

COMING TO TERMS WITH:  
I TIMOTHY 2:8-15

UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING THE  
PASSAGE IN LIGHT OF THE HISTORICAL  
AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

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I Timothy 2:8-15

[8] I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; [9] likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, [10] but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. [11] Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. [12] I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. [13] For Adam was formed first, then Eve; [14] and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. [15] Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

If one is looking to start a friendly discussion (or heated argument) amongst a group of person, bring up the words of Paul to Timothy at the church of Ephesus. One does not have to state a personal opinion or make an absurd claim, one must only read the words of the Holy Scripture and the tension level in the room will automatically raise several levels. There will certainly ensue an impassioned discussion that is sure to split the members into opposing factions.

I suppose that our modern American society is not the first culture to be so sensitive to this particular passage, but it is hard to imagine a more divisive issue amongst evangelicals than this one. Why so much dissension and disagreement over this issue? What is the nature of the controversy surrounding this passage?

The issue of debate of course is the nature of men and women, specifically the role of women in the Church (and all of Christendom for that matter). Why so much controversy? Paul is very plain and forthright in his discussion of women in the church, and many people are not comfortable with what he has to say. There is an attempt to explain the passage in alternative lights in order to acquit Paul of his harsh and firm words to women in the Church.

But does Paul need an apology? It is my intention to study the passage of I Timothy 2:8-15 in light of the historical and cultural setting of the Pastoral Epistles (PE). The objective of this study is to investigate the context in which Paul was writing in order to hopefully shed some light upon the controversy. It is my hope that the following discussion will be true to the Holy Scriptures and glorifying to the LORD almighty.

### **Preliminary Issues**

There are certain assumptions and conclusions that have been made prior to writing. These conclusions have been drawn from study and are omitted from discussion currently because the nature and length of the assignment forbid a thorough investigation and discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references from the English Standard Version.

It is my assumption that the PE were written by Paul. There has been much discussion by liberal scholars questioning the authorship of the PE. I am in agreement with conservative and historical scholarship that Paul is undoubtedly the author of the PE.

I also assume that the PE (I Timothy and Titus, with II Timothy being written during a second Roman imprisonment) were written by Paul during an intra-imprisonment period of freedom. This theory assumes a release from the Roman imprisonment in which Paul is held at the conclusion of Acts 28.<sup>2</sup> The approximate date and location would be from Macedonia, c. 62 AD (I Tim. 3:14-15).<sup>3</sup>

**Brief introduction to historical/cultural background of:**

**- Paul**

Paul identifies himself as the author of this letter (1:1). There has been much work done studying the apostle Paul. This is not a research paper about Paul, but it is helpful to state a few important details of Paul's life that bare importance upon the occasion and purpose of his writing the PE.

A brief sketch of Paul's life shows that he was born in Tarsus, which was a center of Greek philosophical thought and Roman law. Paul was born a pure Hebrew, and a Roman citizen by birth. He was a Pharisee and Rabbi by profession, but also learned and practiced the trade of tent making. He was converted to Christianity through a vision of Christ on the road to Damascus, 35 A.D. (Acts 9:1-7). Paul traveled with several different companions on three separate missionary journeys. His third journey ended in his arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 18:23-21:26). He was imprisoned in Caesarea and Rome for approximately four years, after which he was probably released for a time of independence and freedom.

At the time of writing this Epistle, it is supposed that Paul was enjoying freedom during an intra-imprisonment period. Following this proposed release from Roman prison (62 A.D.), he went to Philippi and Ephesus (Phil 2:24). Returning to Ephesus, he found the heretical wolves amongst the church and expelled two men (1:20). Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to deal with other errors (1:3-4) and went to Macedonia. He hoped to return to Ephesus, but apparently never did, writing I Timothy from Macedonia, c. 62. A.D. (4:14-15).<sup>4</sup>

**- Timothy**

Timothy was a native of Lystra (Acts 16:1). He was the son of a Jewess mother and a Greek father. He was instructed in the ways of the Lord by his mother and grandmother (II Tim 1:5, 3:14-15) and a convert of Paul (1:2; Acts 14:6, 19; 16:1). In 51 A.D. He joined Paul on his second missionary

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<sup>2</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 440-4.

