

An exegetical essay on I Timothy 2:11-15

by Dr Paul B Coulter

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades I Timothy 2:11-15 has been among the most debated passages in Scripture. This debate has paralleled a major shift in the role of women in society, leading to the suggestion that recent interpretive trends are "indebted significantly, and at times probably culpably, to the prevailing social climate rather than to the biblical text" (Yarbrough, 1995, p.167). It has been suggested that the cultural and religious setting in Ephesus was so unique in the first-century world that Paul needed to impose temporary local restrictions that were not intended to be generalised to other cultural contexts. However, Baugh (1995, p.50) has conducted probably the most detailed examination of first century Ephesian culture to date, and concludes that "exegetical treatments can proceed with the assumption that Ephesus was not a unique society in its era". We know from Scripture that false teachers were active in the church in Ephesus, where Timothy was ministering (see I Timothy 1:19-20; II Timothy 2:17-18; Acts 20:30), and that some women had been led astray (II Timothy 3:6-7). Although I Timothy is an "occasional letter", and its teaching must therefore have had specific relevance to problems in Ephesus, we cannot conclude that its content is therefore automatically irrelevant to other settings. My aim is to determine the meaning and scope of Paul's commands in this debated passage by an examination of the text itself, but also with consideration of the proposed cultural and historically specific factors that may limit its application in 21st Century church life. This essay assumes Pauline authorship of the epistle.

WOMEN AND TEACHING (vv11&12)

It is significant that Paul's first statement in v11 is a command that women "should learn". Stott (1996, p.85) comments that women:

are certainly honoured by their responsibility to learn, in contrast to the chauvinistic Rabbinical opinion expressed in the Jerusalem Talmud that it would be better for the words of Torah to be burned, than that they should be entrusted to a woman.

However, Paul also specifies **how** women are to learn: “in quietness and full submission” (v11). The object of the woman’s submission is not specified – whether to men generally, the teacher, the elders of the assembly (Lock, 1924, p.32), the teaching itself, or the congregation. Given the context of learning I maintain that the implied object is the teacher, who, given Paul’s view of authoritative teaching in the church (Schreiner, 1995, p.127-129), would presumably have been an elder.

The instruction to quietness, which is repeated for emphasis (*silent* in v12 and *quietness* in v11) render the same word, *hēsychia*), forms bookends around vv11&12 in the Greek. The most appropriate translation of *hēsychia*, which can mean either *silence* or *quiet demeanour*, has been debated. Mounce (2000, p.118) favours *quiet demeanour* in view of the permission Paul grants women in I Corinthians 11:5 to pray publicly and other Pauline uses of *hēsychia* (in v2 to mean *quiet lives* and in I Thessalonians 4:11 and II Thessalonians 3:12 to mean *quietness*). Schreiner (1995, p.123) argues for the translation *silent*, since it contrasts with the prohibition on teaching, and “silence” is “The most natural antonym to teaching”. Whichever translation is favoured, the meaning of the text is hardly altered: women should learn in an attitude of quiet submission.

In v12, Paul moves from command to prohibition. The clauses of v12 parallel v11, the prohibition on teaching corresponding to the command to learn, and the prohibition on exercising authority corresponding to the command to be submissive. Some writers (e.g. Keener, 1992, p.140) claim that *epitrēpo* (“I do not permit”) represents Paul’s personal opinion, rather than an authoritative command. However, Knight (1992, p.140) claims that, “such a suggestion misunderstands the authoritativeness of *ἐπιτρέπω* when used by Paul”. Other writers (e.g. Liefeld, 1999, p.98) have suggested that the use of the present indicative form of *epitrēpo* limits Paul’s prohibition to the specific contemporary situation in Ephesus. However, Knight (1992, p.140) demonstrates that other Pauline usages of the present indicative include its use to give “universal and authoritative instruction or exhortation”. Mounce (2000, p.122) says that:

In his thirteen epistles, Paul uses 1,429 present-tense active indicative verbs (out of a total of 2,835 indicative verbs). If this objection is true, then almost nothing Paul says can have any significance beyond the narrow confines of its immediate context... While the use of the present tense does not require that a statement be true in the future, neither is there anything in the tense that requires it to be true only in the present but not later.

