

February 2013

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Recommended Citation

Cortez, Felix H., "The Argument of the Order of Creation in 1 Timothy 2:9-15" (2013). *Faculty Publications*. Paper 13.
<http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/new-testament-pubs/13>

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Biblical Research Committee of the Inter-American Division

“Theology of the Ordination”
Miami, Fla., February 26-27, 2013

**THE ARGUMENT OF THE ORDER OF CREATION
IN 1 TIMOTHY 2:9–15**

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Introduction

It is normally easy to understand what a person says. It is not always easy, however, to understand what he or she meant. If a given afternoon I say to my son, “I don’t want you to play soccer.” He won’t have any problem understanding what I said. None of the words is unknown to him. The grammatical construction is straightforward. It is possible, however, that he will have more difficulty understanding what I meant. Did I mean that he cannot play soccer for the rest of his life or just that specific day, week, or until he has finished his chores? Did I mean that soccer is bad in itself or that playing soccer is Ok but not that specific day, week, month, etc., or in that specific place, or with some specific friends? This paper analyzes what Paul said about the role of women in the church—specifically 1 Tim. 2:9–15 and 1 Cor. 11:1–16—because what he said stands at the center of the debate whether it is proper or not to ordain women to the pastoral ministry. I will argue that the main disagreement between the different positions regarding women’s ordination to pastoral ministry does not have to do with *what Paul said*, but with *what he meant*. I will

also argue that we may not be able to answer all the questions that these passages raise; therefore, it is imperative that we approach the issue with humility toward the biblical text and toward others who disagree with us. It will be clear throughout the paper that I have a position regarding what Paul meant in these passages, but the purpose of this paper is not to convince those who happen to disagree with me that they need to change their views; instead, I would like to facilitate through this paper a reflection on what are the implications of the way we read Paul. I hope that at this paper help us in our resolve, as we deal as the church with what should be the proper role of women in the church, to be faithful to the Bible above all regardless the sacrifice that would demand from us.

First Timothy 2:9–15 is probably the most debated passage in the discussion regarding women’s ordination to pastoral ministry. First we will study what Paul said. Later on, we will discuss what he might have meant and the implications.

What Did Paul Say?

Paul has mainly four instructions for women regarding their participation in the church¹:

1. “Women should dress themselves modestly and decently” (v. 9).
2. Women should “learn in silence with full submission” (v. 11).
3. Women cannot “teach or ... have authority over a man” (v. 12).
4. Women should “keep silent” (v. 12). (This is, in fact, a repetition of the second instruction.)

There are two main points of debate at this passage. First, what is the meaning of the verb *authentein* [αὐθεντεῖν, “have authority”] in verse 12? The verb *authentein* appears

¹ Unless noted otherwise, I will use the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

only here in the New Testament and evidences a range of meanings in Greco-Roman literature. Scholars are mainly divided whether the verb means to “have authority”² or to “domineer”;³ that is, whether Paul prohibits women to exercise any kind of authority over men or only prohibits them to exercise an abusive authority. Still another way to say it is whether Paul prohibits women from being leaders in the church, or only prevents them from being abusive leaders in the church.

The context suggests, in my opinion, however, that Paul means the former. He does not want women to exercise leadership roles in the church. The phrase “to have authority” explains the immediately previous instruction “to teach.”⁴ Paul simply does not want women to teach, which would be a form of exercising authority. They, instead, should remain quiet in “full submission.” Paul is so intent on this that repeats the idea three times.

Γυνή ἐν ἡσυχία μαθανέτω
 ἐν πάσῃ ὑποταγῇ·
 διδάσκειν δὲ γυναικὶ οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω
 οὐδὲ ἀυθεντεῖν ἀνδρός,
 ἀλλ’ εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχία.
 (1Ti 2:11-12 BGT)

Let a woman learn in silence
 with full submission.
 I permit no woman to teach
 or to have authority over a man;
 she is to keep silent.
 (1Ti 2:11-12 NRS)

We cannot say that Paul prohibits women only to teach false doctrines. If he had meant that, he would have used the verb ἑτεροδιδασκαλέω (“teach different doctrines”), which he uses in 1 Tim. 1:3 and 6:3. So, it is very clear that Paul does not want women to

² {Baldwin, 2005 #1362}

³ {Winter, 2003 #1361@116-9} See also {Towner, 2006 #1364@4553}

⁴ {Köstenberger, 2005 #1363}

teach. They should, instead, “keep silent” and in “full submission” as was expected of children in a well-ordered family (1 Tim. 3:4).

