

The great debate...an introduction to etymology...(G. Kappas)

1. Study 1 Timothy 2: 11-12. One area of great controversy is what 1 Timothy 2:12 really means and the role of women in ministry. What does Paul mean “exercise authority?” In the original translations, this concept has a positive or neutral sense; only in English is the suggestion of “dominion” or “to rule” carried with a negative connotation (*1). Some would argue that this biblical usage was not accurate and that the original Greek does not mean “exercise authority.” Some have argued that Paul was stating a personal opinion. Many have disregarded this passage as irrelevant to today’s cultural norm. What was God, through Paul, telling us here?

In answering this question, you will get a sense of what translators must do before arriving at the translation you read in the Bible. The Koine Greek verb **authentein** has traditionally meant “exercise authority.” The early manuscripts all translated what the Apostle Paul meant with regard to a woman, authority, man, and the church: namely, a woman should not usurp or exercise authority over a man.

But **authentein** is a New Testament *hapax legomena* which is a word found only once in the Scriptures, here in the New Testament. This means the interpreter must research outside of the Bible to truly understand its meaning as it was used during that time. Of late, recent interpreters have advanced some of the following views: a) a woman should not get involved with teaching controversies and “violently self-assert herself” against a man (*2), b) a woman should not engage in “fertility practices with” or “sexually dominate” a man, or c) woman should not teach or “represent herself as originator” of man (*3).

One of the best determinants for the translation of a word is its *etymology*. Etymology is the study of the origin and historical development of a word by determining its basic elements, earliest known use, and changes in form and meaning. In studying etymology, it is crucial to remember that context is what governs the actual meaning and usage of the word.

The etymology of **authentein** is uncertain. During this time, the Greek language was going through a transition. Because of the political supremacy of Athens during and after the 5th century BC, Attic, the language of Athens and the surrounding district of Attica, became the standard form of classical Greek. However, with the conquests of Alexander the Great and the extension of Macedonian rule in the 4th century BC, a shift of population from Greece proper to the Greek settlements in the Middle East occurred. In this period, known as the Hellenistic, linguistic changes took place, and Koine Greek became the vernacular of the period.

In Greek classical literature (prior to 322 BC), there hasn’t been any root words found for the *verb* **authentein** as used by Paul in 1 Tim 2:12. The nearest related root words to **authentein**, such as **auqentein**, were nouns meaning “to kill by one’s own hand / murder / suicide.” The literary use of these root words has exclusively been as nouns not as a *verb*. The following are some examples:

1. Early grammarians (word scholars) saw **auqentein** formed from (*4):

auto + entoj	to thrust himself forward (Phrynicus 100-200 AD)
auto + fonew	to murder, kill (early scholars)
autoj + enthj and	to strike (Kretschmer 1900)
auto+ qeinw	
auqenthj	responsible agent (Pierre Chantraine)

2. Classical Greek writers used the nearest form of **authentein** as a noun not a *verb*. (*4)

auqenthj	murderer, suicide (19 citations)
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Authentein was always considered in Koine Greek as a word commonly used for speech rather than literary purposes. During the period, 322 BC - 600 AD, Koine Greek was the common language throughout the conquered Greek empire and adopted subsequently by the Roman empire. During the period, approximately 322 BC - 300 AD, **authentein** was used in reference to authority. Adjective, adverb, and noun forms developed to include the sense of “have power,” “to be in authority,” “despot,” and “ruler.”

During the 1st and 2nd centuries AD a group of Greek scholars advocated a return to the pure Attic dialect of the 5th and 4th centuries BC. The so-called Atticist movement was not wholly successful; however, because **authentein** was a word in Koine Greek and from the Hellenistic period, Atticists sought to establish its classical rendering and purge its Koine Greek influences. As a result, they sought the noun form as “one who acts by his own hand, murderer.”

3. Patristic writers (fathers of the early church) used the **auquent** word group, the nearest root word group to **authentein**, in the following manner (*4):

murder / suicide	Clement of Alexandra (9 citations). He was classically trained before becoming a Christian; thus, it is likely that he had Atticist influences.
authority related	Eusebius (27 citations), Chrysostom (166 citations), Amphilochus (7 citations), Apostolic Constitutions (3 citations), Asterius (7 citations), Athanasius (14 citations), Basil (19 citations), Cyril of Alexandria (5 citations), Didyus the Blind (30 citations), Epiphanius (17 citations), Evagrius Scholasticus (8 citations), Gregory Nazianzus (2 citations), Gregory of Nyssa (13 citations), Palladus (3 citations), Sozomen (2 citations), Severianus (17 citations), Theodoret (12 citations)

Paul’s use of **authentein** was indeed in reference to authority. It was certainly not in reference to “murder” or “suicide,” because it would result in an improper sentence structure (ie. But I do not allow a woman to teach or *suicide* a man..). **Authentein**, as a Koine Greek word, was always understood in an “authority” sense and Atticists, in their attempt to purify the Greek language, recognized the Koine meaning as vulgar and improper. Early interpreters of 1 Tim 2:12, during the Koine Greek period, always understood **authentein** as “exercise of authority.”