An alternative explanation for Paul's choice of grammar is proposed by Witherington (1988, p.119), who suggests that a milder tone is used because "the letter is directed to a faithful colleague".

The phrase "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man" (v12) may contain either a single prohibition (against "authoritative teaching") or two related prohibitions (against "teaching" and against "having authority"). Knight (1992, p.139) sees just one prohibition, but Grudem (2004, p.316) maintains that the use of the conjunction *oude* (*or*) rather than *kai* (*and*) shows that Paul has two issues in mind. A grammatical study conducted by Köstenberger (1995, pp.81-103) concluded that two separate injunctions are intended. Mounce (2000, p.130) agrees, but claims that "The relationship that exists between the two is that of a principle and a specific application of that principle", in other words that teaching in the church is an expression of the exercise of authority. This is in keeping with Kent's (1982, pp.107-108) view that, "This has reference solely to the function of the authoritative teacher of doctrine in the church", and that, "The role of teacher in New Testament days was an authoritative office". Schreiner (1995, pp.127-129) adds that:

authoritative teaching is usually a function of the elders/overseers (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17), and it is likely that Paul is thinking of them here. Thus, women are proscribed from functioning as elders/overseers.

It must be noted, however, that Paul's prohibition on women teaching is **not** unqualified, and we must ask where, who and what they cannot teach. To answer **where** they cannot teach we must examine the wider context of these verses. Paul's focus from the beginning of chapter 2 is on the public life of the church, and there is nothing in the text of vv11-15 to limit or to expand their application. Furthermore, Mounce (2000, p.107) claims that Paul's comment in I Timothy 3:15 that Timothy "will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household" proves that all of Paul's teaching in the letter is applicable primarily to the church setting. Teaching by women in the home or in evangelistic settings may, therefore, be permissible. Keener (1992, p.113) argues that the numerous Pauline passages commending women's contributions to the ministry prove that v12 cannot be an absolute prohibition on women teaching in the church, but Kent (1982, p.108) correctly notes that, "Nowhere in the New Testament is a woman presented as a teacher in the church." However, if teaching in the New Testament church was linked with authority (as proposed by Schreiner, 1995, p.127-129) then Powell (1988, p.8) may be correct to say that:

These factors would not necessarily prevent a woman from giving an occasional message to the assembly, since the oversight and accountability aspects would be handled by the other leaders and teachers of the church.

This would also permit women to publicly exercise other gifts, including intercession and prophesy (I Corinthians 11:2-16), since Paul's concern is with the principle of headship, which is not necessarily compromised by these other types of service (Schreiner, 1995, p.130).

The verb *didaskein* (*teach*) is placed first in the construction of the prohibition, and no immediate object is supplied, raising the question **who** the woman is not permitted to teach. Mounce (2000, p.123) argues that *men* is the object of *didaskein*, and so the prohibition specifically concerns women teaching men in the church. Other passages demonstrate that women are permitted to teach other women (Titus 2:3-5), their own (and presumably other people's) children (II Timothy 3:14&15), and even individual men privately in the home (Acts 18:25&26). It has been argued that the prohibition is not against women teaching all men, but merely those who are in authority over her, namely her husband and the overseers. Although some commentators limit the prohibition to wives by translating *gunē* as *wives*, Grudem (2004, p.299), Lenski (1937, p.558), Schreiner (1995, pp.115-117) and Fee (1984, p.71) insist that the absence of the article and the grammatical context demand the translation *women*. The suggestion that overseers are in view does not find support in the text itself, which simply says *andros* (*man*), and, "This interpretation would make application difficult, to the point that one wonders if Paul could have meant this" (Mounce, 2000, p.124).