<sup>3</sup> John Hutchinson, *Matthew-Revelation*, (La Mirada, CA: Biola University Bookstore, Fall 2003), 38.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

journey (Acts 16:3), and accompanied him to many cities as his closest companion (along with Luke). Paul loved him devotedly as a father (1:2), and companion.<sup>5</sup>

By nature, Timothy was not naturally brave (4:12; II Tim. 1:6-7), and was often unwell (5:23). He was young (4:12), but was nonetheless an elder appointed by the laying on of hands (4:14, II Tim 1:6)

We find Timothy in Ephesus, apparently sent there as Paul went to Macedonia (1:3-4). As Paul's most trusted coworker, Timothy is left in Ephesus to supervise the local Christian groups, choose and train church leaders, as well as the task of dealing with Ephesian heresy (1:3-7, 18-20).<sup>6</sup>

#### - **Ephesus**

According to Acts 19, it appears that Paul did his greatest work in Ephesus, about 54-57 A.D. The Epistle to the church at Ephesus was written about four years after his departure (62 A.D.), and now, a few years later, he addresses this letter to Timothy who is in Ephesus.

From the narrative in Acts 19, Paul led many people in Ephesus to faith in Christ, and following his departure many converts continued to grow. Paul was aware of their vulnerability to false teaching (Acts 20:29-30). Ephesus could be considered the numerical and geographical center of Christendom.

#### **Historical and Cultural Bearing Upon the Passage**

It is helpful to examine the historical and cultural background of I Timothy by examining the *occasion* and *purpose* of the writing. The investigation of *occasion* of the letter will give specific and particular information regarding Ephesus and Timothy's ministry, thus indicating *why* Paul wrote to Timothy there. The examination of *purpose* will hopefully help explain *what* Paul wrote in correspondence to *why* he wrote to Timothy at Ephesus. The *occasion* deals mostly with the setting in Ephesus that prompted Paul to write, while the *purpose* investigates his response to the *occasion* and setting in Ephesus.

#### **General Occasion and Purpose of writing (Pastoral Epistles)**

I Timothy was occasioned by Paul's leaving Timothy in Ephesus as a leader and representative to stop the influence of false teachers. For purpose statements, it is best to inquire of the text to explain itself. There are two significant passages, which seem to shed significant light upon the purpose of Paul in writing to Timothy at Ephesus. Paul states his own purpose for writing in saying that, "As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine" (1:3). He later expands upon that purpose, and adds additional reason for writing by

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<sup>5</sup> Henry H. Halley, *Halley's Bible Handbook*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), 631.

<sup>6</sup> *Eerdmans Handbook to the Bible*, ed. David Alexander and Pat Alexander, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 618-9.

stating, "...but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar of truth" (3:14-15).<sup>7</sup>

It seems that Paul is responding in an *ad hoc* response to the occasion and setting of the church in Ephesus, namely that false teachers have risen up and are threatening the faith of the people in the church (1:19). Therefore, the statement against false teachers in 1:3 indicates most pointedly the occasion of Paul's writing. The false teachings and heresy have given Paul a reason to write to Timothy in Ephesus. Paul seems to expand upon this purpose in 3:14-15, by stating that the behavior of believers is crucial in the fight<sup>8</sup> against false doctrine. Believers in Ephesus are not to follow the false teachings, but are to receive "The aim of our charge [which] is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1:5). With this in mind, the investigation of the heresy and false doctrine being taught in Ephesus must be investigated.

During Paul's third missionary journey, he calls for the elders of the church in Ephesus to come meet him at Miletus (Acts 20:15-17). Paul describes to the elders in Acts 20:18-35, the nature of his ministry in Ephesus, and warns against things to come in Ephesus. He states clearly, "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. There fore be alert..." (29-31).

Paul basically gives a sort of prophecy to the elders of the Ephesian church, which is now coming true a few years later, thus giving occasion to Paul addressing Timothy there. Robert Mounce, in his commentary on the Pastoral Epistles in the Word Biblical Commentary series, outlines and investigates the Ephesian heresy. He states that, "While we are told a few of its specific doctrines, for the most part it does not appear to have been a well-thought-out, cohesive system of belief."<sup>9</sup> Mounce investigates the Ephesian heresy and states that there are: Jewish elements (quarrels about the law and minimizing of faith, grace and mercy of God, sectarian and exclusive, or anti-gentile), proto-Gnostic elements (not gnosticism of 2<sup>nd</sup> century, but containing elements that would form the cohesive system of Gnosticism at a later date. These elements include "contradictions of what is falsely named 'knowledge'" (6:20)), Hellenistic elements (stoicism, denial of resurrection, asceticism, dualism, magic, Judaism and religious

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<sup>7</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *New International Biblical Commentary*, 1 Timothy and Titus, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers 1988), 3. Fee presents a case that while most commentators state 3:14-15 as the purpose; he sees 1:3 as the main purpose of writing. I am in agreement with Fee that 1:3 is the most prevalent and clear statement of purpose, but I also see the importance of including Paul's purpose statement in 3:14-15. In other words, I do not believe it is an *either/or*, but a *both/and* case.

