

The Inspired Point of I Timothy 2:8-15

Background Information about Ephesus

At its roots, the city of Ephesus was a Hellenic society—hundreds of years before the time of Christ, it had been conquered by Alexander the Great.¹ It was not until 190 B.C. that it came under the rule of the Roman Empire.² Along with Pergamos, Ephesus was an important city in the Roman province of Asia.³ As an artificial harbor, the city was accessible both by land (via Roman highways) and sea.⁴ It was also a center for the study of philosophy and rhetoric.⁵ But most of the wealth and repute of Ephesus was due to the temple of Diana which resided there.⁶ Eventually, Ephesus was designated as the seat for Roman administration in the province of Asia—this had the effect of magnifying the cultural influence of Rome on the Ephesian people.⁷ Thus the Ephesian church was likely carved out of a typically Greco-Roman, 1st century society.

The Situation in the Ephesian Church

Paul's overarching concern in I Timothy centers on a wave of false teaching that had infiltrated the Church. In fact, this heterodoxy was what occasioned Paul's missive to Timothy:

¹ John Richard Sampey, "Ephesus," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, vol. II, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 961.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Andreas J. Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin, eds., *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of I Timothy 2:9-15* (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 1997), 45.

⁶ Sampey, 961.

As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines... (I Tim 1:3).

The heterodoxy present in the Ephesian church (promulgated, in all likelihood, by some who had formerly acted as elders—see Ac 20:28-31) was evidently the source of strife between its members:

If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words...he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth.... (I Tim 6:3-5a).

Presumably, it is on this basis that Paul makes his plea in 2:8 that men assemble for prayer “without wrath and dissension.”

I Timothy 2:8-15

v. 8 The presence of the word “therefore” (οὖν) relates this and the following verses to the preceding material. Paul enjoins “entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings [to be] made on behalf of all men,” with a view toward “a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (v. 2). The presence of “wrath or dissension” (v. 8) is irreconcilable with the goal of Paul’s original prayer-injunction (vv. 1-2). Thus the prayer-gatherings

⁷ Köstenberger et al, 49.

commanded by Paul yield opposite results from the false teaching he seeks to banish.

vv. 9-10 ὡσαυτως (“likewise, in the same way”) at the beginning of v. 9 denotes that the assembly of the community of faith for prayer is still in view. The material of these verses also relates to the “tranquility and quiet” and the desired absence of “wrath and dissension” in vv. 2 and 8. In keeping with both these characteristics, women are to abstain from wearing elaborate hairstyles and extravagant clothing; instead, they are instructed to “adorn themselves modestly and discreetly...by means of good works” (vv. 9-10). The point here is not a self-contained, legalistic prohibition of certain kinds of attire—Paul is stating that “women who profess godliness should focus on good works rather than [attracting attention by] outward adornment.”⁸ As in v. 8 with the men, the issue at hand with the women of the Ephesian congregation is one of *deportment*.

vv. 11-12 Of importance in these verses is the word quiet/quietly (ἡσυχία), which is first used in Paul’s original prayer-injunction in 2:1-2. As with vv. 8-10, proper deportment in the context of the assembly is in view; women are instructed *both* to learn *and* to abstain from teaching/having authority over men *with quietness*.⁹

⁸ Köstenberger et al, 160.

⁹ Again, as with his previous instructions to the men concerning prayer and the women concerning attire, the deportment Paul demands is in contradistinction to that which is produced by the false teaching at Ephesus.

- vv. 13-14 Here Paul explains his rationale for the prohibition of female teaching and having authority over men in the congregation. He does so by adapting and applying the creation narrative (Gen 2:7, 21-23) and the account of the Fall of Man (Gen 3:1-6) to the situation in Ephesus. Women should learn and remain in quietness because (1) of the order of creation—Adam was created first, then Eve—and, (2) Eve (not Adam) was deceived and thereby fell into transgression. This latter portion of Paul’s logic probably takes the situation in Ephesus into account. We know from II Tim 3:6 (and perhaps I Tim 5:13) that some women in the congregation had been a willing audience for the false teachers.
- v. 15 The conjunction “but” sets this verse in contrast to the preceding ones. Paul appears to qualify his logic in vv. 13-14 so as to dispel “the impression that woman lies under God’s permanent displeasure.”¹⁰ This is a difficult verse, and commentators differ on its proper interpretation. It seems that Paul has the punishment of Eve’s sin (pain in childbirth) in view (Gen 3:16). Thus he is not making a soteriological statement with respect to childbearing; he probably means “saved” or “delivered” in a different sense, i.e., women will be preserved or brought safely by God through the difficulty of labor.¹¹

¹⁰ J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles* (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1963), 69.

¹¹ Craig S. Keener, *The InterVarsity Press Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 612.

Summary

That Paul was concerned about the false teachers and their influence on the Ephesian church is obvious. The heterodoxy and its peddlers had disturbed the congregation, causing arguments, strife, and friction—apparently even in the midst of prayer gatherings. Paul’s purpose in I Tim 2:8-15 is to instruct the Ephesian church in behavior that befits a Christian assembly. Men must pray without engaging in strife. Similarly, women must avoid ostentatious, boastful (perhaps even seductive) behavior in terms of their attire. Furthermore, they are instructed to learn (but not to teach) in the assembly. Whether man or woman, all must exemplify the “quietness” Paul describes as “good and acceptable” in the sight of God (I Tim 2:3).