for everyone—there is only one God, not several. Similarly in v. 12,
15 Paul does not permit women/wives to domineer over men/husbands, and in v. 13 he provides the
16 *explanation*: Eve was created to be Adam's equal partner, not his boss. Paul is arguing against
17 the syncretistic false teachers who misinterpreted Gen 1-2 to teach the superiority of women over
18 men without establishing the contrary—the superiority or headship of men over women. He says,
19 in effect, "Your acceptance of the false teachings and societal customs that encourage women to

⁷⁸ E.g., John Phillips, *Exploring the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 75-8.

⁷⁹ E.g., Philo, *Questions on Genesis* 1:33, 46.

⁸⁰ Belleville, "Teaching and Usurping Authority," 222. Belleville points out "the principal Greek causal conjunction is *hoti* (or *dioti*)." An excellent example of the difference between a explanatory instead of a casual use of *gar* is found in Matthew 8:8-9.

1 assume a domineering role over their husbands is wrong, for don't you know? It was Adam, not
2 Eve, who was created first. It was Eve, not Adam who was deceived."

3 Paul's allusion to Genesis continues with terminology reminiscent of the hope of
4 salvation connected to the bearing of children in Genesis 3:15-16. Although the serpent had
5 deceived Eve and led her into sin, God had promised the birth of a descendant, who would one
6 day defeat the serpent. In the pain that would accompany the birth of every child, there was also
7 to be a reminder of the hope that lay in God's promise of a deliver. Some see Paul's reference to
8 "childbearing" as a specific reference to the birth of Jesus.⁸¹ While this interpretation is possible,
9 it seems far too ambiguous to state for certain that this is a reference to Jesus. Paul's allusion is
10 far more general. He is seeking merely to affirm the value of marriage and childbearing in
11 response to the heretical teachings (and, perhaps, cultural trends) that had caused Christian
12 women in Ephesus to look disparagingly upon such domestic relationships and responsibilities
13 (cf. 4:3; 5:9-10, 14).

14 **Conclusion**

15 To summarize, the primary intention of 1 Tim 2:8-15 is not to specify the relationship that
16 should universally exist between men and women.⁸² Rather it contains advice directed to a
17 specific situation in Ephesus. Within instructions on worship, Paul encourages women to live
18 godly lives, to learn quietly, to avoid being deceived by the false teachers as Eve had been
19 deceived by the serpent, and to bear and raise children, all the time remaining firm in a
20 reasonable faith bathed in love. In the words of van der Jagt:

⁸¹ E.g., W. Lock, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1924, 1952), 33; D. Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: Tyndale, 1957, 1990), 92-3; G. W. Knight III, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1992), 146-7.

⁸² The following section is largely taken from a revised form of Vyhmeister's article "Proper Church Behavior in 1 Timothy 2:8-15," 350.

1 Women can have a good life and hope for eternal salvation without getting
2 involved in power struggles. They can reach the same spiritual heights as men
3 without renouncing their womanhood. What sounds so negative in the ears of
4 many now would have sounded positive in the ears of those who heard the
5 message in a different world from ours.⁸³
6

7 The concern of this passage is not about women serving in the ministry or as local church
8 elders, much less about ordination, since these were not issues in the congregations of Ephesus.
9 While the sparseness of information and the complex construction of the passage make it
10 difficult for modern readers to know precisely what Paul had in mind, it is clear that he was
11 addressing a current concern that Timothy and the Christians in Ephesus would have readily
12 understood. Furthermore, to take as eternally normative the limited prohibition of women's
13 teaching (v. 12)—when in other passages Paul clearly approves female participation in teaching,
14 praying, and prophesying—does violence to the hermeneutical principle of the unity of Scripture.
15 Likewise, to determine from v. 13 that priority in creation gives males the right to rule over
16 women goes beyond sound biblical interpretation.

⁸³ Krijn A. van der Jagt, "Women Are Saved through Bearing Children," *Bible Translator* 39 (1988), 207.