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Biblical Hermeneutics for Women’s Full Participation in Ministry

“Why do you want the power?” I was stunned at the question. I did not want power; I wanted to teach an adult Sunday School class that included men and women. It was the early 1990s, I was getting my PhD in NT and adjuncting at a local Christian college. “Why do you want the power?” That is the same sort of question as, “Have you stopped beating your wife?” There is no way to answer it without perjuring yourself. We need to unpack the presuppositions underpinning this question, and explore the concept of “power” as it relates to authority and the church. First, I’ll define hermeneutics and explain my approach to the biblical text. Next, we’ll use as a case study 1 Timothy 2, and look at the key features of the hermeneutical process, as well as dangers to accurate readings. I hope to show that proper hermeneutics rightly applied to 1 Timothy 2 does not restrict women permanently and universally from full participation in ministry.

I. What is Hermeneutics?

I assign Jeannine Brown’s book *Scripture as Communication* for my class on hermeneutics at Wheaton College.¹ Much of what I outline can be further explored in her work.² Hermeneutics is the study of the activity of interpretation, or as Brown quips, “It is thinking about thinking.”³ Hermeneutics looks at how texts communicate, how readers derive meaning from this communication, and what readers then do with this communicated meaning. Of course, this begs the question – what is meaning? Again, turning to Brown, “Meaning is the

¹ Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

² I’d also recommend Scot McKnight’s *The Blue Parakeet* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008); Cynthia Long Westfall, “The Meaning of *authentēin* in 1 Timothy 2:12” (*JGRChJ* 10 (2014): 138-73). See also Christiane Carlson-Thies, “Hermeneutics in Pink and Blue,” *Priscilla Papers* 16 (2002): 3-6.

³ Brown, 20-21.

communicative intention of the author, which has been inscribed in the text and addressed to the intended audience for purposes of engagement.”⁴ By defining “meaning” in this way, Brown introduces “exegesis” or the task of carefully discerning the author’s meaning in the context of his/her writing. This always involves our own context as readers, but her point is that we can look at exegesis as a cross-cultural exercise with the emphasis on understanding the context of the author’s intended audience.

Thus, we begin with the Bible. I want to stress this because one charge against evangelical feminist hermeneutics is that it brings a foreign lens to the text, or it imposes on the text something from the outside. But my evangelical feminist approach asks questions about biblical women and biblical men, and concerns about gender and patriarchy without pre-judging the answers. I’d be happy to forgo the label “feminist” if that is distracting. I use it in the 1980’s sense of equal pay for equal work – today among many of my Wheaton students, it means pro-abortion. Such is the shifting landscape of our political conversation.

As we begin with the Bible, we look at five key areas for hermeneutical study. First, we study the historical context of the author and the text. I emphasize the author’s context because authorial intent is a key aspect of biblical hermeneutics; biblical authors speak for God to God’s people in the text, and human communication is sufficient for readers to understand meaning. Second, we focus on linguistic theory, which asks about the nature of language. At its basic level, linguistic theory looks at semantics and genre and other formal components of communication. Third, we look at literary theory, which focuses on meaning as the author, text, and/or reader convey it. I hold that meaning is rooted in the author’s intentions, which might include ideas or applications not specifically anticipated by the author. Fourth, we look at theology, which explores the revelation of God about who God is and who we humans are in relation to God and creation. Fifth, we must apply the text properly, that is, contextually, so that the author’s intentions can be lived out in our lives.

I think historical context is self-explanatory, so let’s focus on the second area of hermeneutical study, linguistic theory. Speech-Act Theory is an important linguistic theory that has numerous

⁴ Brown, 22.

supporters across biblical studies and theology. Kevin Vanhoozer has done much to promote this approach in its formal, theological sense.⁵ This theory, broadly speaking, argues that words do things. A ready-to-hand example is when a bride or groom says, “I do,” their vows secure their intentions, and when the pastor says, “I pronounce you husband and wife,” her words create a new, legal entity. This theory outlines the communicative act in three stages: locution, illocution, perlocution. (No, there will not be a quiz at the end!). Locution is what is said: “The stove is hot.” The illocution is what I hope to accomplish with my locution. It might be a warning – don’t touch! Or it could be a fact that I convey to my husband, who fixed the stove earlier in the day. In that case, my illocution would be a “thank you” that the stove is now hot and I can cook on it. The perlocution is what I hope my listener or reader will do. If the illocution is a warning, then I hope my listener will stay clear of the stove. If I’m talking with my husband, he might say, “You’re welcome!”

Alongside Speech-Act Theory is another important linguistic theory called Relevance Theory. This argument contends that words have meaning in their context, and not simply in isolation. Listeners have to infer meaning, to search their database of possible meanings and determine which is the most relevant or applicable meaning. The upshot is that meaning is always contextual, and inferential. We communicate explicit and implicit information, and both are essential for full understanding. Presuppositions shared by speaker and listener make communication possible. When this breaks down, frustrations abound. In a sad example of this, one of my friends was explaining a difficulty her son has with communication. He cannot pick up the tacit dimension of language, the inferences that most people understand. She might say, “Ok, kids, hop in the car. It’s chilly outside.” Her other two kids would grab their jackets on the way out the door, but when they arrived at the park, her son would complain he was cold. My friend was exasperated – “Where is your jacket?” He’d yell in frustration, “You never told me to bring it!” This was technically true, but not really true since she had communicated to her children that it was cold outside. Relevance theory highlights the role of inference in generating and communicating meaning.

⁵ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Scripture: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

Both Speech-Act Theory and Relevance Theory insist that story matters. We are creatures that think in story and process in narrative. We gain a sense of coherence of our own place in the wider world by building and connecting stories. We find our identity alongside others in the story. This approach to meaning has the goal of engaging in the drama. Christians hold to God's meta-narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and promised new creation. The narrative contains propositions and truth claims, but these latter are not reducible to stand-alone assertions, rather, they are best understood within God's grace-filled redemption narrative.

Narrative theology is a category of theology that joins literary theory's concern for a narrative's implied author and implied reader with theology's attempt to discern God's work in the world – the plot of redemption history. Brown asserts that narrative theology “affirms that doctrine and values must be derived from the meta-narrative of Scripture.”⁶ Into this mix we bring ourselves, our family history, our church location, our socio-economic reality, and all that makes up who we are as individuals.

A final piece of the hermeneutical puzzle is contextualization. We need to let the biblical worldview shape our mindset and actions. Reading biblically includes reading canonically, allowing notes and chords from each book to contribute to God's symphony. This precludes cherry picking our favorite verses or proof texting our cherished theories. And reading canonically invites us to think about the Bible as being fully from God, and also fully a human work. Brown holds these two points in creative tension by pointing to the Incarnation as a guiding analogy.⁷ Because the Bible is from God, it addresses all humans in every culture. Because it is communication by humans to humans, it is always embedded in culture and context, both the ancient culture and our own. We cannot extract “pure” propositional truth from the muddy cultural context of the biblical text. Such a simplistic approach fails to understand the nature of communication, and one's own unavoidable situated-ness. Contextualizing well requires a commitment to both coherence with the author's meaning and fidelity to the author's purpose. Any application should cohere with the author's meaning and should reflect, even by analogy, the author's original purpose.

⁶ Brown, 45.

⁷ Brown, 233.

Hermeneutics, then, applies good communication theory to discover how the author's meaning (arrived at through good exegesis) is actualized in the listener's context and situation. It includes focus on the author's context, on both the implied and explicit contents, and on the desired response by the listener or reader. Let's apply these areas to the infamous 1 Timothy 2 passage.

Part 1: Example of Reading in Context

Romans 12:12 encourages believers, "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer" (NIV 2011). In this short verse, Paul enjoins all believers to endure hardship and be devoted to prayer. Luke's description of believers reflects Paul's convictions. Men and women alike, both apostles and disciples, devoted (προσκαρτερέω) themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14). Early communities of believers met frequently, Luke tells us, for fellowship and prayer, for breaking bread and learning from the apostles (Acts 2:42). They devoted themselves to these activities and stood in awe of the miracles performed by the apostles. These Jewish believers cared for each other, selling property if necessary to contribute to central funds that were later allocated to needy members (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–35). As the community grew, the apostles focused on the service of the word and devotion to prayer, while others were dedicated to distributing food (Acts 6:1–4). Presumably women continued to devote themselves to prayer, but the narrative's focus shifts to the institutionalizing of duties and responsibilities in the growing church.

The devotional action of prayer has a visible, gendered component reflecting the social fabric of the ancient world. For example, a woman's public voice was treated with suspicion, yet public prayers in temples or during festival parades were often applauded as appropriate acts of devotion. The devotion to prayer shown by Jesus's mother, Mary, in Acts 1:14, continues in Corinth, now with attention to hairstyles. Women and men prayed and prophesied, but with different displays of hairstyles or head coverings (1 Cor 11:2–16). Devotion was not simply verbal; it was also physically put on the body. This realization provides new ways to consider concerns about women's attire, shifting attention from the category of modesty to that of proper devotion to God.

First Timothy 2:1–15 offers more details about believers’ gathering for prayer. Paul envisions the community praying together, offering thanksgiving and petitions for everyone, including those outside the community who govern the city and the empire. The prayers reflect the hope that the community might live quietly with holiness, and that unbelievers might come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved. Men are enjoined to pray, and to do so without anger or disputing as they lift their hands. Most likely Paul has in mind the *orans* pose, a common posture for both men and women. The gospels note that men stand to pray (Mk 11:25; Lk 18:9–13), and Sinon in Virgil’s *Aeneid* lifts his hands with open palms in prayer (*Aeneid* 2.153). The synagogue decorations in Dura Europa personify each of the twelve tribes with an *orans* male figure.⁸ It is unlikely, then, that Paul mandates the pose, but rather he assumes it, and then enjoins them to avoid specific vices such as anger and disputing. Perhaps Paul deduces that the false teachers mentioned earlier in his letter create dissention during worship (1 Tim 1:3–7). We have an anecdote from the first century suggesting upheavals happened during Jewish services, opening the possibility that Paul had experienced disruptions in synagogue service, and anticipated as much in Timothy’s setting. Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, describes a scene during a synagogue prayer that erupted into accusations against him for mishandling funds, resulting in an attempt on his life. Josephus declares that the assembly was behind him, and aided his escape (*Life* 56–59 [294–303]).

As Paul turns in 1 Timothy to discuss women’s attire, the majority of scholars assume a shift from the topic of men’s prayer to the issue of women’s modesty.⁹ However, several points suggest that Paul is continuing to reflect on prayer in devotion to God. First, the *orans* pose was typical of women as well as men, as evidenced in the early catacomb art.¹⁰ In the Roman imperial period, we find the Empress Livia presented as a priestess in the *orans* pose. Additionally, this pose is linked with Pietas, and coins displayed both the goddess and imperial

⁸ Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 180.

⁹ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus in NICNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 204.

¹⁰ Karen Jo Torjesen, “The Early Christian *Orans*: An Artistic Representation of Women’s Liturgical Prayer and Prophecy,” in *Women Preachers and Prophets Through Two Millennia of Christianity*, edited by Beverly Mayne Kienzle, Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 44 writes, “The fact that in this collection of pagan *orantes* the figure at prayer is always male makes the predominantly female *orans* of Christian art even more interesting.”

women dressed in the goddess's clothes.¹¹ It would be natural for the congregation to assume both men and women lifted holy hands in prayer and to continue reading with this in mind.

Secondly, Paul's encouragement in 1 Timothy 2:2 concerning reverent behavior for all believers includes the general term εὐσέβεια, which means godliness or piety (Latin: *pietas*). Within Jewish writings, the noun reflects "the core ideas of covenant loyalty and the appropriate behavioral response to the law," as seen in Proverbs 1:7 and Isaiah 11:2; 33:6.¹² Interestingly, in Ephesus the κουρῆτες, the "wardens of the mysteries of the Artemis cult who also were part of the city's governing structure,"¹³ used the adjective εὐσεβεῖς to describe themselves in inscriptions. These male civic leaders celebrated festivals and participated in symposia dedicated to Artemis. By declaring themselves "pious," they presented "themselves to readers as possessing a communally shared religious quality or virtue that justified and legitimated the positions of authority and power that they held within the civic hierarchy of Ephesus."¹⁴ In another example, an inscription (ca 104 C.E.) celebrates Gaius Vibius Salutaris for his εὐσέβεια in providing money and statues honoring Artemis.¹⁵ Hoag concludes, "rich people also gave money to ensure the perpetual honor of Artemis, and in return, they were lauded for their εὐσέβεια, 'devoutness, piety, or godliness,' to the goddess with public proclamations and inscriptions that celebrated their beneficence."¹⁶ Paul turns the gentile expectation for piety on its head, infusing the term with new meaning. Paul intended εὐσέβεια to mean godly Christian comportment over against pagan rites surrounding the worship of Artemis.

Thirdly, Xenophon's *Ephesiaca* offers descriptions of Artemis worship, emphasizing that female devotees dress as the goddess. The text indicates the erotic appeal of braided hair and purple chiton. Xenophon describes the heroine Anthia's celebration, specifically commenting on her

¹¹ Reita J. Sutherland, "Prayer and Piety: The *Orans*-Figure in the Christian Catacombs of Rome," M.A. Thesis, University of Ottawa, 2013, 29–32, 367. Appendix A shows a photo of Livia Photo:

<http://lobojosden.blogspot.com/2010/05/oran-orante-orans.html> This statue was found in the basilica of Otricoli.

¹² Towner, 173.

¹³ Towner, 172.

¹⁴ Guy MacLean Rogers, *The Mysteries of Artemis of Ephesus: Cult, Polis, and Change in the Graeco-Roman World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 135. In the mythic past, κουρῆτες helped Leto with the birth of Artemis and her twin brother, Apollo.

¹⁵ *Die Inschriften von Ephesos*, 27. See Gary G. Hoag, *Wealth in Ancient Ephesus and the First Letter to Timothy: Fresh Insights from Ephesiaca by Xenophon of Ephesus* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 33, for brief discussion.

¹⁶ Hoag, 32–33.

hair, which hung loose except for a braided portion (πεπλεγμένη), mimicking that of the goddess. Interestingly, 1 Timothy 2:9 specifies braided hair (πλέγμασιν) using the cognate noun, which suggests that Paul has in mind the Artemisian festivals as a backdrop to his injunctions on proper Christian prayers, and I will develop this below a bit more. Paul's additional comments on modesty make sense, given the erotic environment of the Artemis celebrations.¹⁷ Moreover, Paul's sanction against gold and expensive garments could be directly related to the sumptuous clothing worn in honor of the goddess. Paul uses similar terms in Acts 20:33, where he declares to the Ephesians that he has not coveted gold (χρυσίον) or clothing (ἱματισμός).

In these ways, Paul warns believers in Ephesus to shun all behaviors that hint at pagan practices surrounding the worship of Artemis. As believers devote themselves to prayer, men lift hands to God, not raise fists at each other. Women distinguish themselves from Artemis followers by refraining from dressing as the goddess, and not succumbing to the culture's pull to display wealth as a form of piety. The εὐσέβεια as demonstrated by the Artemis worshipers must be re-defined according to the gospel's understanding of holiness. Paul offers guidance to new female believers who grew up enacting prayers and devotion by dressing as the goddess. Now they are called upon to embody devotion as believers in Christ. Paul's words remind us today that devotion can be a public act, and as such, engages the public square and popular notions of piety.

This brief glimpse at the issues of proper attitude and clothing highlights the pagan protocols for worship, many of which bumped up against the appropriate and godly behaviors expected of those who follow Christ. A second aspect of solid hermeneutics is appropriate study of language, including linguistic theory and semantics. We will apply such tools to 1 Timothy 2:11–12.

Part 2: Example of Literary Theories Applied

1 Timothy 2:11–12 “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.” (NIV 2011)

¹⁷ *Ephesiaca* I.3.1–2 describes Anthia and Habrocomes falling in love at Artemis's temple. He could not take his eyes off her, and Anthia put “maidenly decorum out of her mind: for what she said was for Habrocomes to hear, and she uncovered what parts of her body she could for Habrocomes to see.” Hoag, 77.

I'd like to focus on the verbs for a moment: "should learn" which is an imperative, "I do not permit," which is an indicative, and "to have (assume) authority over" which is an infinitive. The tenses are straightforward, but the semantic ranges of these terms have bedeviled interpreters. We will first look at the semantic range, and then focus on illocution – what the text intends to do.

"Let a woman learn" seems as basic to us as women's right to vote. But even as women suffragists faced violent opposition as they worked to persuade both men and women of the rightness of their cause, so too the ancient world did not value education for women, except as it might enhance the lives of men. In the US, opponents to the 19th Amendment argued that women were nurturing, fitted naturally with the home, while men were competitive and better suited for public life. As such, women should not worry themselves with public policy, and thus should not have the vote. Parenthetically, New Zealand was way ahead of the US, granting women the right to vote in 1893, and South Australia the following year, which meant women voted in the 1895 election. The US ratified the 19th Amendment in 1920.

In Paul's day, education for women happened in the home, with husbands or fathers taking up the task. The exception is the Jewish woman who was educated in the synagogue. Each Shabbat she heard Scripture read, and if she lived in Roman Palestine, she traveled to Jerusalem for festivals. There is no pagan analog to the Bible, no analog to the weekly practice of worship and study. Therefore, the gentile women in the Ephesian church had little exposure to education in the Bible and theology, and their gentile culture would not have a ready way of helping them learn Scripture. Hence Paul's command here that women should learn.

"I do not permit" can also be translated, "I am not permitting." The tense is indicative, not imperative. Yet how often is it treated as a command, indeed as though it is one of the Ten Commandments? John Walton, my Old Testament colleague at Wheaton College, produced an unpublished paper on the semantic range of this verb, which I draw on for my argument. He observes 18 total occurrences of our verb, all outside the Pastoral epistles, and only a total of three within the Pauline corpus. Yet one finds a consistent usage among the verses, which suggests that the non-Pauline verses will serve us well in discerning meaning. Often the question becomes, is the verb limiting women for all time, or only for a specific purpose? But the verb

does not address such strictures, Walton concludes. Instead, the verb grants or withholds permission based on circumstances. He argues, “Paul is not initiating the discussion of the role of women but is responding in a formal way, as a recognized authority in the situation, to a request for permission given the circumstances in Ephesus.”¹⁸ The semantic range of the verb, and not its tense or the particular false teaching in question, determines Paul’s range of meaning.

We turn finally to the verb, “to have authority over.” The phrase has led to more shouting matches and, dare I say, creative exegesis, than the simple infinitive deserves. A large part of the problem is that the verb is found nowhere else in the Bible (LXX or NT), and this is the first time it is used in the Greek language. Interpreters ask whether the verb carries a positive, neutral or negative connotation, and how one might make such a determination in the specific context. Cynthia Westfall examines the lexical and semantic configuration of this verb, arriving at several conclusions based on her close study. First, she explains that the action in our verse fits the category of “an animate/personal actor with an animate/personal goal (a person).”¹⁹ There are thirteen examples of such usage in her sample (which includes occurrences through the sixth century). In every case the evaluation of the action is negative, and the person receiving the action is harmed in some way. The church father Chrysostom uses this verb when cautioning a husband not to be abusive (*ἀυθεντέω*) as his wife submits to him (*Hom. Col. 27-31*). Such behavior is contrasted with being a loving leader (*ἀρχων*). Westfall rightly points out that Chrysostom reveals that a man should not commit *ἀυθεντέω* against a woman, even as Paul indicates as much about a woman’s actions towards a man. Westfall challenges the common assumption that “have authority over” means being a senior pastor.

Westfall uses the 82 examples cited by Scott Baldwin from the *TLG (Thesaurus Linguae Graecae)*, a database drawing on Greek works from Homer to the Byzantine period.²⁰ She

¹⁸ John Walton, “Common Sense Lexicography and 1 Timothy 2:12–15,” unpublished paper, page 4. On page 6, he renders the verse, “I am issuing a restraining order against a woman teaching or (in any other way) imposing her will (i.e., point of view?) on a man.”

¹⁹ Westfall, 160. Even in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, in which God remains perfectly good, His action results in a negative experience for the recipients, as seen in Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 2.48.1.8 and Athanasius, *De synodis* 27.3.18. The term is not used in the LXX.

²⁰ H. Scott Baldwin, ‘A Difficult Word: *ἀυθεντέω* in 1 Timothy 2:12’, in Andreas J. Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner and H. Scott Baldwin (eds.), *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1st ed, 1995), 65-80, and Baldwin, ‘Appendix 2’, in the same volume, 269-305; H. Scott Baldwin, ‘An

concludes that none show “a male doing this to another person or a group of people with a positive evaluation in a ministry or leadership context.”²¹ The positive occurrences of this verb always reflect action towards an inanimate object, or the verb is intransitive. Westfall concludes that a basic semantic concept for our verb is “*the autonomous use or possession of unrestricted force*.”²² She suggests the term “eradicate” as a useful English equivalent for ἀθεντέω because the term carries both positive connotations (as when eradicating termites from a home) and negative (as when one person takes another’s life).²³ Given that the term is never used in a positive sense to describe pastoral leadership, Westfall concludes, we should not use this verse to exclude women from church ministry or offices of leadership.

Another important verb is the common verb “to teach” in 2:12, inviting the question of how the two infinitives might be connected within the grammar and syntax of the sentence. Should they convey a single thought (*hendiadys*) or two separate prohibitions? John Dickson suggests that “to have authority over” adds an additional dimension to the function of teaching. In English, the thought would be expressed, “*the authority of teaching*.”²⁴ Westfall observes the genitive direct object “a man” (ἄνδρος) can only match with ἀθεντέω, for the infinitive “to teach” takes an accusative direct object (ἄνδρα). Thus, if one wants to link “a man” with “to teach” then one might conclude as Dickson does. Yet as Westfall points out, “Some interpreters want to have their cake and eat it too by treating ἄνδρος as the direct object of διδάκειν, but insisting that ἀθεντέω cannot interpret διδάκειν.”²⁵ I find myself in the unusual position of agreeing with Grudem and Piper in their grammatical conclusion that Paul speaks of two activities. They rightly point to the conjunction οὐδέ as joining two related ideas, not two terms that state the same idea.²⁶ I draw an opposite interpretation, of course, but it is nice to celebrate a moment of unity! In sum, the grammar indicates that Paul did not want women to teach anyone – male or female, young or old – and did not want them to eradicate/have domineering authority over men.

Important Word: ἀθεντέω in 1 Timothy 2:12’, in Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner (eds.), *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2nd edn, 2005), 39-51.

²¹ Westfall, 165.

²² Westfall, 171, italics original.

²³ Westfall, 169.

²⁴ Dickson, location 308.

²⁵ Westfall, 78, footnote 44.

²⁶ *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 187.

A related question is what the verb “to teach” means in this context. Continuing with Dickson’s argument, he contends that the verb carries the sense of handing on the apostolic tradition; in 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul insists that only men can proclaim this specific content. Dickson suggests that Paul distinguishes prophesying, teaching, and exhorting, drawing on the example of Romans 12:4–8. He determines that “exhorting” offers the closest parallel to a sermon today.²⁷ He concludes, “When Paul refers to ‘teaching,’ he never means explaining and applying a Bible passage; rather, he consistently means carefully preserving and laying down for a church what the apostles had said concerning Jesus and his demands.”²⁸ Dickson continues that since the apostolic period is now past, and the NT has secured the gospel message for all to hear and receive, that women along with men can now teach and preach the word. His overarching point, that “to teach” carries a specific meaning related to the content of the teaching, is persuasive and further clarifies Paul’s intentions.

In summary, Paul commands the church in Ephesus under Timothy’s guidance to teach female disciples. He follows with a statement that might be viewed as a qualification of the command, or an explanation of its purpose and scope. In other words, he anticipates a question about how the command will be received, and provides instructions. These instructions include the verb *αὐθεντέω*, a *hapax legomenon*, or word used but once in a textual corpus. Relevance theory reminds us that words convey their meaning via the specific context, which includes implicit signals and context shared by reader and author. The context for the Ephesian believers to understand power included magical spells and witchcraft. Such were commonplace in Ephesus, and promised dominance and authority to their users. But Christians have a power far greater than anything in this world, for they draw on the resurrection power of Christ. This power source does not dominate to destroy but builds up to make whole. Paul instructs the Ephesians to reject the magic spells and any abusive grab for power. Instead, they are to seek after godliness.

²⁷ John Dickson, (location 209).

²⁸ Dickson, location 448.

Part 3: Theology

1 Timothy 2:12–14: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.” (NIV 2011)

Why does Paul draw on Genesis here? And what point is he making? The answers depend on the reconstruction of first century theology and its opposite, heresy. It might seem a bit anachronistic to use the term “heresy,” as Christian theology had not developed at this point. But if we understand theology as the study of God, and our relationship to God, then we have a good start to the theological enterprise in 1 Corinthians 15:1–8. Paul ties the gospel message to the Old Testament, repeating the phrase “according to Scripture.” He emphasizes that Christ died for our sins, was raised and appeared to many different believers – including Paul himself. Further in the chapter, Paul explains that Christ is the new Adam, writing “So it is written: ‘the first Adam became a living being’; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.” Perhaps we are all nodding our heads at this point, thinking, “Of course, basic Christianity.”

But how would this have sounded to the Ephesians? Their backdrop is the cult of Artemis (Diana to the Romans), a goddess of great renown, honored with a worship site in many of the 2,000 towns and cities across the Empire. Her main temple, the Artemisium, was located close to Ephesus, and housed an image that had fallen from the sky. At four times the size of the Athenian Parthenon, this great building was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.²⁹ As the ancient sources tell us, Artemis and her twin Apollo were born of Leto and Zeus in the grove of Ortygia, just outside the city.³⁰ Hera, wife of Zeus, was jealous of Leto, and sought to destroy the twins. She watched from nearby Mount Silmissos, but before she could act, the *κουρῆτες*, (wardens of the Artemis cult) stormed the hill, banging swords on shields. The noise frightened Hera and she fled. The twins were saved, and each year the myth was remembered, although it is unclear exactly what rituals were followed.

²⁹ Antipater, in *The Greek Anthology*, 9.58. See Trebilco, page 20, footnote 53.

³⁰ Strabo, *Geog.* 14.1.20.

What is clear is that the city took very seriously its responsibility to honor Artemis.³¹ She was the founder of the city. Her image graced many of the city's coins, and her name was invoked in many official documents. She protected Ephesus, and the city's political business interwove seamlessly with her festivals. Two annual festivals grounded the liturgical year. The Artemisia included not only athletics and arts competitions, but also a matchmaking ritual wherein young men and women found their mates. Xenophon describes this practice in his romance novel, *Ephesiaca*, described earlier.³² A second festival was held a month or two later, on the 6th of Thargelion, (May/June). A grand parade carrying images of the goddess began at the Temple, and processed to the city, then returned to the temple. About once or twice each month, processions of about 260 people walked from the temple through the city; each lasted about 90 minutes as they traversed the four-kilometer round trip.

Mystery cults, such as the cult of Artemis, followed a pattern of devotion called “votive religion.”³³ Guy Rogers describes this as the “polytheists’ practice of making vows to the gods for some reason or to achieve some goal and then fulfilling those vows by making dedications to the gods.”³⁴ Rogers explains that the ancients sought the favor (χάρις) of the god or goddess, usually for an immediate need such as good health or harvest, and not for eternal salvation. The devotee made the request, offered a sacrifice, and vowed to honor the god should he answer the prayer. It was a bit of a “hit or miss” approach, and the supplicant kept trying until he or she got results. Artemis saved those in need, and was known as the protector of women in childbirth; the bees that decorated her skirt emphasized her special powers.³⁵

I'm sure by now you are making connections with Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 2:12–15. The insistence on Adam's creation, and on Eve's deception, counters the Artemis myth of the supreme importance of the goddess's birth near Ephesus. Paul might also be reacting against the

³¹ See Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 29 for a discussion.

³² Xenophon of Ephesus, 1.2.2–4.

³³ The phrase comes from W. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (1987), 12–15. Discussion in Guy Maclean Rogers, *The Mysteries of Artemis of Ephesos: Cult, Polis, and Change in the Graeco-Roman World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 16.

³⁴ Rogers, 16.

³⁵ Callimachus, *Hymn* (*Suda* 3.302: 859) see Rick Strelan, *Paul, Artemis, And the Jews in Ephesus* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 48, 62, 114.

alternative story of the twins' birth as Artemis born first on the island of Ortygia, after which Leto traveled to Delos to give birth to Apollo.³⁶ If Paul had this alternate version in mind, it makes sense he would reinforce Scripture's account of the creation of Adam and Eve. Artemis must be distinguished from Eve, who sinned along with Adam. Artemis must also be distinguished from Christ, the second Adam, who alone has the power of life and death, of deliverance from harm, including the dangers of childbirth. Paul must reassure the Ephesians of Christ's supreme lordship, and he has an uphill battle. Not only would the believers be aware of the processions every fortnight celebrating Artemis's greatness, but among the believers themselves lurk hypocritical liars who promote asceticism and godless myths (4: 2, 7; see also 1:4). Read against the backdrop of the all-encompassing cult of Artemis, Paul's concerns for women's clothing and the content of their teaching makes sense. He must distance both men and women from the dangerous pagan myth that had governed their mindset and actions from childhood.

Conclusion

In real estate, the mantra is "location, location, location." That could be the saying for biblical hermeneutics as well. We looked at historical location, the context of the author and his audience. We examined linguistic location, focusing both on Relevance Theory that emphasizes author/reader location and on the semantic range of terms that locates meaning within the sentence or paragraph. And we looked at theological location, specifically the Old Testament and the gospel's challenge to the local cult of Artemis. From these three location points, we discover that Paul refutes the deadly Artemis drama enacted daily in innumerable ways before the fledgling believers. Dangers include emulating erotic worship patterns, and reiterating false myths of origin, which in turn distort the gospel's truth. Paul's solution is to promote sound doctrine and godly living, a life of faith serving the Lord Jesus and God the Savior through the Holy Spirit's power. Women must learn this doctrine, and until they do, must cease from telling lies. So too, men must learn this doctrine, and until they do, must cease from telling lies. Paul insists to Timothy, "Stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain persons (masculine

³⁶ See Callimachus (*HhAp* 16, 24–25), discussed in *Callimachus: the Hymns*, edited by Susan A. Stephens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 102.

indefinite pronoun) not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies” (1 Tim 1:3–4). Christ will return to rule, and by implication, Artemis will be powerless to prevent the overthrow of her rule. It is God who is King of kings and Lord of lords, who is alone immortal and who lives in unapproachable light (1 Tim 6:15–16).

Paul closes the letter with a warning to Timothy to guard what has been entrusted to him. We must also guard the gospel message, carefully exegeting the text and using interpretative methods that consider the entire context of the passage, the literary work, and the canon. As I hope I demonstrated, 1 Timothy 2:1–15 insists that women learn the gospel properly. Until they do, they must not be teaching anyone, and they must not be harming men by their false myths. Were there women learned and able to teach men? We know of one, Priscilla, Paul’s coworker, who educated Apollos in the deeper aspects of the gospel (Acts 18:26). Perhaps Paul was thinking of her example as he penned these words to Timothy.