<sup>8</sup> The terminology of fighting and warfare are common throughout the PE (1:18, 6:12; II Tim 2:4-7). This language indicates the seriousness and severe nature of the conflict, and indicates that false doctrine and heresy are severe attacks upon the faith, and need to be combated in a very real and serious way.

<sup>9</sup> William D. Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary*, volume 46, Pastoral Epistles, ed. Ralph P. Martin (Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), lxix.

syncretism), and additional elements (elements of asceticism – abstention from marriage and child-bearing, observance of dietary laws, and accumulation of wealth; downplay of Christ’s significance; enacting of the life of resurrection paradise; overall foolish speculations and misunderstandings; over-realized eschatology; significant success among women). Generally speaking, Paul writes with an apparent urgency against this false teaching, which is a different gospel from Paul’s gospel. The opponents had achieved a considerable level of success, upsetting entire house churches (Titus 1:11), deceiving many women (II Tim 3:6; 2:9-15) and, also men (Titus 1:11), upsetting the faith of many (1:19; 2 Tim 2:18), resulting in the straying of people after Satan (4:1, 5:15). “The teaching is at best useless, resulting in nothing beneficial, and at worst ruins those who listen (2 Tim 2:14).”<sup>10</sup>

In response to all of this, Paul is writing to Timothy to: encourage Timothy to stay in Ephesus and deal with the dissensions; provide authoritative instruction concerning how the household of God is to act; combat opponents directly in their teaching, and how he himself (Timothy) was to conduct his own personal behavior and teaching. Mounce states that, “The underlying purpose was then to encourage Timothy in his work but also to transfer Paul’s authority to Timothy in his fight against the opponents.”<sup>11</sup>

#### **Specific Occasion and Purpose of writing (concerning women)**

As mentioned earlier, women were a prime target of the Ephesian heresy. It is important to investigate this area more thoroughly in an effort to give further understanding to the occasion and purpose of Paul specifically writing the instructions to women found in vv 8-15. In II Timothy 3:6, Paul says, of the teachers of false doctrine that, “For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions.” It seems that much of the ascetic teaching was directed toward women (4:3, poss 2:15). The false teachers were actively seeking women (II Tim 3:6), especially young widows (5:11-15), helping us to understand the purpose of Paul’s emphasis upon marital faithfulness among church leaders (3:2; Titus 1:6). Women were even helping spread the heresy (2:12, 5:13), and the context of 2:8-15 seems to imply that women were being taught to openly rebel against their husbands, and male authority in general. It appears that an expression of this rebellion was expressed in physical appearance of women. Fee asserts, “There is a large body of evidence, both Hellenistic and Jewish, which equated ‘dressing up’ on the part of women with both sexual wantonness and wifely insubordination.”<sup>12</sup>

#### **Historical and Cultural implications derived from the passage**

With a general understanding of the historical and cultural setting which gave occasion and purpose to Paul’s writing of the PE, specifically to Timothy in Ephesus, it is necessary to turn attention to

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<sup>10</sup> Mounce, *World Biblical Commentary*, lxxv.

<sup>11</sup> Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary*, lix.

<sup>12</sup> Fee, *New International Biblical Commentary*, 71.

the particular passage of interest and study. A general overview of the culture, and a more specific overview of women in the culture have been examined. It is now necessary to interact with the text of I Timothy 2:8-15, seeking to gain a basic understanding of the Ephesian culture and church as revealed in the passage.

*I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling: (8)*

Since Paul has been speaking about corporate worship (2:1-7), he takes the opportunity to comment upon an apparent problem, namely that men are attempting to pray while participating in anger and quarrels. With an understanding of all the disagreement and controversy in the Ephesian church, it seems very likely that people were worshipping and praying in an incorrect way, namely without a pure heart, but with anger and dispute. Paul's command to lift up holy hands is a cultural expression of a Biblical principle. "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord" (Ps 28:2). The underlying principle is that people are not to approach the LORD in worship with an unclean heart. Paul could also be paralleling his instruction in Eph 4:26, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger."

*likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, (9a)*

After an address to how men are to act in corporate worship and prayer. Paul turns his attention to women. The principal of modest dress is first addressed. It was customary for ancient Greek women to dress up for public worship festivals. S.M. Baugh gives some important historical examples in the Zondervan Illustrated Backgrounds Commentary. He cites the historian Herodotus remarking that Athenian women gathered in temples in their best clothes. Also, the romance novel by Xenophon of Ephesus describes a scene in which young girls march in their finest clothes at the procession in honor of the patron goddess of Ephesus, Artemis Ephesia. "In contrast to the prevailing practice, Paul instructs women (and, by implication, men as well) to focus their attention not on rich wardrobes, but on the inner beauty of Christian character."<sup>13</sup>

Also helpful in our understanding is the claim made by Fee and others that, "For a married woman so to dress in public was tantamount to marital unfaithfulness... Thus women are to dress modestly, with decency and propriety."<sup>14</sup> The Christian virtue of modesty (I Peter 3:3-4) seems to be the desired attitude and guiding factor in such issues as dress and appearance.

*not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, (9b)*

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<sup>13</sup> S.M. Baugh, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, volume 3, I Timothy, ed. Clinton Arnold, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 456.

<sup>14</sup> Fee, *New International Biblical Commentary*, 71.

Baugh addresses the issue of braided hair by stating that during this time, hairstyles were undergoing many drastic changes. Earlier in the Greek world, women's hairstyles were simple: pulled back and held up with a band or scarf. In public, respectable women would wear veils, covering any possible elaborate hairstyles. Only 'shady' women or those in mourning would appear in public with hair untied and unveiled. "However, in the mid-first century, women throughout the empire were copying the elaborate braided and ornamented hairdos of the Roman empresses (many of whom were quite scandalous)."<sup>15</sup>

Donald Guthrie adds, "The plaiting of the hair was a usual feature of Jewish women's hairstyle... Such tendencies to ostentatious adornment must be resisted by Christian women, and the same applies to the use of jewelry and costly clothing."<sup>16</sup>

John Stott agrees by quoting James B. Hurley. "He [Paul] refers... to the elaborate hair-styles which were then fashionable among the wealthy, and also to the styles worn by courtesans. The sculpture and literature of the period make it clear that women often wore their hair in enormously elaborate arrangements... and decorated with gems and/or gold and/or pearls."<sup>17</sup>

Stott continues by saying, "Such hair-do's were inappropriate for Christian women in first-century women in first-century Asia Minor... What Paul is emphasizing is that Christian women should adorn themselves with clothing, hairstyles and jewelry which in their culture are inexpensive, not extravagant, modest not vain, and chaste not suggestive."<sup>18</sup>

*but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. (10)*

As stated above by Baugh and Stott, the overriding principle for appearance is guided by modesty for Christian women. Paul positively states that the proper adornment for women is to adorn themselves with "good works." This is similar to Paul's instructions to servants in Titus 2:9: "so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior."

*Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. (11)*

"The topic now changes: Paul shifts from the disruption caused by women's clothing (9-10) to the larger question of leadership. The issue of leadership is a central concern in the PE since the opposition to Timothy is coming from the Ephesian leaders."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Baugh, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, 456-7.

<sup>16</sup> Donald Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, Pastoral Epistles (England: Intersity Press, 1983), 75.

<sup>17</sup> John R.W. Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today, The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*, (England: Intersity Press, 1996), 84

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

<sup>19</sup> Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 117.

Baugh asserts, “Paul’s injunctions in I Timothy 2:11-12 require no special historical insights to understand.”<sup>20</sup> Baugh correctly appeals to Paul’s theology that women are not called to serve in the office of teacher or of elder in the church. While I agree with Baugh, I also agree with the assertion made by Guthrie, who states that this command, “Is in full accord with I Corinthians 14:34-5, although in the latter case the reference is specifically to public worship... [Paul’s statement] was designed to curb the tendencies of newly emancipated Christian women to abuse their newfound freedom by indecorously lording it over men... When taking part in public worship the woman’s share is to learn, or at least to listen quietly.”<sup>21</sup>

He goes on to claim, “Not only was the prevailing Greek attitude against it (equality of the sexes), but Hebrew thought was equally unsympathetic. The entire subjection mentioned by Paul relates primarily to public worship, as it was then enacted, and reserve must be exercised in deducing universal principles from particular cases.”<sup>22</sup>

*I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. (12)*

There has been much speculation and study, concerning the role of this verse in the church. Such speculation has led to many false theories that have been harmful to leadership in the church. I will examine the implications of this verse more fully in the application section that follows.