The second point of debate concerns the reasons Paul gives for his instruction. He provides two reasons:

1. “Adam was formed first” (v. 13).
2. “The woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (v. 14).

The first reason seems to imply that Adam’s priority in the order of creation suggests that God assigned roles at creation: Adam should be the leader and Eve his helper (Gen. 2:18). In fact, the idea that the first is best is found widely in Jewish and Greek sources.⁵ It is argued, however, that subordination is not bad in itself and does not imply a difference in worth or essence but only a difference in roles—e.g., Jesus subordinated himself to the father (1 Cor. 11:3).⁶ The second reason seems to imply that women should be subordinated to men either because she is easier to deceive (e.g., Philo *QG* 1.33, 46) or as a consequence (or punishment?) for Eve’s transgression (Gen. 3:16).⁷

Scholars debate, however, what the function of the conjunction *gar* (γάρ, “for”), which introduces the arguments of vss. 13–14, is. Does *gar* introduce a rationale or an analogy?⁸ In other words, should women be in “full submission” *because* man was created first and women are more gullible (rationale)? Or, should women be in “full submission” to men *just as* Eve was subjected to Adam after the serpent deceived her (analogy)?⁹ Is Paul reminding women at Ephesus that they should submit to men because that is God’s original

⁵ See {Towner, 2006 #1364@4621 n. 658}

⁶ {Bacchiocchi, 1987 #1367@71–77}

⁷ See further references in {Towner, 2006 #1364@4720}

⁸ The translation “for” could carry both meanings.

⁹ That is to say, Eve’s secondary creation and submission after the fall would be “analogous to” not “normative for” women’s subjection.

design for the world (rationale) or should they submit to men so that they are not deceived as Eve was (analogy)? It is clear that Paul used OT stories as analogies (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:1–11). In fact, Paul uses the story of Eve’s deception as an analogy to warn the church at Corinth—both men and women (2 Cor. 11:3)—against false doctrines. So, did Paul use the creation account of Genesis as a *rationale* for or as an *analogy* to the subjection of women in the church? It is difficult to say. Both senses are common for *gar*, but the argumentative use (rationale) is more common and easy to understand in the passage. So, it seems that Paul is arguing in this passage that women should be quiet and submit fully to the authority of men *because* of the order of creation and the fall.

What Did Paul Mean?

What did Paul mean? Did he mean that specifically the women of Ephesus should submit or women in general? Did he mean that they should submit always or for a particular period of time?

It has been argued that Paul is not establishing here a local instruction for a specific period of time but a general principle applicable across time and across cultures. The arguments are simple. Paul bases his instruction on the order of creation. So, women’s subjection to men is part of God’s original plan and, therefore, the ideal to which society should strive at any time and at any place.¹⁰ Furthermore, 1 Timothy is a letter where Paul instructs Timothy how he should lead “the church of the living God” (3:15) until the “later times” (4:1).¹¹ Finally, since the instruction against jewelry (2:9–10) is applicable across

¹⁰ {Hasel, 1989 #1368@16–22; Holmes, 2000 #1366@169}

¹¹ {Holmes, 2000 #1366@165–71} See also {Bacchiocchi, 1987 #1367@151–2}

time and culture, the instruction on women's submission—which includes the instruction on Jewelry (2:9–15)—should be also.¹²

In a forceful article, Gerhard Hasel has argued that we should be consistent in our reading of Scripture and accept Paul's instruction regarding the submission of women lest we undermine the authority of Scripture. So, we should conclude that women should not teach or exercise authority over men in the church. This, however, would have wide implications for the life of the church. *Paul is not talking about ministry in particular in this text but about the church in general. So, it would seem that women should not hold any position of authority—like being department directors or academic administrators—or teach over men—e.g., teaching the Sabbath School lesson or a class at a university.*

I think, then, it is necessary to make a closer analysis to the nature of Paul's instruction in this passage.

Has Timothy 2:9–15 Local or Universal Application?

I believe that before we make a universal application of this passage, we should be very careful to look at it more closely and also the way Paul forms his arguments. So, let's review the arguments advanced above.