As to **what** it is that women are not permitted to teach, Paul does not specify. Kroeger and Kroeger (1992, p.81) claim that *didaskein* is always used in the Pastoral Epistles in relation to the content of the teaching, and that Paul is condemning heterodoxy in the teaching of some women rather than issuing an absolute prohibition on women teaching. However, according to Mounce (2000, p.125), *didaskein*:

is used almost always in a positive sense in the PE, i.e., to teach truth ... While the cognate διδαχή, 'teaching,' can refer to the content of what is taught ... the verb διδάσκειν refers exclusively in the PE to the act of teaching as would be expected with a verb.

Where *didaskein* is used, therefore, the content of the teaching must be understood from the context. In this verse there are no qualifying clues, and we must consequently assume that Paul means to prohibit the act of teaching itself rather than the teaching of any particular doctrine. Furthermore, Grudem (2004, p.283) writes that, "there is *no evidence* that women were teaching false doctrine at Ephesus. And so the claim turns out to be speculation without any hard evidence to support it." Even if some women **were** teaching falsehood, why would Paul prohibit **all** women from teaching simply because of the heterodoxy of a few? In that case, why did Paul not prohibit all men from teaching, since we know for certain that some men were teaching falsehood? Keener (1992, pp.110-112) argues that Paul's prohibition was

limited “only to the majority of **uneducated** women in Ephesus”, and that, “Presumably Paul wants them to learn so that they could *teach*”. However, lack of education is not given by Paul as the reason for his prohibition, and Paul nowhere requires that men who teach must be adequately educated. As Mounce (2000, p.118) explains, authoritative teaching in the New Testament church was the province of the leadership, who would be gifted teachers (see I Timothy 3:2), not of all men. Education simply is not mentioned in the text itself, and should not be read into it.

The second prohibition forbids women to “have authority over man”. Fee (1984, p.73) and Witherington (1988, p.121), argue that Paul is only forbidding women from domineering men. Their argument depends on the understanding of the word *authentēin* (“to have authority over”), which is found only here in the New Testament. Baldwin’s (1995, p.78) chronological study of the verb’s usage shows that at the time of writing of I Timothy it had several potential meanings including “to dominate”, “to assume authority over”, and “to flout the authority of”, and that the context must therefore determine which is correct. Guthrie (1957, p.76) translates it to “lord it over”, and Scott (1936, p.26) claims that it refers to attempts by women to “pose as men’s superiors by laying down the law to them”. However, Köstenberger (1995, p.103) claims that *didaskein*, “when used absolutely, always in the New Testament denotes an activity that is viewed positively by the writer” and that since the two words are linked by *oude*, *authentēin* “should be regarded as viewed positively as well and be rendered ‘to have (or exercise) authority,’ and not ‘to flout the authority of’ or ‘to domineer’”.

Other attempts have been made to limit Paul’s prohibition to the cultural or historical setting of Ephesus. Liefeld (1999, p.112) suggests that it was only relevant to the church before the completion of the canon:

Paul’s restriction on women’s teaching made good sense in a world that refused to give woman teachers a hearing. In his day the New Testament had not yet been completed and circulated, so people were dependent on the authoritative spoken word.

However, he neglects the fact that the New Testament believers had the Old Testament by which they could test teaching (as the Bereans did in Acts 17:11), as well as the apostolic teaching Paul had entrusted to them (2 Timothy 2:2). It cannot be true that all teachers were assumed to be “authoritative” in the apostolic era, nor is there any Scriptural indication that the authority of elders was intended to be greater or less in the period before the completion of the canon than afterwards. In fact the teaching of the Pastoral Epistles prepares the way for the normative local church in the post-apostolic age. Gordon (1995, p.63) reminds us, “As

with all the Pastoral Letters, the instructions regarding life in the postapostolic church are especially germane to our setting, which is postapostolic as well”.