It does seem reasonable to infer that women might have been causing disruptions in worship and prayer. We already have seen that they were the target of many false teachers, and Paul’s admonition against inappropriate clothing and hair definitely indicate that there was a problem with women’s dress and appearance. Could it be that Paul is here admonishing the women to be silent in response possible inappropriate outbursts by women in corporate worship and prayer? There has been much speculation concerning the situation. Some have proposed that women were abusing their newfound freedom in Christ, and speaking out authoritatively against men. Others have speculated that, influenced by false teaching, women were attempting to usurp authority over men, and Paul is thusly responding to that problem. The difficulty is that Paul does not state what specific error he is addressing. Speculation can be helpful to attempt to understand the occasion and purpose of Paul’s addressing this issue, but we cannot build doctrine upon speculation. My intention is that the occasion and purpose of this issue will not change the interpretation and application of this admonition.

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<sup>20</sup> Baugh, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, 457.

<sup>21</sup> Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, 75.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

*For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. (13-15)*

These verses deal with Theology exclusively, and I will not deal with the occasion and purpose here. I will be investigating the Theology of Paul in his appeal to Creation and the fall in point three of practical application.

### **Practical Application of passage to Church and Christian life**

As an expository teacher of God's Holy Word, I am overcome by the awesome responsibility to present this passage to those under my teaching. A simple reading alone of the passage is sure to upset some and incite false notions in the minds of many others. Many persons, to the detriment of the Church, have misunderstood this passage.

There have been those who attempt to challenge the traditional interpretation of the passage, in an attempt to get Paul 'off the hook.' They tweak the language and offer interpretations that limit the application of the passage to 1<sup>st</sup> century Ephesus alone. These people have done injustice to the Word of God, denying the fact that, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (II Tim 3:16).

There have been others who have used this passage to suppress women and to limit their responsibilities and worship in the Church. There have been many men who have used this verse to lord a false authority over women, restraining women from fully enjoying all that God has for them as members of the body of Christ.

Both of these injustices to the text have been harmful to the faith of many in the Church. It is my conclusion that there is a need in our society to be faithful to teaching right doctrine and faithful practice. I have outlined three specific lines of application that I would teach to the Church concerning this passage. My first priority would be to teach the passage according to what it says. But I also believe that there is room for application in teaching as well. There are many other lines of application, which could have been addressed, but I have decided to pose three questions that give significant consideration to the complexities presented by Paul in this passage.

#### **1. Is this passage true for us today?**

This question is fundamental in our understanding of this passage. At the root of the issue is the distinction in Scripture between eternal truth and its cultural expression. If Paul was only addressing the situation at Ephesus in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, then our controversy can be put to rest. The Word of God would no longer restrict women from teaching and exercising authority in the Church. It is in this spirit that many scholars have approached the text, seeking to restrict the application of this passage – thus making it inapplicable to modern Christendom. There have been several attempts by scholars to restrict the

application of this passage to the original intended audience. Stott quotes A.T. Hanson, who states, “The second half [of chapter 2] seems to show him [Paul] at his worst. Christians are under no obligation to accept his teaching on women.”<sup>23</sup> Stott also quotes William Barclay, saying, “All the things in the chapter are mere temporary regulations to meet a given situation.”<sup>24</sup>

Some of the most common objections to application beyond the intended audience focus upon, (1) the ‘weak’ language used by Paul, (2) apparent rampant feminism in Ephesus, (3) attempts to restrict strong statements to particular situations.<sup>25</sup>

(1) Many scholars have tried to limit the scope of application by investigating the actual language of Paul. (with an emphasis upon the present, void of ongoing implications). Others suggest that these apostolic instructions express only Paul’s personal opinion, not his authoritative command (*Personally, I do not permit...*). Others have claimed that Paul is addressing wives (*aner* may refer to woman or wife), not women in general. Still others suggest that Paul’s instructions are directed only against noisy disturbances and interruptions by women, not against a quiet and orderly exercise of their ministry. Some argue that Paul’s instructions only forbid a woman to ‘domineer’ over a man (claiming an alternate understanding of *authenteo*).<sup>26</sup>

Gordon D. Fee, who I respect greatly, and consulted often in this study, is wrong in his approach to this passage as well. Not only does he subscribe to the translation of ‘domineer’ in v 11, he also says that the “in silence” of v 15 should be translated “in a quiet demeanor. He maintains that the statement “I do not permit...” of v 12 is to be rendered, “I am not permitting...” He also seems to indicate that Paul’s prohibition of women to teach is solely meant for the house churches of Ephesus.<sup>27</sup>

The overriding principle of translation is to read the text in its most natural reading. The above propositions do not take the most natural reading, but rather seek to apply a possible interpretation from a wide range of semantic range of possibilities. There is an overwhelming amount of support for the reception of the natural readings that we find in conservative scholarship.<sup>28</sup> We can also find continuity in the teaching of Paul in this passage, with others found in the New Testament concerning women: I Corinthians 7; 11:3-16; 14:33-36; Ephesians 5:22-23; as well as Peter’s teaching (I Peter 3:1-7).

