

## **DEFUSING THE 1 TIMOTHY 2 BOMB** **Robin's message**

This subject – like walking a minefield – my guess at the reading of the text earlier, there were a number of inner cringes...”let’s see how he gets himself out of this” “poor sucker”

It would be too easy for me to ignore this – fall back on tradition and say to all of you, “just deal with it”

But my experience in Jesus’ body – in watching and witnessing the POWER of Jesus in and through women I’ve known make it imperative for us to deal with this because there’s got to be more than just a rub with these verses...there’s got to be a way to work through these words that are faithful to the text as well as faithful to the call of Jesus in our time to all of God’s people – men and women

Plus – last thing I want is to see moms say to little girls, “just take a seat”...”sit on the sidelines” no matter how you feel about God’s giftedness and his call on your life.

Here’s something important to say too – this isn’t about women’s liberation, women’s movement or whatever.... Important – how to release EVERYONE created in God’s image to be about the mission of Jesus

Now – as far as methodology - I’m using a biblical interpretation method – redemptive hermeneutic as well as a cultural context hermeneutic

God didn’t change his mind – people finally GOT it

Now, as far as the way we are handling this today – using a metaphor about a BOMB! Here’s why:

A colleague of mine at APU was leading a women’s retreat a couple of years back and she told me she asked the women to create some pictures with stick figures about what the bible says about women...her favorite poster was one that showed stick figure men and women climbing a “stairway to heaven”, so to speak. Some steps were depicted with a lone man or woman making the climb. Other steps depicted a couple or a small group climbing the stairs together. On one step a man was reaching down to pull a woman up. On another a woman was reaching down to pull a man up. It was a beautiful depiction of the body of Christ working together.

Except that in the space above the stairway the group had drawn a bomb falling with the caption “1 Timothy 2:12”.

This section of the bible is what is best called a “conversation stopper”

- Typically, what happens in a discussion is that the person who holds a hierarchical view uses this verse as a way of shutting down discussion about women and their place in the Body of Christ
- Say something like, “Say what you want, but 1 Timothy 2 makes it clear that women cannot be in authority over men...”
- This section is PROOF in some minds that the bible is clear – NO women should be ministers
- Then what happens is that guys try to give solace to women by telling them some other stuff and hope that they buy it as something that is honoring

- One church denominational magazine – “men teach and give” “women hear and receive”
- I give Vicky hard time about Beth Moore – guys don’t know Beth – seriously wrong

So, today we’re going after this subject – important we get this right!

So question is - did Paul really intend to drop a bomb that would forever exclude women from all levels of church leadership?

Well it shouldn’t be a big surprise to you to know that that’s not the case...

What I’d like to do is “defuse the bomb” and encourage a more accurate understanding of Paul’s purpose in writing this “difficult passage”

**First major point – there is NOTHING said about women “submitting” here**

For that, we have to thank Paul and the Greek language he used to write

- Here the word translated, “quietness” is used – not mentioned to shut women down but rather to encourage them to listen and learn
- I don’t see anything wrong with that...Paul was hearing that Timothy was having some problems with his teaching
- Not his personal content but his audience
- In Ephesus – Artemis cult – women were the teachers...here Paul is just saying, “ladies, things are different now...you need to listen a bit”
- I tell you – I say that all the time!

**Second major point – has to do with translations – this is a bit technical but stay with me:**

Before we conclude that this passage is “clear” we must consider the limitations of our English translations...we sometimes CAN’T exactly know how the word is actually best translated

Problems with language all the time – in English - homonyms, homophones, and homographs. Homonyms are words which have the same spelling and pronunciation, but have different meanings.

- Crane – bird or lifter of objects
- Date – fruit or out for the night
- Leave – from a tree or getting out of here
- Type – on a computer or personal preference

So there are language issues - the most problematic issue is the rendering of the verb “authentain” as authority.

- This unusual Greek verb is found only once in scripture and rarely in extrabiblical texts, where it is usually associated with aggression.

- “Authentein” is translated as “domineer” in the Latin Vulgate and New English Bible and as “usurp authority” in the Geneva and King James Bibles.
- A study of Paul’s letters shows that he regularly used a form of the Greek “exousia” when referring to the use of authority in the church (see 1 Cor 6:12, 7:4, 1 Cor 6:12, 7:4, 9:4-6, 9:12, 11:10, 2 Cor 2:8, 10:8, 13:10, Col. 1:13, 2 Thess 3:12, Rom 6:15, 9:21).

So it is strange that some modern versions translate this simply as “authority”.

- Considering the context, it is likely that Paul was not objecting to what we think he was objecting to...Paul was objecting to something other than the legitimate use of authority.

There is also the possibility that the verb “didaskain” (to teach) is linked here to the verb “authentein” in what is called a hendiadys (two words joined by a conjunction to make a single point – two for one).

- “Don’t eat and run” would be a modern example...”this coffee is nice and hot”...or “country western music”
- So a better interpretation might be “don’t teach in a domineering way”.

Additionally, the grammar in this passage changes abruptly from the plural “women” in verses 9 & 10 to “a woman” in verses 11-15 and back to “women” in the next chapter, suggesting that Paul had a specific woman in mind, perhaps one that Timothy had written to him about.

Furthermore, some scholars believe “I don’t permit” could also be accurately translated as “I am not currently permitting”...

There is not a sing use of this Greek verb where this means, “I’m permanently banning...” Paul never said “I will NEVER allow women to teach”...

- So while these verses are often used to defend male-only leadership, current scholarship suggests that the passage is anything BUT clear on the issue.

**Third major point has to do with Context** – remember, I’ve said it before, you want to be a good bible student and interpreter, it is all about context

- You’ve heard the real estate expression about property values, right?
- It’s all about “location, location, location”.
- To interpret it correctly, we have to think about “context, context, context” ....we go back to the beginning of vs. 8 – “THEREFORE” – what’s it therefore – what is the context of this instruction?

In this case, Paul was writing to instruct Timothy about how to deal with heresy being spread by false teachers in Ephesus.

This is spelled out at the beginning of the letter:

“As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to myths and

endless genealogies...They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm..." (1 Tim 1:3-4, -7).

Most bible scholars agree that most likely Paul was talking about false teachers who were most likely men BUT much of the spreading of the false teaching was through women in the congregation.

It is likely that most women in the Ephesian church had limited training in Christian theology and that their interest in false doctrine was proving to be dangerous.

- There is no evidence in the text that he was writing to establish a permanent restriction on all women for all time.

Another interesting fact about 1 Timothy is that the myths and endless genealogies circulating in Ephesus included the idea that Eve was created before Adam and was superior to him.

Ephesus and goddess worship

This context also helps us understand Paul's mention of the creation order in verses 13 and 14 (more on Paul's use of the creation narratives here).

#### **Fourth Major point – has to do with interpretation**

There are some well-established principles of biblical interpretation that are helpful in navigating highly contested passages like this one. Here are a few to consider:

Doctrine should not be built on a [hapax legomenon](#) (a word that occurs only once in an author's writings or a text).

- When a word is only used once it is difficult, if not impossible, to infer the writer's meaning, since there are no other examples of word usage to compare.
- The word "authentain" translated as authority in 1 Timothy 2:12 is a hapax legomenon.
- This fact alone is sufficient to suggest caution in using this text as a foundation for church doctrine.

#### ***Interpretation should be consistent with the rest of the passage under study.***

- It is inconsistent to regard the dress code in 1 Tim 2:9 as culturally relative, and therefore temporary, but the restriction on women's ministry as universal and permanent. These instructions were part of the same paragraph and flow of thought.
- Similarly, if we insist that verse 12 is applicable today, to be consistent, that ruling should apply to the whole passage, including verse 15 (women shall be saved through childbearing).
- I find it concerning that most people who claim that 1 Timothy 2:12 is clear and applies today usually don't have a clue as to what the verses that follow mean and how they should be applied.

#### ***Interpretation should not contradict the rest of the author's teaching.***

- For example, 1 Timothy 2:1-10 provides instructions for both men and women to follow when praying in public, and in 1 Corinthians there are instructions for women praying and prophesying in church.
- Paul gives other instructions about corporate worship and spiritual gifts that are not restrictive of gender and takes care to record commendations to women serving in leadership positions (Romans 16).
- So Paul is generally supportive of women's participation, which contradicts the idea that women must be silent.
- Paul is NOT writing a general, universal treatise on women in church – he's giving particular, context-based instructions to women in Ephesus (presence of false teaching, problems that causes with divisions, tec.)

***Interpretation should not contradict the overall teaching in the New Testament, especially the example and teaching of Jesus.***

One author I read notes, "Christ is the center – the Logos, the living Word, and Scripture must be viewed through the Christ filter. Jesus' words and acts are normative and paradigmatic and should be a critical filter for interpreting scripture" (pp. 248-9).

- In the gospels Jesus never suggests that women's roles were to be secondary or limited in the community of faith, even when he had the opportunity to do so.

There is much more that could be said, as thousands of pages have been written on this one passage. At times it seems like there are diminishing returns on continuing the conversation and so I'll stop here for now.

Church should be making every effort to function as the New Community made possible by the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. The full inclusion of women in leadership is part of that redemptive work and is vital to the health and effectiveness of the church in this century.

The bottom line is that in light of current biblical scholarship it's time to acknowledge that there are too many problems with this passage to continue using it as a weapon against women called to church ministry.

But my experience in Jesus' body – in watching and witnessing the POWER of Jesus in and through women I've known make it imperative for us to deal with this because there's got to be more than just a rub with these verses...there's got to be a way to work through these words that are faithful to the text as well as faithful to the call of Jesus in our time to all of God's people – men and women

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