Oden (1999, p.97) limits the prohibition to Ephesus on the basis that Paul’s other epistles do not contain similar prohibitions. However, this argument could limit much of Paul’s other teaching, for example about the Lord’s Supper, which is only mentioned in I Corinthians. Since the accepted tradition among both Jews and Gentiles was that women did not teach (Liefeld, 1999, p.97), Paul would have been unlikely to write any instruction about the issue unless this traditional position was being challenged in the particular situation (as in Ephesus). Keener (1992, p.113) asks a related question, “had this rule been established and universal, is it possible that Timothy, who had worked many years with Paul, would not have known it already?” However, simply because Paul does not mention that Timothy already knew this rule we cannot assume that he did not. In fact, coming from a Jewish religious tradition, Timothy would have been unlikely to assume that women were permitted to teach unless Paul explicitly told him so.

Some writers (e.g. Pieteresen, 1998, p.2; Barclay, 1975, p.68; Oden, 1999, p.102) argue that Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ “there is neither ... male nor female” prohibits any distinction in the roles of men and women in the church. But Kent (1982, p.110) maintains that this verse “offers no obstacles when it is understood that the oneness there described is spiritual and ontological, not functional.” If the roles of men and women in family life (including women’s unique privilege of childbearing) remain distinct without compromising Galatians 3:28, why not roles in church life? Towner (1994, p.74) writes that, “Galatians 3:28 is not a simple declaration of the immediate eradication of all social distinctions. Paul’s own approach to the three relationships ought to be evidence of that”. Moo (cited in Mounce, 2000, p.111) suggests that Paul’s teaching in the Pastorals about the role of women may even have been in response to:

an unbalanced emphasis on Paul’s own teaching that ... in Christ there is neither ‘male nor female’ (Galatians 3:28). What Paul would be doing in both 1 Corinthians and the pastoral epistles is seeking to right the balance by reasserting the ... ongoing significance of those role distinctions between men and women that he saw rooted in creation.

In studying Scripture we must always seek to elucidate from the text the universal principles of God’s truth and order, which must be differentiated from the specific cultural expressions of those principles. There are examples where the principle can be distinguished from a cultural expression of it, for example in I Corinthians 11 where the principle is headship and the

cultural expression is head covering. In these cases we must apply the timeless universal principle to our own cultural situation. The issue of the role of women regarding authoritative teaching in the church is not, however, one where the practice can be distinguished from the principle. I agree with Schreiner (1995, p.140) when he says that:

the principle in verse 12 cannot be separated from the practice of teaching or exercising authority over men. There are some instances in which the principle and practice (e.g., polygamy and homosexuality) coalesce. This is one of those cases. Public teaching of men by women and the concomitant authority it gives them violate the principle of male leadership.

AN APPEAL TO CREATION ORDER AND THE FALL (vv13&14)

In vv13&14 Paul refers to the narratives about Adam and Eve: firstly to the creation narrative of Genesis 2 (in v13), and secondly to the narrative about the Fall in Genesis 3 (v14). The opening word of v13, *gar* (*for*), allows v13 to be read either as the reason underlying Paul's prohibition in v12, or an explanation of how it might be improper for women to teach. If v13 is actually an explanation, Paul might simply be drawing an analogy between two specific historical situations (Eve and Ephesus) rather than making a universally applicable argument (Keener, 1992, p.115). Mounce (2000, p.132) discusses the frequencies of each use of *gar* and concludes that, "The most natural reading and the most lexically supported conclusion is that here *γὰρ* is not illustrative but gives a reason ... that v12 is true". Furthermore, if the illustrative use of *gar* is true it remains unclear exactly how v13 would be an illustration of v12. Keener (1992, p.117) and Witherington (1988, p.122) argue that there is an analogy in v14 between the easily-deceived Eve and some easily-deceived women in Ephesus, but it is less easy to see an analogy between the order of creation and the prohibition on women teaching. Furthermore, if vv13&14 are analogies of the dangers of women teaching, one might ask why Paul does not clarify this. Hence, I maintain that vv13&14 provide reasons underlying Paul's prohibition on women teaching or exercising authority in the church.