4. From the original Greek version of the New Testament, 3 direct translations were made from which many other translations were based: Old Latin, Old Syriac, and Coptic (Egyptian). Examination of Old Latin and Old Syriac reveal that the Greek **authentein** was translated as “rule”, “have dominion over”, “to have primacy, authority, power.” The Coptic did not have a translation (*4).

In Paul’s admonition, “But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man,” “teach” is in reference to the church assembly / congregation. Women can teach, but ongoing teaching about doctrine to the congregation is the responsibility of the elders. There is nothing wrong with a woman teaching or leading a small group, Bible study, Sunday school class, etc. Spiritual gifts are given to both men and women. There are women who have the gift of preaching and / or teaching. 1 Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:4-9- tells us that the office of elder is not open to a woman; therefore, God desires the woman to serve him in another capacity, outside of an elder. It is important that all who teach the assembly / congregation are in submission to the church leadership; a woman can teach periodically to the assembly / congregation if the elders agree to permit it.

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Charles Swindoll pens a good summary: "She can engage in ministry and reap the benefits of the ministries of others as long as she does not try to place herself over or supplant the male leadership of the church."

"A Christian woman can minister with and to men, but she must do it under the permission and authority of the male church leadership. This instruction does not mean that women are second-class citizens or are in some way inferior to men. Both men and women are God's image (Gen 1:26-27), and both are equal in the dignity in Christ (Gal 3:28). But this teaching *does* mean that God has ordained that in the local church there will be a functional difference between men and women-namely, the role of authority in the local church will rest with men, not women (*5).

Paul's use of the word "quietly" (1 Tim 2:11) does not mean complete silence. The Greek word for "quietly" means to be "settled down or not unruly." Paul was addressing a unique problem in Ephesus: unruly women getting out of order in the assembly / congregation. The city of Ephesus was renowned for the Temple of Diana. The regional culture and religion revolved around pagan worship and sexual influences. The temple had priests who were eunuchs, many virgin priestesses (at this time, virgin meant unmarried not sexually pure), and a large number of slaves. The culture worshipped a female god and females played a significant role in the religious ceremonies, dances, and celebrations. This false religion taught that fornication was the means to commune with the deity. Given the role of women in pagan worship, Paul wanted to reinforce the idea of the woman being peaceful in the assembly.

Paul gives two reasons for the prior commands. The first reason is God chose to create man first then woman. Adam was fashioned first from the earth, and Eve was fashioned from Adam-his rib. The woman is to be a helper, a complement to, not in competition with man. Leadership as seen in the relationship between Adam and Eve, and with all couples, should begin with the man.

The second reason is that Satan deceived Eve, and while Eve is the one who was initially deceived and fell, Adam is the one who was held accountable (Rom 5:12-21) and is recognized as the one who brought sin into this world. Authority rests on those whom God deems accountable. Adam was accountable to God to protect his wife. He failed miserably...and we still do today. 2 Corinthians 11:1-4 reminds us that each of us (both male and female) can be deceived by the Enemy of our souls, the serpent-Satan.

The Apostle Paul's statements about women were never chauvinistic, discriminatory, denigrating, or stifling. To truly understand the context of Paul's statements, one must understand the culture of Ephesus. According to legend, the Asiatic goddess Artemis was founded by Amazons (female warriors) and was worshipped as the mother of all goddesses. Over time she was confused with the more masculine looking Greek goddess Artemis (which Romans adopted later and renamed Diana) the virgin goddess of the hunt and childbirth protector of young animals and humans. This pagan worship was in existence for some 800 years by the time Paul arrived, and accordingly, women played a significant role in Ephesian society and religious matters. And in time, the veneration of Mary replaced the pagan goddess as a focus of religion.

Paul concludes his statements by telling women, in contrast to pagan culture, Christianity has a different role for them. Even though they are to avoid ongoing teaching in an authoritative manner in the assembly / congregation (i.e. they are not given a ministry that is continually centered around doctrine as an elder), they do have a place of great fulfillment in God's plan. A woman's dignity and ultimate fulfillment is preserved in her devotion to her husband and children (see verse 15).

Authentein, being a *hapex legomena*, is difficult to understand and is governed by the hermeneutical principle to never build a doctrine upon a *hapex legomena*. Based off of current and past study, it appears that the Lord was saying through Paul that He does not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority in an ongoing manner (note present tense) over a man in the assembly / congregation. This was the responsibility of elders, and it is no mistake that just a few words away from verse 12, we see statements about the office of elder (1 Tim 3:1-7). Once again context introduces its clues to us.

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Many men have used this passage to establish the role of males and females within the church. Men would do well to study its implications. It seems apparent that men find volunteering for a construction service project much easier than for the prayer meeting. God has made everyone accountable for their walk with God; but, too many men have mistakenly used physical leadership in lieu of spiritual leadership or abdicated their responsibilities of spiritual leadership on the misguided notion that they will not be held accountable. Adam attempted that and failed (Gen 3:12). Should a spiritual woman follow poor male leadership today? May women be allowed to learn (verse 11)? May we as male elders, lead and lead well.

References:

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3. Richard Clark and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer not a Woman, Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House (1992), 103.
4. Stephan Valleskey, "The Study of the Word Aquentew". *Essays On-Line*, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (1999).
5. Charles R. Swindoll, *Excellence in Ministry*, Swindoll Bible Study Guides (1996), p.34

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