

Observing Paul's thoughts leading up to 1 Timothy 2:12
Examining the Controversy of 1 Timothy 2:12: Part 2

1. What is the purpose of Paul's first letter to Timothy? What is the nature of the false teaching that Paul was addressing?

The main purpose for Paul's letter is found at 1 Timothy:3:15, "...I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." Paul's intent was to teach Timothy on how the church should function, because of its role in exhorting sound doctrine.

Timothy had stayed in Ephesus to confront the false teaching occurring there (1 Tim 1:3-4, 1 Tim 4:1-3).

Some false teachers were involved with fables and genealogies, which did not have any spiritual value and led to more trivial questions and arguments (1 Tim 1:3-4).

Some false teachers believed that natural desires of the body, such as sex and food, were evil and promoted abstinence from those activities by forbidding marriage and certain foods (1 Tim 4:1-3).

False teachings were significant for its negative impact on human relationships. Marriage was forbidden and young widows were encouraged not to remarry, bear children, and manage their homes (1 Tim 5:9-16). These false teachings fostered incorrect attitudes toward marriage, sex, and roles in human relationships, all of which were contrary to the created beauty and order by God (1 Tim 4:4).

2. What is the biblical context preceding 1 Timothy 2:11-15? Consider making an outline of the preceding verses.

Paul's greeting to Timothy (1 Tim 1:1-2)

The threat posed by false teachers:

A warning about the false teachers' heretical and spiritually worthless doctrine (1 Tim 1:3-6)

A comment on the false teachers' egotistical motive of being recognized as a teacher of the Law while demonstrating a complete lack of understanding of how the Law functions with the Gospel (1 Tim 1:7-11)

A review of the Gospel and Paul's personal experience of grace (1 Tim 1:12-17)

Instructions on proper church behavior:

The importance of *public* prayer – requests, thanksgiving, and intercessory (1 Tim 2:1-8)

The importance of a woman's attire – adorning oneself with good works instead of the fashion values of the pagan world (1 Tim 2:8-10)

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3. Examine carefully 1 Timothy 2:9-12. What does Paul consider as appropriate behavior for Christian women and why?

Paul wants Christian women to dress modestly in church.

Note that Paul's exhortation is followed by an admonishment:

"I want men to pray... "without wrath and dissension" (verse 8)

"Likewise" (verse 9)

"I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing... not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments," (verse 9)

Paul's exhortation for men to pray "without wrath or dissension" is an implicit reference to the discord caused by false teachers (1 Tim 1:3-6; 6:3-5).

Paul's exhortation for Christian women to dress modestly in church may have been motivated by several reasons.

Contemporary literature of the time suggests that a woman's attire reflects her character. If it was inappropriate, it may reflect that a woman had loose morals or was independent from her husband.

"Women are evil, my children, and by reason of their lacking authority or power over man, they scheme treacherously how they might entice him to themselves by means of their looks.... They contrive in their hearts against men, then by decking themselves out they lead men's minds astray.... Accordingly, my children, flee from sexual promiscuity, and order your wives and your daughters not to adorn their heads and their appearances so as to deceive men's sound minds." (*The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Reuben 5* – an intertestamental Jewish book)

Another possibility is that a woman's attire may have been used to reflect their higher socioeconomic class.

Paul writes to the church of Corinth (1 Cor 11:2-16) addressing a similar problem regarding a woman's adornment and its significance to male headship and leadership.

False teaching may have been on Paul's mind, when he advocates another adornment in lieu of costly garments (1 Tim 2:9-10), "but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness."

Paul wants women to learn in quietness and submission.

Paul makes an important distinction. Paul's desire for women is not an exhortation for a woman's opportunity to learn; instead, it is instruction of *how* women should learn.

Apparently some women of Ephesus were disruptive during teaching sessions. The teaching of some false teachers led to trivial questions and arguments (1 Tim 1:3-4). Paul was encouraging the women to accept the teaching of appropriately appointed church leaders, such as Timothy and his staff, without disruption or criticism.

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Paul's directive to women "to learn in submission" is in reference to the proper attitude and action towards the appropriately appointed church leaders. The verse can be viewed to encompass submission to church authorized teaching, and women to male church authorized teacher - leaders.

Learning implies that women may eventually teach. Paul clearly wanted all Christians to study and learn proper Christian doctrine in the pursuit of holiness and to discern false teaching; however, in succeeding verses, Paul clearly prohibits women from teaching biblical truths to men.

Paul prohibits women from teaching Christian doctrine to men or having authority over them in the church.

Verses 11 and 12 are connected with the particle "de" which has the force of a mild contrast and is translated as the term "but." In Paul's exhortation of the manner in which women should learn, he contrasts with prohibitions that elaborate what he means by the term "submission."

"Let the women learn... with full submission; *but [de]* 'full submission' means also that I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man." (Douglas Moo)

1 Timothy 2:12 has been a verse of much controversy. Some deny the authority of these words and have dismissed the verse outright. Others believe that the Paul's prohibitions on a woman's ministry were temporal and no longer apply today. And still others believe that the verse applies to wives, not women. What are your thoughts? Are they grounded on biblical evidence?

References:

1. Piper, J, Grudem, W, eds, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books (1991), p.179-193.

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