Firstly in v13 Paul appeals to the order of creation of the man and woman. For Kent (1982, p.109), this appeal conclusively demonstrates the universal application of v12's prohibition. Mounce (2000, p.131) reminds us that "While the issue of the curse is raised in v14, v13 refers to the period before the curse and indicates God's original intention". In other words, v13 teaches that woman's submission to man's headship is part of the fabric of God's creation rather than a result of its corruption by sin. This understanding nullifies the Keeners' (1992, p.117) argument that the submission of women "like other aspects of the curse ... does not need to be praised and enforced by church rules". The claim that Adam had a position of

priority does not mean that by virtue of this he was superior to Eve, as v13 gives “no evidence of the superiority of man; but only of his priority” (King, 1962, p.52). To quote Schreiner (1995, p.136):

It is a modern, democratic, Western notion that diverse functions suggest distinctions in worth between men and women. Paul believed that men and women were equal in personhood, dignity, and value but also taught that women had a distinct role from men.

Secondly, in v14, Paul appeals to the fact of the Fall. There is considerable debate about exactly how the deception of Eve relates to the prohibition on women teaching. Some commentators (e.g. Kelly, 1963, p.68) see a reference to an inherently greater susceptibility to deception in the female personality. Guthrie (1957, p.77) suggests that Paul, “may have in mind the greater aptitude of the weaker sex to be led astray.” Although the phrase “the weaker sex” jars with modern sensibilities, the suggestion that personality differences between men and women may make men more suited to leadership in the church is worth consideration. Powell (1988, p.7), after emphasising the differences between the classical female and male personality types, states that:

women are prohibited from teaching and exercising authority over men, not because it involves the public communication of truth to men, but because teaching involves exercising oversight and correction of men ... Generally speaking, women are less inclined to exercise these necessary negative aspects of teaching.

Likewise, Schreiner (1995, p.145) writes that women:

are more nurturing and relational than men... Women are less likely to perceive the need to take a stand on doctrinal non-negotiables since they prize harmonious relationships more than men do.

A second explanation for the connection between v12 and v14 is suggested by Kent (1982, p.109), namely that the Fall illustrates the disastrous consequences of a reversal of roles where a woman takes headship over the man. He writes that:

the Fall was caused, not only by disobeying God’s command not to eat, but also by violating the divinely appointed relation between the sexes. Woman assumed headship, and man with full knowledge of the act, subordinated himself to her leadership and ate of the fruit (Rom. 5:19). Both violated their positions.

The curse delivered to Eve in Genesis 3:16, where she is told that her husband will “rule over” her would then represent a parallel with *authenthein* in v12.

A third explanation proposed by Keener (1992, p.116) is that v13 explains v14 – that Eve was deceived because, having been created after Adam, she had not directly received the command from God. Hence she was deceived because she had been inadequately taught by

Adam. Keener suggests that Paul presents this as an example of why it would be inadvisable for the poorly-educated women in Ephesus to teach, at least until they were adequately educated. However, this would actually be an indictment not of Eve but of Adam (who **was** adequately educated, since his teacher was God Himself) for failing to teach well, and would not support a prohibition specifically on women teaching. If this was genuinely Paul's thinking, why did he not prohibit all uneducated people from teaching rather than prohibiting women? Keener struggles with Paul's use of the Genesis accounts to establish the principle of submission of women to men because he claims that this idea is not found in the text of Genesis itself. However, if one allows that Paul was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it is possible that he is drawing out an insight that, although not explicit in the text of Genesis, is implicit there and now made clear under the Spirit's guidance. As Grudem (2004, p.327) says, "If the Bible is the Word of God, then these interpretations are not just Paul's interpretations; they are also God's interpretations of His own word."

I tend to favour the second of these three alternatives, since v13 has already established the principle of headship from the creation order, and v14 can therefore be read as an example of the consequences of reversing it. The reference to the Fall is then (Knight, 1992, p.144):

an example, rather than a separate basis for Paul's argument. Thus Paul argues not from creation and fall but from creation, and then illustrates this argument, albeit negatively, from the fall.