(2) The study of feminism in Ephesus has led many to come to conclude that the reason for Paul’s harsh restrictions upon women are in objection to the particular situation of 1<sup>st</sup> century Ephesus. Baugh

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<sup>23</sup> Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today*, 75

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> My discussion of these proposed ‘solutions’ must be brief. I will not deal in depth with these issues. My intention is to make the reader aware of proposed interpretations, and to show that the traditional view of universal application of this passage is most reasonable and true to the text.

<sup>26</sup> Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today*, 85-6.

<sup>27</sup> Fee, *New International Bible Commentary*, 72-3.

<sup>28</sup> Again, I am restricted in this study, but have been aided in my conclusion by the works of Mounce and Stott, which are referenced often in this work.

treats the situation wonderfully by stating that Ephesus “cannot be characterized as a feminist culture. Although its state deity was a goddess, many other states whose patriarchal character has never been questioned also worshiped goddesses. The nature of a culture as feminist must be demonstrated through what we can know about its *institutions*, particularly its political, religious, social, and cultural institutions.”<sup>29</sup> Baugh concludes that in study of the institutions of Ephesus, it is not accurate to determine Ephesus a feminist culture. Understanding this truth allows us to not be forced to believe that Paul was only addressing a severe situation in Ephesus that is not relatable to today. Although the denial of feminism in 1<sup>st</sup> century Ephesus does not prove universal application of the passage, it certainly does not support the case for specific application as many have asserted.

(3) In defense of a universal application of unchangeable eternal principles, with a cultural application of certain changeable principles, I am in agreement with the works of John R.W. Stott and William D. Mounce. Both men, as well as many others, deal extensively with the charges raised by Fee and others in their respective commentaries. I will state briefly that the universal application of this passage is secure. Paul’s commission to “*all men*” to pray in “*every place*” in v 11 sets the passage in a universal context. Throughout the passage, we find commissions that must be applied perpetually and universally. Certainly the call to ‘modesty’ and ‘good works’ (9-10) are not to be directed to Ephesus alone. These are timeless principles true for all people in all places. Also, Paul’s appeal to Creation and the fall at the end of the passage keep it in a universal context. There is no real reason to doubt the eternal nature of application of this passage. The call to “continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control” (15) is another universal and perpetual principle that has been taught to all believers in all times. So the overall structure of Paul’s argument in this passage requires that we accept a hermeneutic of harmony. “Those of us who believe the Bible to be the written Word of God also believe that when God spoke, he did not contradict himself. Therefore, although we gratefully acknowledge Scripture’s rich diversity of both theological emphasis and literary style, we also expect it to possess an underlying consistency.”<sup>30</sup> We must conclude that God is a God of consistency and harmony. We can appeal to II Timothy 3:16 with confidence that this passage is “breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

## **2. Is there a difference between manhood and womanhood?**

Modern thought, (and I assume historical thought as well) is very uncomfortable with discussing differences between men and women. The tendency is to stress the equality of men and women by minimizing the unique significance of our maleness of femaleness. There is a lot of energy being

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<sup>29</sup> Baugh, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, 457.

<sup>30</sup> Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today*, 74.

expended today minimizing the distinctions of manhood and womanhood. Our society is lost in a state of confusion over sexual roles.