First, it is true that modesty in dress is a principle that applies across time and across cultures but the specific reference to braided hair, gold, pearls, and expensive clothes (1Ti 2:9) was culturally motivated. Roman culture assigned much importance to women's dress. There were laws, in fact, that regulated the dress of the matron, the adulteress, and the prostitute. In practical terms, dress determined to a large extent public

¹² {Hasel, 1989 #1368@20–21}

identity. Greco Roman writers described ideal wives as modest in their demeanor. The four things that Paul excluded, however, were characteristic of the *hetairai* (high-class prostitutes).¹³

Secondly, there are instructions in 1 Timothy that we clearly understand as applicable to Ephesus only. There is, for example, this instruction: “So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, and manage their households, (1Ti 5:14 NRS).” This instruction is opposite to Paul’s instruction in 1 Cor 7:8–9. It seems clear, then, that for some reason Paul wanted young widows in Ephesus to marry while he opened the possibility for widows of Corinth to remain single.

Third, specific arguments of Paul seem to contradict his teachings unless we understand them in the context of his whole teaching and the particular situation of Ephesus. For example:

a. “... she will be saved through childbearing (1Ti 2:15 NRS)” seems to contradict Paul’s teaching that we are saved through faith only (Rom 3:28; Gal. 2:16).

b. Paul says that the elder should be “...the husband of one wife (1Ti 3:2 NKJ).” This, however, would disqualify Paul himself from being an elder (1 Cor. 7:8).

Third, Paul often qualified his statements. For example, in 1 Cor 7:1 he says, “Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: *It is* good for a man not to touch a woman (1Co 7:1 NKJ).” Paul qualified this statement in vv. 25–33 by explaining that this is because of the impending crisis that they are about to face. First Corinthians 8 gives the impression that Paul would not have any problem letting people eat food sacrificed to the idols if no weak brother is offended because “we know that an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that

¹³ {Winter, 2003 #1361@98–109}

there is no other God but one (1Co 8:4 NKJ).” In chapter 10, however, he says that, after all, though an idol is nothing, what is sacrificed to them is sacrificed to the demons and, therefore, we should not participate of the table of the idols (19–22) and uses the idolatry at Baal-Peor as a warning (vv. 1–13).

I will argue that this is what happens with the argument of the order of creation in 1 Cor. 11:4–11. There, Paul argues that women should wear a veil on their head, among other things, because she was formed from man and for the sake of man (vv. 8–9); that is, because of the order of creation. In the very next verses, however, Paul qualifies his statement: “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God (1Co 11:11-12 NRS).” So, Paul says that “in Christ” the principle of the order of creation does not apply because in Him both men and women proceed from each other and both proceed from God.¹⁴

This is quite surprising! How is it possible that Paul qualifies the argument of the order of creation in this way? How could the order of creation, which is before the fall, be superseded by Jesus’ redemption in the cross (i.e., “in Christ”)? We would think that the order of creation is not part of the problem of sin; yet, Paul argues that “in Christ” it no longer applies. I have struggled for a long time with this problem. I want to suggest that Paul decided to use the “order of creation” argument as other Jewish and Greco-Roman authors did.¹⁵ They overwhelmingly believed that “first is better.” Paul decided to talk in that way as well because the order of creation became significant at the fall. Let me explain.

¹⁴ The same principle applies in Eph 5:20 when Paul says that both husbands and wife should “[b]e subject to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21 NRS).”

¹⁵ See note 5 above.

First, we need to understand the meaning of the order of creation. God created Adam to be the governor of the world and Eve as his helper (Gen. 2:18). Before the fall, however, this relationship did not entail authority or submission on the part of the woman, at least not as we know it today. The term *ezer* (עֵזֶר, “helper” Gen. 2:18), which describes the function of the woman, refers to a helper that comes from a position of strength. It often refers to God who helps man, or foreign kings that come to help another king.¹⁶ Certainly these “helpers” are not under the authority of the one helped. So, the woman was not created to be under him, or above, but at his side *as his equal* (see PP 46). She was his benefactor. Together, they would govern the world created by God as “one flesh.” The sinless nature of both Adam and Eve made possible this kind of relationship. Once sin entered the world, however, that relationship was not possible anymore because they were now fallen human beings. It is at this moment that “the order of creation” acquires relevance. Subordination came after the fall, not before. This is what Ellen G. White says:

Eve was told of the sorrow and pain that must henceforth be her portion. And the Lord said, "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." **In the creation God had made her the equal of Adam.** Had they remained obedient to God--in harmony with His great law of love--they would ever have been in harmony with each other; but sin had brought discord, and **now their union could be maintained and harmony preserved only by submission on the part of the one or the other.** Eve had been the first in transgression; and she had fallen into temptation by separating from her companion, contrary to the divine direction. It was by her solicitation that Adam sinned, and **she was now placed in subjection to her husband** (PP 58, emphasis mine).

