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## **Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:12-15**

**By Stuart Pattico**

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*Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version of the Holy Bible. Scriptures marked KJV are taken from the King James Version of the Holy Bible.*

<sup>12</sup>But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

<sup>13</sup>For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

<sup>14</sup>And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.

<sup>15</sup>Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.  
(1 Timothy 2:12-15 KJV)

At first glance, these verses may seem to ban to women from teaching an audience where men are present, or from holding a leadership position in the church over men. However, such an interpretation seems to be at odds with other scriptures. For example, **Deborah**, a prophetess, provided leadership to Israel (Judges 4:4-5). She even gave direction to the man Barak, the commander of Israel's army (Judges 4:6-7, 14). Also, **Huldah**, a prophetess, prophesied to men (2 Kings 22:14-20) and also gave them instruction (2 Kings 22:15, 18). There is also **Priscilla**, who with her husband Aquilla, expounded the word of God to the man Apollos (Acts 18:26). Paul certainly didn't have a problem with Priscilla, indeed he mentions her several times in his letters (Romans 16:3, 1 Corinthians 16:19, 2 Timothy 4:19).

A closer examination of 1 Timothy 2:12-15 reveals that it may not be saying what it initially appears to. What follows represents my personal understanding of these verses, and readers are encouraged to search out the matter for themselves. We will now analyse each of the verses to see what they say.

### **Verse 12**

You will notice that in verse 12, the words 'teach' and 'to usurp authority over' are connected by the word 'nor' – "I suffer not a woman to teach, **nor** to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (KJV). The Greek word for 'nor' in this verse is *oude* (pronounced oo-deh). Often, Paul used *oude* to connect two parallel thoughts. The second thought would often (but not always) be a repetition or amplification of the first thought. This is illustrated in the below Pauline passages. Where the text is underlined, it indicates that the text is a translation of the single Greek word *oude*. You will notice that what follows the underlined text (*oude*) is either a repetition or an amplification of the statement that preceded it.

*...There is none righteous, no, not one;*  
(Roman 3:10)

'No not one' is a repetition of the fact that 'there is none righteous'.

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Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. (1 Corinthians 15:50)

'Nor does corruption inherit incorruption' is a repetition of the fact that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead)  
(Galatians 1:1)

'Nor through man' is a repetition and amplification of 'not from men'.

And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject...  
(Galatians 4:14)

Paul uses the phrase 'or reject' as a way of repeating the fact that the Galatians did not 'despise' his trial in the flesh.

...so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.  
(Philippians 2:16)

'Or labored in vain' is a repetition and amplification of the thought 'run in vain'.

...We are not of the night nor of darkness.  
(1 Thessalonians 5:5)

'Nor of darkness' is a repetition of 'of the night'.

If Paul used *oude* in the same way in 1 Timothy 2:12 as he did in the above verses, then it indicates that 'teach' is defined, or further clarified by the phrase 'to usurp authority over the man'. To put it another way, 'usurp authority over' is a repetition or amplification of what Paul meant by 'teach'.

<sup>12</sup>But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. (KJV)

The word 'nor' thus indicates that 'teach' is defined by the phrase 'usurp authority over'. Therefore, Paul is not referring to normal teaching, where a woman would be teaching the Word to men and women in meekness and humility. Instead, it seems that Paul is here addressing the kind of teaching in which a woman sought to 'usurp authority over' a man (the original Greek is 'a man', not 'the man'). Paul is forbidding women from teaching in such a way that usurps authority over the men. With regards to this practice, the women were 'to be in silence' i.e. they are to voice nothing of the sort.

The Greek word translated 'usurp authority over' is the verb form of *authenteo*. The Enhanced Strong's Lexicon defines this word as follows:

**831** αὐθεντέω [*authenteo* /ow·then·teh·o/] v. From a compound of 846 and an obsolete hentes (a worker); GK 883; AV translates as "usurp authority over" once. **1** one who with his own hands kills another or himself. **2** one who

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acts on his own authority, autocratic. **3** an absolute master. **4** to govern, exercise dominion over one.

We can see from this that *authenteo* means more than to simply 'have authority over' (NKJV). Another possible translation would be to 'lord it over', which is how Hippolytus of Rome (a prolific writer in the early church c. 170 – c. 236) used *authenteo* when he wrote about how masters would treat their servants in the last days:

...Masters will lord it over their servants savagely<sup>1</sup>

The phrase 'lord it over' is a translation of *authenteo*. We see then that in 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul is banning the women from seeking to lord it over the men. In view of the fact that one possible meaning of *authenteo* is 'one who with his own hands kills another', it is also conceivable that Paul had in mind women trying to rule the men by force. In respect to this practice, the women were 'to be in silence' i.e. they are to voice nothing of the sort. Taking all the above into consideration, we can amplify 1 Timothy 2:12 as follows. Paul may not have had all of these meanings in mind, but this amplification will nevertheless show us the range of what he could have meant. I have placed numbers [1] to [4] in the amplification to indicate which part of the Enhanced Strong's Lexicon definition is being referenced:

<sup>12</sup> And I do not permit a woman to teach or to lord it over a man, by force [1] becoming his absolute master [3], governing him and exercising dominion over him [4]. She herself is to be under authority [2] and must not voice anything of this sort (i.e. be in silence).  
(My amplified version based on the Enhanced Strong's Lexicon and the quotation from Hippolytus)

In summary, Paul does not appear to be banning women from teaching men in meekness and humility. Rather, he is banning women from teaching men in a forceful, usurping and inappropriate way.