This view does not suggest that women are inherently incapable of teaching, which is in keeping with Paul's allowances for them to teach children and other women. However, I acknowledge Liefeld's (1999, p.100) difficulty with this position that "The biblical reference in both Genesis and 1 Timothy is to Eve's deception, not to insubordination". Perhaps the correct interpretation lies in a combination of the first two views: the headship of man, which is part of God's order in creation, includes a distinction of roles, and this is mirrored personality differences between the sexes that suit each sex particularly for its role, so that the results of reversing this order (as in the Fall) will often be disastrous.

SAVED THROUGH CHILDBEARING (v15)

The exegesis of this verse meets with four significant difficulties. Firstly, where the NIV has *women* the Greek reads *she*, raising the question who the subject of the verse is. It could be Eve (the *woman* of v14) or Christian women in general (the *women* of vv9-12). Secondly, the meaning of *sōthēsetai* (*saved*) can be either spiritual (salvation of the soul) or physical (preservation of the body). In favour of the physical sense, Keener (1992, p.118) assures us

that, "'Saved' means 'delivered' or 'brought safely through' more often in ancient literature than it means 'saved from sin'". Schreiner (1995, p.147), however, insists that *sōthēsetai*:

always has the meaning of spiritual salvation in the Pastoral Epistles ... and the other Pauline writings. Keener makes the error of making the meaning in other writings more important than in the Pauline writings.

It is note-worthy that, whichever meaning of *sōthēsetai* is taken, "The verb is in the singular, employing a divine passive that indicates God as the source of her salvation" (Collins, 2002, p.76). Thirdly *childbearing* can mean either childbearing in general or specifically the birth of the Messiah (since it is preceded by the definite article in the Greek). Kent (1982, p.114) argues that the use of the definite article with childbearing limits it to a "definite and particular event", but Guthrie (1957, p.78) insists that, "The Greek article is generic, describing the whole process of child-bearing, rather than definitive of one particular instance." The fourth exegetical problem is the grammar of the phrase "if they continue", since *she* is singular, whereas this phrase is plural. Houlden (1989, p.72), claims that *they* "must refer to the children", but Guthrie (1957, p.78) claims that, "it can only be assumed that the latter part of the verse refers to Christian women in general".

Various combinations of these interpretations have led to different understandings of the verse. Taking the physical sense of *saved* and general sense of *childbearing* the text reads, "women will come safely through childbirth". Keener (1992, pp.118-119) advocates this view, claiming that, "The most natural way for an ancient reader to have understood 'salvation' in the context of childbirth would have been a safe delivery" and that Paul's promise of safe childbirth may be "a relief from part of the curse". Simpson (1954, p.48), claims that Paul is promising a "safe delivery, provided that they abide in faith and love, amid the throes of parturition". However, as Stott (1996, p.87) states, "such a promise is not true, since many godly women have died in childbirth". Knight (1992, p.145) points out that:

this suggestion also raises the question of how the *εαν* clause then functions. Is the clause saying that all who come through childbirth do so because they believe, implying that all who die in childbirth do not believe? This seems extremely unlikely.

Taking the spiritual sense of *saved* and specific sense of *childbearing* the text reads, "women will be saved through the birth of the child". Stott (1996, p.87), Oden (1999, p.100), and Liefeld (1999, p.101) all advocate this view, which sees *childbearing* as an allusion to the Messianic promise of Genesis 3:15. Knight (1992, p.146) claims that Eve is the subject of the word *she*, and argues that Eve abandoned her role by taking the authority of the man, and so "became a sinner", but that through Mary she fulfils her role of child-bearing and so brings

salvation. Guthrie (1957, p.78) argues forcefully against this position saying, "if that were the writer's intention he could hardly have chosen a more obscure or ambiguous way of saying it". Another problem with this reading is raised by Lenski (1937, p.574) and Fee (1984, p.75), namely that "Paul nowhere else suggests that salvation is by the Incarnation or by Mary's deed".