So, before the fall there were different functions performed by Adam and Eve but there was no subordination. The woman was not under the authority of man. After the fall, different functions continue but subordination is added. The woman is placed now under

¹⁶ {Keener, 1992 #1369@116 n. 115}

the authority of man. So, when Paul argues—as Jewish and Greco-Roman authors did—that the woman should be in “full submission” because Adam was formed first (1 Tim. 2:11–14) he is viewing the order of creation through the lens of the fall. The fact that Adam was formed first meant the subjection of the women only after the fall. Before the fall, the order of creation meant different functions, but not submission. In 1 Tim 2, the order of creation means submission and also different functions. That is why in 1 Cor 11:11–12 argues that “in the Lord” the order of creation does not longer apply.

There remains a question. Why did Paul did not qualify his argument in 1 Tim 2:9–15 as he did in 1 Cor 11:11–12? Why did he not remind them that “in Christ” we should subject to one another as he did in Eph 5:21? Paul does qualify his statement but in a different way.

Paul climaxes his instruction to women in 1 Tim. 2:15 by affirming that they “will be saved through childbearing provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.” This is a difficult passage. Paul alludes in this passage to Gen 3:16 where God explains Eve that pain in childbearing was part of the punishment or consequence for her sin. Paul’s expression “will be saved through childbearing” could refer to women’s physical safety in childbearing or to (spiritual) salvation “through” childbearing. It probably referred to the latter. Affluent Greco-Roman women of a liberated lifestyle were often averse to having children because it ruined their figure or simply because it was inconvenient. So, they used preventive methods (including abortion) that put them in physical danger. Paul tells them that bearing children would save them. He means that instead of embracing a liberated life away from the duties at home, they should embrace the tasks of a virtuous wife by having children and rearing them. If they submit to God’s

discipline (Gen 3:15) and remain in the faith with modesty (*sōphrosynē*, “self-control”), they will be saved. Apparently the needs of women in Ephesus were different from those in Corinth. There, Paul allows them to engage in prophecy but here they must be quiet in full submission and are not able to teach. Why was this? The wider context of 1 Timothy suggests that women were probably the main propagators of false teachings in the church (1 Tim. 4:7; 5:13-14; cf. 2 Tim 3:6-7). The heresy’s aversion of marriage (1 Tim. 4:3) suggests that there were other teachings that were specially attractive to well-to-do Christian wives tempting them to shun home duties and seek a life of independence and liberation (5:11-15).

In the time of Paul had emerged in the Greco Roman world what has been called the “new woman”—affluent women who claimed for themselves the sexual liberty normally permitted to men. The literature of the time relates these women to the use of complex hairstyles, and the wearing of gold, pearls and expensive clothes. It is possible that well-to-do Christian wives attracted by this emerging trend were in danger of rejecting the cultural norms of modesty. It is probable that what Paul is combatting in Ephesus and other places are the initial tendencies that later flourished in the heretical movements of the second century. Both the gnostic and the montanist—heretical movements of the AD second century—gave great prominence to women in their teachings and organization.

Conclusion

In summary, Paul instructs women in Ephesus to “learn in silence with full submission” and prohibits them to teach. I have suggested that Paul meant this instruction for the church at Ephesus. I have suggested that 1 Cor. 11:11-12 shows that Paul viewed the argument of the order of creation through the lenses of the fall. That is to say, for Paul

the order of creation implied the submission of women because of the fall and that is why he argues in 1 Cor. 11:11–12 that “in the Lord” men and women are equal (i.e., dependent on each other) and both depend on God.

This agrees with Paul’s teaching in Gal. 3:28: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28 NRS).” It also agrees with Paul’s practice. He did not expect women to be quiet at church, but to pray and prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5). He also commends women who had authority roles in the church. Paul used Phoebe as a carrier of the letter to the Romans and identifies her as *diakonos*, “servant” or “deacon” (like Paul himself 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6; 6:4; 11:23; etc.), and patroness of the church at Cenchrea (Rom 16:1-3). All three roles implied some degree of authority and probably a responsibility to teach (cf. 1 Tim. 3:9). Priscilla and her husband are commended as Paul’s co-workers (Rom. 16:3). They actually taught Apollos (Acts 18:26; note Priscilla’s priority in both texts). Paul also commends Junia and her husband as prominent among the apostles (Rom. 16:7). Elsewhere in Scripture we find reference to women speaking and having leadership roles (e.g., Judg. 4-5; Joel 2:28; Acts 21:8-9).