### Verses 13-14

It is commonly understood that one of the main streams of false teaching the early church had to contend with is today known as Gnosticism. In 1945, some Gnostic writings were discovered in Upper Egypt. One of these writings, which has been called 'On the Origins of the World', revealed that some Gnostics taught that Eve was created before Adam, and that she was sent to be his instructor, and that she was the source of knowledge. If this false teaching was already in circulation when Paul wrote this letter, it may have been what he was correcting and writing against when he continues:

<sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup> And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.  
(1 Timothy 2:13-14)

In this Gnostic false teaching, there was a female deity called Sophia Zoe, and some other evil rulers. The evil rulers planned to create a man called Adam. In response to

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<sup>1</sup> Hippolytus, *On the End of the World* (<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0504.htm> accessed 11th September 2008)

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their plans, and before the evil rulers were able to create Adam, Sophia Zoe created Eve to instruct Adam to despise his evil creators. Thus the Gnostics taught that Eve was created before Adam to be his instructor.

When Adam was created, his creators did not put a spirit within him. Adam was therefore inanimate. Sophia Zoe sent her breath into Adam, and he was able to move although he could not stand up. Sophia Zoe then sent Eve as an instructor to Adam, which is described as follows in the Gnostic writing:

Sophia sent her daughter Zoe, being called Eve, as an instructor, in order that she might make Adam, who had no soul, arise, so that those whom he should engender might become containers of light. When Eve saw her male counterpart prostrate, she had pity upon him, and she said, "Adam! Become alive! Arise upon the earth!" Immediately her word became accomplished fact. For Adam, having arisen, suddenly opened his eyes. When he saw her, he said, "You shall be called 'Mother of the Living'. For it is you who have given me life."<sup>2</sup>

According to the Gnostic interpretation, after this, Eve then left her body and went into the tree of knowledge. Thus, Adam's companion was now just Eve's body. The evil rulers commanded Adam and Eve's body not to eat from the tree. However, Eve's body was convinced to eat of the tree. When Adam, and Eve's body ate from the tree, "the light of knowledge...shone upon them". Thus Eve (who was in the tree) was the source of knowledge.

It may be that in verses 13-14, Paul is countering an early form of this false Gnostic teaching by stating that it was Adam who was formed first, not Eve as some Gnostics taught.

<sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup> And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.  
(1 Timothy 2:13-14)

By pointing out that it was not Adam, but rather the woman, who was deceived, Paul is not belittling women, or suggesting that men are superior. Rather, through Timothy, Paul is reminding the women of their mother's error so that they do not have an overly exalted view of themselves, and think that they are in a position to lord it over the men. Elsewhere, Paul plainly sets forth the equality of men and women, stating that in Christ, there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28). Whether or not Paul is countering an early form of Gnosticism in verse 13-14, through Timothy, he is at the least encouraging the women to be humble, and not to think that it is their place to lord it over the men. Instead, women are to minister to the body of Christ in meekness and humility, as should also the men! As Peter said to the elders,

<sup>3</sup> nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock  
(1 Peter 5:3)

Both men and women are to minister to others in humility and not as lords. It could be that in Ephesus (which is where Timothy was located when Paul wrote this letter

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<sup>2</sup> *On the Origin of the World*, The Nag Hammadi Library . Translated by Hans-Gebhard Bethge and Bentley Layton <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/origin.html> accessed 31st August 2008.

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to him), there was a particular problem with the women trying to lord it over the men, which is perhaps why Paul had to write these verses.

### Verse 15

Paul wrote 1 Timothy to give Timothy instructions on how to handle various matters in the Ephesian church (1 Timothy 1:3). The main deity of Ephesus was a goddess called Diana, who was known as Artemis to the Greeks (Acts 19:27). Amongst other things, Artemis was believed to keep women safe through childbirth<sup>3</sup>. It is against this backdrop that Paul, still talking about women, writes in verse 15:

Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.  
(1 Timothy 2:15)

It may well be that Paul is saying that it is not the goddess Artemis that will protect the women during childbirth; rather, it is God who will bring them safely through childbirth as they continue in faith, love, and holiness with self-control.

### Conclusion

In 1 Timothy 2:12-15, Paul does not forbid women from teaching men in meekness and humility. Instead, he bans them from teaching men in a forceful, usurping and inappropriate way (“teach, nor to usurp authority over”). He appeals to the creation order and events in the garden to promote humility in the women, and to discourage an overly exalted self-view. He also reminds the women that God will bring them safely through childbirth as they continue in faith, love, and holiness with self-control.

Therefore, Paul is not here banning women from teaching men or from being in a position of leadership over them.

The reader may also wish to read my article on 1 Corinthians 14:34-37 and 11:2-16 which are other Pauline passages about women, which I believe have been misapplied. You can read it by clicking on the following link:

<http://www.stuartpattico.com/corinthianwomen.htm>

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<sup>3</sup> See Linda L. Belleville, *Exegetical Fallacies in Interpreting 1 Timothy 2:11–15* (Priscilla Papers, Summer 2003 17:3) page 5