Taking the spiritual sense of *saved* and general sense of *childbearing* the text reads, "women will be saved through becoming mothers". Chrysostom advocated this reading (Guthrie, 1957, p.78). He saw *childbearing* as equivalent to *child-nurture*, and made the children the subject of the verb *continue*. King (1962, p.54) translates *saved* as "delivered from spiritual uselessness, for verses 11-14 seem to have condemned the poor lady to that fate". The reference to spiritual salvation can be explained by Paul's qualifying comment about continuing in "faith, love and holiness with propriety". Despite Eve's sin, women can be saved (spiritually) by living righteously before God, including fulfilling the maternal and domestic roles required of her. Witherington (1988, p.123) says:

verse 15 indicates that Eve's transgression was not without a remedy ... Women in Ephesus are not to emulate Eve in being deceived and transgressing (listening to false teachers) but rather are to work out their salvation not by attempting to rule over men or engage in harmful teaching, but by being married, having children, and helping them continue in faith, love and holiness.

Gruenler (1998, p.217) describes Eve's sin as her "autonomous decision apart from the family unity of husband and wife", and her path to salvation as repentance from this individualism to follow God's plan for family life. However, there is no suggestion here of salvation by works as, given the overall teaching of the letter and the connection here with *saved*, *faith* "undoubtedly means 'trust, confidence, faith in the active sense'" (Knight, 1992, p.148).

Amidst this detail we must not lose sight of the overall intention of v15, which is to emphasise that, far from having no usefulness in God's purpose, women can and will be saved. As Kent (1982, p.111) writes, "There is salvation for women, even though they are in subjection to men. This is in contrast to many other religions which place women below the level worth saving." Furthermore, this verse reminds us that even if women are not permitted to teach or exercise authority in the church, they have a unique role to play in childbearing that is not available to men, emphasising the complementary but distinct roles for men and women in the plan of God. As Simpson (1954, p.48) writes:

The Scriptures portray the relationship of the sexes as complementary, not competitive. They are designed to blend in a mutual unison. We see diversity of function linked with equality of nature.

CONCLUSION

I conclude that within its cultural context and against the background of Jewish tradition this passage positively encourages women to learn, but prohibits them from teaching men or holding authoritative positions in the church, and that there are no qualifying comments in the text that limit this prohibition only to the specific local situation in Ephesus. Indeed, this has been the majority position throughout church history (Guthrie, 1957, p.76). Doriani (1995, p.262), who conducted a comprehensive survey of the interpretation of I Timothy 2 throughout church history, concluded that:

Throughout the ages the church has traditionally interpreted 1 Timothy 2:11-14 in a straightforward manner ... Women ought to learn, but in a quiet and submissive manner (2:11). They may teach informally, but may not hold teaching offices or formally authoritative positions in the church (2:12). Furthermore, Liefeld (1999, p.97) says, "This would not have been surprising to either Jews or Greeks, since neither culture permitted women to teach". If Paul had intended to reverse the norms of his day would he not have made a positive statement permitting women to teach? As it is, we have no such statement. On the contrary we have here Paul's prohibition, which is in keeping with his teaching elsewhere on the role of women in the church and the principle of headship (I Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5:23). As Schreiner (1995, p.136) writes:

Even progressives acknowledge that role differences were very common in ancient societies. The original readers would have understood Paul, then, to defend such role differences, and he does so on the basis of the created order.

To limit the commands of scripture to the specific historical situation into which they are written without explicit warrant from the text would rule out huge portions of Scripture, including almost every part of the New Testament epistles, from being authoritative for us today. We should, therefore, celebrate our equality of standing in Christ but also rejoice in our diversity of roles as we seek to live out the Biblical principle of headship in the twenty-first century.