There is no doubt in my mind that there are fundamental differences between men and woman presented in Scripture, revealing itself in natural created order. Let me state clearly that I am fully convinced that it is the difference that make men and women unique and beautiful. There have been many misuses of different roles, a direct result of sin. But the fundamental differences between men and women are part of God's created order. As a man, I find the roles of womanhood remarkable. I am challenged and excited to elevate the role of the woman, and to embrace all that she has to offer in Christ Jesus. I do not equate roles with worth.<sup>31</sup> Paul Jewett quotes Emil Brunner, "Our sexuality penetrates to the deepest metaphysical ground of our personality. As a result, the physical differences between the man and the woman are a parable of psychical and spiritual differences of a more ultimate nature."<sup>32</sup>

God has shown us in Scripture the beauty of manhood and womanhood in complementary harmony, as well as the horrors that sin has made of fallen manhood and womanhood. John Piper, of whom I am incredibly indebted to in my study of manhood and womanhood, states,

Our understanding is that the Bible reveals the nature of masculinity and femininity by describing diverse responsibilities for man and woman while rooting these differing responsibilities in creation, not convention... it [the Bible] bases this differentiation not on temporary cultural norms but on permanent facts of creation. In the Bible, differentiated roles for men and women are never traced back to the fall of man and women into sin. Rather, the foundation of this differentiation is traced back to the way things were in Eden before sin warped our relationships. Differentiated roles were corrupted, not created, by the fall by the fall. They were created by God.<sup>33</sup>

If this line of argument sounds familiar, it is because it is the same line of argument that Paul uses in vv 13-15 of chapter 2. "It would appear that Paul's reasoning is, generally speaking, as follows: Eve was created second and she fell first; therefore, women are under some restriction."<sup>34</sup> The "For" of v 13, indicates that the following is in support of the preceding. In other words, vv 9-12 are founded upon vv 13-15. One might expect an assortment of reasons to be given by Paul to support his commands to

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<sup>31</sup> I have found that it is difficult for men to discuss differences in manhood and womanhood. It is typically maintained by most persons, within evangelicalism and outside, that the restricted role of women (teaching), is an attack of womanhood, and a making less of women in general. This thought could not be further from the truth. Women are created beautifully in the image of God, and as a man, I especially want to celebrate women, rather than falsely attempt to subjugate or repress under the order of authority.

<sup>32</sup> Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1975), 173. The reference is to Emil Brunner, *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen* (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1933), 358.

<sup>33</sup> John Piper, *What's the Difference? Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 20.

<sup>34</sup> *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 2001), 1285.

women. Paul sees no need to make an apology for himself, but rather appeals to the difference in roles as revealed in the natural created order.

Roles of men and women were distinct before the fall (Genesis 3:16). This is seen in the creation of Adam first, then Eve (Gen 2:7, 18-23), the role of Eve as a helper for Adam (Gen 2:18), Adam naming Eve (Gen 2:19-20), God naming the human race ‘man,’ and not ‘woman’ (Gen 5:2), the serpent going to Eve first (Gen 3:1) in contrast to God speaking to Adam first after the fall (Gen 3:9), Adam as the representative of the human race (I Cor 15:22; Rom 5:15), the curse as a distortion of previous roles, not the introduction of new ones (Gen 3:16, 18, 19), and reaffirmation of creation order in Christ’s redemption (Col. 3:18-19; Eph 5:22-23; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1-7).<sup>35</sup>

Paul makes it clear that his entreaty to Ephesian women rests upon the Genesis 2 account. “Having stated his rule for participation of women in church leadership, Paul now gives a reason, possibly two, why his rule is valid: Gen 2 state that Adam was created first, and then Eve. For Paul this indicates that God intended male authority. The specific application of this principle is that the Ephesian women should not try to reverse the created order by being in authority over men.”<sup>36</sup>

Paul, in vv 13-14, gives reasons why 11-12 are true. Not only was Eve created second (13), but she was deceived (14). Not only does the appeal to created order and deception apply to Ephesus, but also it appeals to humanity perpetually. There is an ontological distinction between men and women. While they are equal before God, He intended different roles for each.

In conclusion, I find it helpful to simply state the descriptions of manhood and womanhood as stated by John Piper. “At the heart of Mature Masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man’s differing relationships. At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman’s differing relationships.”<sup>37</sup>

### **3. What is the role of women in the Church?**

The official term describing my position of the matter is complementarianism. I believe this view to be Biblically secure and sound, as well as overwhelmingly glorifying to God and satisfying to men and women. The correct approach to the issue to not focus upon the restrictions, but upon the freedoms. It is also crucial to not confuse role with worth. There is an implicit assumption that a limited role necessitates a diminished personal worth. Yet the equating of worth and role is a nonbiblical, secular view of reality. “Nowhere in Scripture are role and ultimate worth ever equated. In fact, we constantly find the opposite...

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<sup>35</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 460-5. Grudem systematically presents a solid case for the foundation of different roles in creation, thus establishing different roles of men and women as fundamental to humanity.

<sup>36</sup> Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 130.

<sup>37</sup> John Piper, *What’s the Difference? Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible*, 22.

the good news of God's kingdom is that it does not matter what function a person performs."<sup>38</sup> The restrictions of women from roles of eldership and teaching have nothing to do with ability and everything to do with God's designed order.

I agree with Wayne Grudem that, "the Bible does not permit women to function in the role of pastor or elder within a church."<sup>39</sup> We need to be clear that Paul does not forbid women in 2:11-12 from teaching men in private out of their general office of believers (Acts 18:24, 28), from discipling their children (II Tim 1:5, 3:15) and younger women in the church (Titus 2:3-4), or from participating in and giving leadership in hospitality (5:10) or in other kinds of ministries and service to the Lord (Acts 9:36; Rom 16:1-2). "However, Paul clearly says as apostolic instruction (2:7) that a woman should 'learn quietly with all submissiveness... she is to remain quiet' (11-12) when it comes to the official teaching and ruling ministry of the church."<sup>40</sup>

The prevalent attitude amongst many in the church is that this restriction is degrading, limiting, or offensive to women. I believe that the fundamental problem is an issue of perspective. The apostle Paul has laid forth a single restriction upon women in corporate worship and prayer settings. At the same time, he has presented a special privilege enjoyed only by women: "Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control."<sup>41</sup>

God has intended that sinless man, full of love, in his tender, strong leadership in relation to woman; and sinless woman, full of love, in her joyful, responsive support for man's leadership, live in peaceful unity and pleasure. Of course, this is not a description of modern man and woman. Pointing fingers and blaming each other (man vs. woman) will solve anything.<sup>42</sup>

I am not in the position to spell out the roles of men and women in the church. I believe that for most part, these roles are the same for men and women, but there are some issues (authority and teaching mainly), in which we find differences. I have been aided tremendously by the work of John Piper and Wayne Grudem, who lead the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. John Piper, in his book,

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<sup>38</sup> Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 1148.

<sup>39</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 937.

<sup>40</sup> Baugh, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, 458.

<sup>41</sup> I have not dealt with the controversy surrounding the statement, "yet she will be saved through childbearing." Several theories have been presented by scholars concerning the meaning of this statement. Some of the false understanding include the theory that a woman is saved by giving birth (nowhere found in Pauline theology), that she will be kept safe through childbirth (Pauline language does not allow 'saved' to be taken in that sense), or that she is saved by *the Childbirth*, namely that of Jesus Christ, thus reversing the role of Eve (inconsistent with Pauline theology and vocabulary. "Giving birth" has to do with the fact of bearing children, not to the event of a single birth. I agree with Fee, and others that Paul intends that a woman's salvation is to be found in her being a model, a godly woman, known for her good works (10, 5:11) and these good deeds include marriage, bearing children, and keeping a good home. Paul then qualifies the statement by stating that salvation is not attained by good deeds, but rather of course, that she is a woman who continues in faith, love and holiness.

<sup>42</sup> I agree with Piper, in *What's the Difference?* That "the spiritual aimlessness and weakness and lethargy and loss of nerve among men is the major issue, not the upsurge of interest in women's ministries." 68.

*What's the Difference? Manhood and Womanhood defined according to the Bible*, lists a set of 15 'challenges' to men and women (72-80). These 'challenges' are helpful in understanding the fundamental similarities and differences between men and women. I have been challenged by them, and seek to apply them to my life. Piper also gives a list of ministries that women qualify for under the instruction of the Bible (80-82). Also helpful is the Danvers Statement, a positive investigation into the issue by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood in 1987.

What will glorify God, and edify each other is when men and women live together and work together under the instruction of the Word of God, joyfully submitting to the decrees and teaching laid forth by a loving and tender God. In his perfect will and plan, God created man and woman with fundamental differences, and in the church he has designated specific roles to be filled by men only, and other privileges to be enjoyed by women alone. I must conclude that in all of my best efforts and study, I am still, at the end of the day, glad to bow in humble submission to the perfect will of God. I am in awe of this complex and confusing mystery, but I am aware of the beauty and blessings that are seen when men and women follow the Lord in faith as related to God's perfect loving plan for their lives. It is my hope and prayer that the preceding investigation into the text of I Timothy 2:8-15 have been true and honoring the perfect Word of God. I have been truly blessed and amazed to encounter the privilege of studying and learning God's inspired, infallible and inerrant word. Praise be to our great God, who has inspired these words, which are profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (II Timothy 3:16). My only desire is to be so overcome with the greatness of God's revealed Word that I would live my life in a manner that is worthy of this great calling.

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