Please address any comments to: paul@paulcoulter.net

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baldwin, H.S. 1995, "A Difficult Word" in A.J. Köstenberger, T.R. Schreiner & H.S. Baldwin (eds.) *Women in the Church, A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids.
- Barclay, W. 1975, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, The Daily Study Bible, The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh
- Baugh, S.M. 1995, "A Foreign World: Ephesus in the First Century" in A.J. Köstenberger, T.R. Schreiner & H.S. Baldwin (eds.) *Women in the Church, A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids.
- Brown, H.O.J. 1995, "The New Testament Against Itself: 1 Timothy 2:9-15 and the 'Breakthrough' of Galatians 3:28" in A.J. Köstenberger, T.R. Schreiner & H.S. Baldwin (eds.) *Women in the Church, A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids.
- Collins, R.F. 2002, *I & II Timothy & Titus*, The New Testament Library, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Dorani, D. 1995, "The History of the Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2" in A.J. Köstenberger, T.R. Schreiner & H.S. Baldwin (eds.) *Women in the Church, A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids.
- Earle, R. 1978, "1 and 2 Timothy" in F.E. Gaebelein (ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids.
- Fee, G.D. 1984, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Biblical Commentary, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody.
- Gordon, T.D. 1995, "A Certain Kind of Letter: The Genre of 1 Timothy" in A.J. Köstenberger, T.R. Schreiner & H.S. Baldwin (eds.) *Women in the Church, A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids.
- Grudem, W. 2004, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth: an analysis of 118 disputed questions*, Apollos, Leicester.
- Gruenler, R.G. 1998, "The Mission-Lifestyle Setting of 1 Tim 2:8-15", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol.41, No.2, pp.215-238.
- Guthrie, D. 1957, *The Pastoral Epistles, An Introduction & Commentary*, The Tyndale Press, London.
- Houlden, J.L. 1989, *The Pastoral Epistles*, TPI New Testament Commentaries, SCM Press, London.
- Keener, C.S. 1992, *Paul, Women, and Wives*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody.
- Kent, H.A. Jr. 1982, *The Pastoral Epistles*, revised edition, Moody Press, Chicago.
- King, G.H. 1962, *A Leader Led*, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, London.

- Knight, G.W. III 1992, *The Pastoral Epistles, A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids.
- Köstenberger, A.J. 1995, "A Complex Sentence Structure in 1 Timothy 2:12" in A.J. Köstenberger, T.R. Schreiner & H.S. Baldwin (eds.) *Women in the Church, A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids.
- Kroeger, R.C. & Kroeger, C.C. 1992, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids.
- Lenski, R.C.H. 1937, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*, Augsburg, Minneapolis.
- Liefeld, W.L. 1999, *1 & 2 Timothy / Titus*, The NIV Application Commentary, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids.
- Lock, W. 1924, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The International Critical Commentary, T&T Clark, Edinburgh.
- Mounce, W.D. 2000, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville.
- Oden, T.C. 1989, *First & Second Timothy and Titus*, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Pietersen, L. 1998, *AT 18: Women and the Pastorals, Part 2*. Available: www.anabaptistnetwork.com/node/view/159 (accessed 22/04/05)
- Powell, C. 1998, *Paul's Concept of Teaching and 1 Timothy 2:12*. Available: www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=2480 (accessed 22/04/05)
- Scholer, D.M. 2003, "1 Timothy 2.9-15 and the Place of Women in the Church's Ministry" in A. Levine (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Deutero-Pauline Epistles*, T&T Clark, London.
- Schreiner, T.R. 1995, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15: A Dialogue with Scholarship" in A.J. Köstenberger, T.R. Schreiner & H.S. Baldwin (eds.) *Women in the Church, A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids.
- Scott, E.F. 1936, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The Moffat New Testament Commentary, Hodder & Stoughton, London.
- Simpson, E.K 1954, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The Tyndale Press, London.
- Stott, J.R.W. 1996, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today, IVP, Leicester.
- Towner, P.H. 1994, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, IVP, Downers Grove.
- Witherington, B. III. 1988, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

- Yarbrough, R.W. 1995, "The Hermeneutics of 1 Timothy 2:9-15" in A.J. Köstenberger, T.R. Schreiner & H.S. Baldwin (eds.) *Women in the Church, A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids.
- Young, F. 1994, *The Theology of the Pastoral Epistles*, New Testament Theology, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Zodhiates, S (ed.) 1992, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, World Bible Publishers, Iowa Falls.

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise specified, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission.