

CHAPTER XII 1 TIMOTHY 2—USURPING AUTHORITY

Now we get to the most challenging of the passages. We have shown that the interpretation of Genesis 3 as a curse, and not as a command, results in a sensible, consistent interpretation of many other verses. It all fits together as a logical, unitary whole. Our understanding of even familiar passages is deepened as we see how our marriages fit into God eternal plan for mankind.

But 1 Timothy 2 seems to run contrary to this pattern. Or have we missed the point entirely?

1 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and *quiet* lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time. 7 And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.

8 I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

9 I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, 10 but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

11 A woman should learn in *quietness* and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be *silent*. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. 15 But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

The immediate context. Before embarking on the study of the last paragraph, let's first observe something of the first three quoted paragraphs.

First, all Christians are urged to live peaceful and quiet lives, men and women. The word translated “quiet” in verse 2 is *hesuchios*, the same word translated “quietness” in 1 Timothy 2:11 and “silent” in verse 12. “*Hesuchios*” does not mean silent—it means peaceable or tranquil.

Second, Paul instructs men to “lift up holy hands in prayer” (v. 8). This sentence is written as a command in the plainest of terms. Its broad scope is emphasized by the use of “everywhere.” We know from history that the custom of the Jews in those days was to pray looking toward the heavens, with hands raised and palms opened toward the sky. This is very different from our modern custom. Ironically, I know of instances where people have complained about the lifting of hands during services, it being perceived as “denominational” or Pentecostal. We learn something about ourselves when we observe our members protesting obedience to a direct command!

And yet I agree that Paul does not *require* the lifting of holy hands today. The eternal, universal command is to pray. The lifting of hands is the manner of complying with the command dictated by the customs of the day.

Third, Paul instructs women to dress modestly and not with costly apparel, gold, or braided hair. And yet we readily accept women in church in fine, expensive clothes, with gold or pearl jewelry, and with braided hair. In fact, expensive clothes are standard for most congregations. Who repealed this law?

Once again, we understand that the eternal command is modesty and simplicity. What constitutes modesty and simplicity varies from culture to culture (although I think that many of our churches are very far from obeying this command even by today’s standards).

This brings us to the fourth paragraph. Paul states that women may not teach or have authority over a man, but rather must be in submission and in quietness. But unlike the two preceding paragraphs, we have chosen to bind this command as an eternal command. We overrule the lifting of holy hands and prohibition of braided hair as based on culture, but we decide that the requirement for women to neither teach nor exercise authority is eternal. Why? Certainly not based on the context! The immediate context suggests that the universal rule, that women are to be submissive, is to be applied in the First Century cultural context by not teaching or exercising authority over men.

We need to be very cautious in dealing with a passage that is colored in our minds by our own culture (past and present) as well as being colored by First Century culture. Rather, we must try to read 1 Timothy as Timothy himself would have. Scholars present us with three possible interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:11-15:

1. Paul prohibits women from teaching a man in public.
2. Paul prohibits women in Ephesus from teaching or exercising authority because certain false teachers were taking advantage of the ignorance of the Grecian women of the day to spread false doctrines.
3. Paul prohibits any teaching by a wife of her husband that is domineering or that otherwise contradicts her role as his complement.

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A. Teaching Men in Public

The traditional interpretation of this passage is that women may not teach in public. Of course, nothing in the passage mentions teaching in public—rather it appears that all teaching by women is prohibited. But such an interpretation is contradicted by Priscilla’s teaching of Apollos.¹²⁰

Thus, there are several difficulties with this interpretation. First, we don’t allow women to teach men in Sunday School, even though when we consider 1 Corinthians 14:33-35, we declare that women can ask questions in Sunday School, since it is a private setting. How it can be that Sunday School is public in the context of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and private in the context of 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 is beyond me!

Second, there is no obvious reason in current culture that a woman teaching in Sunday School would be unsubmitive while teaching at home would not be. After all, outside of the church setting, we are all routinely willing to be taught or lectured by a woman in a public setting. It only seems wrong to us at church, and then only because of our interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

Third, nothing in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 limits the scope of its prohibition to the assembly or even to church affairs. Rather, we add this limitation by cobbling “in the churches” from 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 into this passage. But Paul did not write Timothy expecting him to pull out his pocket copy of 1 Corinthians and then read the two passages together to find Paul’s meaning. No, Paul meant 1 Timothy to be understood from 1 Timothy.

Finally, there is no basis in the Creation accounts to prohibit a woman from teaching a man. The only arguable basis is that a woman can’t exercise authority over a man due to her role as suitable complement—but only a wife is a suitable complement and then only to her husband. Women are not, as a class, suitable complements to each and every man.

Thus, we are well justified in searching for a fresh interpretation.

B. False Teachers and Unlearned Women

The Ephesian background. Paul wrote 1 Timothy to Timothy while Timothy was in Ephesus,¹²¹ and so the letter deals with the situation in Ephesus. Unlike 1 Corinthians 14, Paul does not say that he does not allow women to teach or have authority “as in all the congregations.” Thus, his command may well be localized to Ephesus. Moreover, the fact that Paul takes personal credit for the command—“*I* do not

¹²⁰ Acts 18:26.

¹²¹ 1 Timothy 1:3.

permit ...”—indicates that Paul was making a rule to meet the needs of the particular time and place, much as he prohibited the Corinthians from eating together to prevent the abuse of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11.¹²²

The earliest New Testament books often deal with the problem of Judaizing teachers, arising from the efforts of certain Jews to mix Christianity with the Law of Moses. Later books (including 1 Timothy), however, begin to deal with Gnosticism,¹²³ arising from the efforts of certain Greeks to blend Christianity with the Gentile mystery religions.

The mystery religions were Gentile cults that had many elements in common with Christianity. They often promised salvation, unity with a god, and sonship. In many cults, the god being worshipped was believed to have died and been resurrected. These cults preceded Christianity and doubtlessly helped pave the way for the pagan world to accept Jesus. However, the cults also contained many elements utterly foreign to Christianity. It is not surprising that the Greeks tried to combine their old religions into Christianity, much as the Jews tried to combine Judaism into Christianity.

Evidence of Gnosticism in the Pastorals. And indeed there is ample evidence in 1 Timothy of Paul’s concern regarding Gnostic teachings. Moreover, it appears that much of the problem centered on the women in the congregation.

(4:1-7) The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and

¹²² 1 Cor. 11:34 declares, “If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.” Most Churches of Christ interpret this command as being limited to the Corinthian situation, because the common meal was being abused to the point of sin. 1 Cor. 11:20-21. A significant number of Churches insist that this verse prohibits eating the church building—at all times and places. But this view fails to acknowledge that there were no church buildings until the 4th Century. In fact, until Constantine legalized Christianity, most assemblies were conducted in private homes, where there were kitchens and much eating. Moreover, Jude 7 specifically condones the “love feast,” or common meal of Christians, often combined with the Lord’s Supper.

¹²³ Many scholars dispute that Gnosticism was a First Century phenomenon, and certainly history tells us that Gnosticism was not formalized until the Second Century. On the other hand, the mystery religions and pagan philosophies that gave rise to Gnosticism had been around for centuries, and we see in the Pastoral Letters and many other books of the New Testament the troubles these false ideas were causing very early in the history of the church.

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prayer. If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.

Have nothing to do with *godless myths and old wives' tales*; rather, train yourself to be godly.

One characteristic of Gnosticism is asceticism. Some Greeks taught that material things are evil and must be given up to be truly spiritual. Thus, the enjoyment of the pleasures of this world must be forsaken. This false teaching was eventually accepted into Christianity, resulting in the monastic movement, Lent, and similar efforts to escape the world that typify medieval Catholicism. But Paul says that there is nothing wrong with enjoying God's Creation and that there is no merit in giving up some pleasure just for the sake of suffering.

We should also understand that Paul meant "old wives' tales" to be taken literally. We use it as a figure of speech, but Paul was referring to tales told by old wives! As was also true in Corinth, in Ephesus the women were uneducated and did not work outside the home. Once a woman had raised her children, she often became idle and was subject to becoming a gossip, as Paul states later. But these same women were the foundation of many of the Ephesian religions. Unscrupulous men found the opportunity in this to raise themselves to positions of influence and to make money at the expense of naive women. And we should not underestimate the naiveté of certain classes of First Century women. Imagine growing up with no formal education, no opportunity to associate with better-educated people, no television, no magazines, no periodicals, and no radio. "Ignorant" understates the situation. Such women, through no fault of their own, would doubtlessly be easily duped by whatever cult was fashionable.

(1 Tim. 5:11-15) As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. Besides, they get into the habit of *being idle* and *going about from house to house*. And not only do they become *idlers*, but also *gossips* and *busybodies*, saying things they ought not to. So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander.

The Ephesian women formed a class that was subject to the sins of gossip and slander. But the danger was perhaps much worse than the translators indicate. The word translated "busybodies" can also be translated "practitioners of magic arts," which is how the same word is translated in Acts 19:19. The Ephesian religions were often characterized by the practice of "magic" cults.

We see in the final quoted sentence that Paul was very concerned for the reputation of the women in the Ephesian church. The command to have children and to marry is to protect their reputation in a world where an unmarried woman frequently became a temple prostitute for lack of any other means of employment.

We see the same problem with many of women members of the church at Ephesus reflected in 2 Timothy as well.

(2 Tim. 3:6-7) They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over *weak-willed women*, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.

It's important to realize that Paul is not being critical of women as such but rather is criticizing what was going on in Ephesus at the time due to the local culture's bias against women.

Summary. Commentators are essentially unanimous in recognizing that 1 Timothy was written in part to combat the evils of Gnosticism. Male false teachers created the problem, but the problem spread and infected the church in large part due to the ignorance and naiveté of the women. Thus, in a society where women were unspeakably uneducated and ignorant, and where false teachers were spreading anti-Christian traditions by taking advantage of women, Paul had very good reason to place limitations on the authority that women should have.

C. Wives May Not Seek Dominion Through Teaching

Women or wives? An alternative translation of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is to take *gune* to mean wife and *aner* to mean husband. As discussed earlier, the words are completely ambiguous in the Greek, and the distinction can only be found from the context. Therefore, let's see if we get a better result by translating *gune* as wife and *aner* as husband:¹²⁴

A *wife* should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a *wife* to teach or to have authority over a *husband*; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the *wife* who was deceived and became a sinner. But *wives* will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Translated in this manner, the verse becomes a prohibition of a wife's usurping authority over her husband, not women having authority over men. And notice the

¹²⁴ As noted earlier with regard to the meaning of *gune*, translatable as either woman or wife, in 1 Corinthians 11, because the Greek language uses the same word for woman and wife, Paul uses the word in both senses in the same context, assuming, as the language assumes, that adult women are married, as was typically—but certainly not always—the case. This leaves the translation of *gune* in many contexts very difficult, since in our culture such an assumption is not permitted.

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appropriateness of the translation. Only wives should be saved through childbearing. Paul would hardly expect unmarried women to seek this route to salvation!

While this translation does not resolve all difficulties with the verse, it has much appeal. After all, Adam and Eve were husband and wife. Wives are to be complements for their husbands. And nowhere does the Old Testament require women in general to be subject to men in general.

“Silent.” The King James Version mistranslates *hesuchios* in verses 11 and 12 as “silence.” The NIV makes the same mistake in verse 12. In fact, as noted previously, the word means “quietness” or “tranquility.” *Strong’s Dictionary* defines the word—

keeping one’s seat (sedentary), i.e. (by impl.) still (undisturbed, undisturbing):—peaceable, quiet.

Vine’s *Expository of New Testament Words* states that while *eremos* means tranquility arising from without, *hesuchios*—

indicates tranquility arising from within, causing no disturbance to others.

This is a different word from *sigao*, translated “silent” in 1 Corinthians 14:35. In fact, it is the same word translated “quiet” in 1 Timothy 2:2 describing how all Christians should live all the time! Hence, our translation now becomes—

A wife should learn in *peaceableness* and full submission. I do not permit a wife to teach or to have authority over a husband; she must be in *peaceableness*. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the wife who was deceived and became a sinner. But wives will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

The meaning of “exercise authority.” We must next consider the meaning of “exercise authority,” which is a translation of *authenteo*. Commentators disagree as to the meaning of *authenteo*. This is the only time the word is used as a verb in the New Testament. *Authenteo* means to dominate or “usurp authority.”¹²⁵ It would hardly be consistent with submission to dominate.

¹²⁵ Vine, *ibid*, page 89.

While “exercise authority” is a possible translation (as in the NIV¹²⁶), Paul always uses other words for “exercise authority,” and so his selection of this unusual term must be intended to carry some special meaning. If he just wanted to say “exercise authority,” why vary from his normal vocabulary? Moreover, *authenteo* is phrased in contrast to “be in quietness” (mistranslated “be silent” by the NIV). “Domineer” best suits the evident contrast. Thus, the King James Version is better than the NIV in translating “usurp authority.”

Standard Greek dictionaries confirm this conclusion. *Strong’s Dictionary* defines *authenteo*—

to act of oneself, i.e. (fig.) dominate:—usurp authority over.

Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* defines the word—

to exercise authority on one’s own account, to domineer over, is used in 1 Tim. 2:12, A.V., “to usurp authority,” R.V. “to have dominion.” In the earlier usage of the word it signified one who with his own hand killed either others or himself. Later it came to denote one who acts on his own authority; hence, to exercise authority, dominion.

Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*¹²⁷ translates,

one who acts on his own authority, autocratic, ... an absolute master ... to exercise dominion over one ... 1 Tim. ii.12.

Spiros Zodhiates¹²⁸ translates—

to use or exercise authority or power over as an autocrat, to domineer (1 Tim. 2:12).

The Revised Standard Version translates “have dominion.” Many other translations are similar: New English Bible: “domineer over”; American Standard Version: “have dominion over”; Living Bible: “lording over.”¹²⁹

¹²⁶ The NIV has much to commend it, especially its readability. But it is often biased in its translations, sometimes toward Baptist doctrine, other times more generally toward the traditional views of fundamentalists. It is not surprising that a passage as sensitive to conservative Bible students as this one reflects some of this bias.

¹²⁷ (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996).

¹²⁸ *The Complete Word Study Dictionary—New Testament* (AMG International, Inc.: 1992).

¹²⁹ Of course, many other translations, including the NIV, translate “authority over.”

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Quite clearly, “exercise authority” in the NIV is mistranslated, and should instead be rendered “domineer.”¹³⁰ Thus, Paul does not prohibit women from having authority—in the church or elsewhere. He simply reminds them that self-willed rule is unchristian. Indeed, the New Testament is clear that no one may domineer, including men in general and elders in particular.¹³¹

This leaves the question, then, of what Paul intends by prohibiting a woman from teaching. If a woman may exercise authority, so long as she doesn’t domineer, then may she teach in a non-domineering manner? Certainly, Priscilla was allowed to teach Apollos.

In his *Women in the Church 1*, Osburn states,

For reasons that must be explained in detail elsewhere, I am of the opinion that the “teaching” in v. 12 is not “teaching” per se, but specifically “domineering teaching.” The *authentein* is taken by complementarians [hierarchicalists] to mean “exercise authority,” but stronger arguments exist for taking it to mean “domineer,” paired with “submissive” in v. 11 and in contrast to “peaceable/quietness.” Both “teach” and “domineer” have “man” as a direct object (here in the Greek genitive case because “domineer” takes that case). When, in Greek, two verbs are joined in this way, the nearer qualifies the farther. Hence, the lack of quietude/peacefulness that is stressed both before and after this admonition is countered by “not to teach in a domineering way.”¹³²

And so our translation becomes—

¹³⁰ Osburn, *Women in the Church 2*, p. 82, comments, “Both from the first century BC, a papyrus in Berlin clearly has the meaning ‘to domineer,’ as does Philodemus, who mentions ‘dominating masters.’” Osburn points out further examples of the meaning domineer in the writings of early Christians, pp. 217-219, John Chrysostum (4th Century) and Hippolytus (3rd Century).

¹³¹ 1 Pet. 5:1-3: “To the elders ... Be shepherds of God’s flock ... not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” 1 Pet. 5:5-6: “Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”

¹³² Page 112, relying in part on Herbert W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (rev. G. Messing; Cambridge, Harvard University Press 1956), pages 364-365. Ferguson points out that the new edition of the *Bauer-Amdt-Gingrich-Danker* lexicon shows that this construction is often parallel, so that the second phrase does not necessarily modify the first. At best, Ferguson has shown that Osburn’s construction is not necessarily right, leaving us to find the correct result based on historical and literary context. On the other hand, in *Women in the Church 2*, Osburn provides several New Testament examples in this construction where the second clause (“domineer” in this case) defines and limits the first clause (“teach”), p. 221, including Acts 4:18, Gal. 1:16-17; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; and Acts 16:21. Greek scholars call this construction *hendiadys*. Of course, the distinction between a *hendiadys* and parallel construction must be made in the context of the entire Bible. Which translation is most consistent with Gen. 1-2?

A *wife* should learn in *peaceableness* and full submission. I do not permit a *wife* to teach her *husband in a domineering way*; she must be in *peaceableness*. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the *wife* who was deceived and became a sinner. But *wives* will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Thus, Paul prohibits wives from teaching or otherwise exercising authority so as to dominate their husbands. Certainly, this would violate the command to be submissive. (We could point out that it would be just as wrong for men to refuse submission but to insist on dominance.)

Adam and Eve. I believe that there would be much less controversy over this passage but for the references Paul makes to Adam being made before Eve and Eve being the first to sin. While these are true statements, they hardly argue for all women to be subordinate to all men. After all, although Adam was made first, he was made incomplete (and hence imperfect)—without Eve. And while Eve sinned first, Adam sinned as well. Moreover, in Romans 5 Paul gives Adam the blame for the Fall of Man (Rom. 5:12).¹³³ The world was condemned through the one man, Adam, according to Paul. And God gave the command to not eat of the tree of knowledge to Adam before Eve was even made (Gen. 2:16-17). Adam can hardly claim the moral high ground over Eve. Why does Paul seem to blame Eve here and Adam in Romans? Why has Paul seemingly interpreted Genesis 2 and 3 inconsistently?

I suggest outlining the passage as follows:

- a** women should learn in quietness
- b** do not teach or exercise authority (in a domineering way), but be in full submission
- b'** Adam was formed first
- a'** Eve was deceived
- a. The reference to Eve being deceived makes the point that women should learn so as to avoid following Eve's bad example in being deceived. When women do not study, they allow themselves to become victims of false teaching, and they can't count on their husbands' learning to protect themselves, any more than Eve was protected by Adam from the serpent's lies. This is exactly what was going on in Ephesus at the time,

¹³³ “sin entered the world through one man”

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and it continues to be sound advice. Paul's first command is that the women "should learn." Only by learning can the women avoid following in Eve's footsteps.¹³⁴

b. The argument from the Creation order does not indicate subordination. After all, in Genesis 1, man—male and female—was made last, but that hardly argues for subordination of the man to the animals! Moreover, we've already seen that the subordination of women begins with God's curse of the Creation. Thus, the point must be found in the purpose behind the order of creating men and women. Man was not good alone. He needed a suitable complement. God made women to complement their husbands. Therefore, if a wife domineers, she fails to be the complement that God intended. The order of creation argument therefore supports the command to submission that we are already well familiar with.

Thus, Paul says that women should learn because Eve was deceived (and women should not follow her bad example) and that wives should not usurp authority over their husbands, because they were created to be suitable complements, not dominators.

We learn from this passage:

1. Women are required to learn in quietness. The command to quietness is the logical conclusion of Paul's command that all Christians should live quiet and peaceful lives, found in 1 Timothy 2:2.

2. Wives are to be in submission to and complements for their husbands, and this is always true.

3. Wives may not teach in a domineering way.

4. Women should learn God's word to protect themselves from deception (which is always true but was a particularly critical need in Ephesus when Paul wrote 1 Timothy).

5. Nothing in this passage teaches that women are gullible or more gullible than men.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Paul uses the account of Eve's deception to apply essentially the same point to all Christians in 2 Corinthians 11:1-3. "But I'm afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ." As in 1 Timothy, Paul sees Eve's sin as a warning to Christians, men or women, against being led astray by false teachers.

¹³⁵ Indeed, if being compared to Eve's sin makes a gender gullible in God's eyes, then both genders are gullible because both men and women are compared to Eve's deception in 2 Corinthians 11:3.

D. Additional Points

Is the assembly under consideration? There is nothing in this passage limiting its impact to the assembly, to Sunday School class, or even to church affairs. Even if we accept the NIV's translation, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man," we have no basis for limiting the command to church. The relationship between men and women established in the Garden of Eden surely is not limited to church affairs or to an hour of church assembly. How can we preach on one Sunday that Christianity is a seven-day a week, 24-hour a day religion affecting our entire lives, and then willy nilly limit God's laws to Sunday a.m.?

Is the prohibition of teaching and exercising authority eternal? This leaves for consideration the prohibition against teaching and exercising authority. There are numerous examples of godly women teaching men and exercising authority over men, Deborah, the judge, leader, and prophetess being the most prominent but hardly the only example. If God has made an eternal rule that women may not exercise authority over or teach men, why did He make Deborah a judge? Surely God could have found a man in all of Israel whom He could have inspired to fulfill the same role. Why violate His own rule and raise up a woman as judge over all Israel? Likewise, why condone Anna's teaching in the temple's highly public courts?

Priscilla taught Apollos. Some distinguish Priscilla's teaching by pointing out that her teaching was private while Paul is addressing public teaching in 1 Timothy 2. But where does the Bible say that Priscilla taught in private or that 1 Timothy is addressing public teaching only? And why are our Sunday School classes "public" when making this argument and "private" when we authorize women to ask questions in class but during the worship hour?

Saved through childbirth. What did Paul mean when he said that women will be saved through childbirth? I know three theories that make sense:

1. The Kroegers¹³⁶ suggest that many Ephesian cults considered childbearing to be a sin and condemned women who gave birth. Perhaps Paul is dealing with this strange teaching here.

2. In the Greek, "childbearing" is preceded by "the." Perhaps Paul has a particular birth in mind, that is, the birth of Jesus prophesied in Genesis 3:15. The curse that imposes such limitations on even Christian women (because of the importance of

¹³⁶ Richard Clark Kroeger & Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman* (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1992).

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adhering to society's notions of propriety, which notions are influenced by male domination) will ultimately fail because of the birth of Jesus.¹³⁷

3. Paul may be saying simply that virtuous Christian women will be saved. Possibly Paul is saying that women may be saved despite the curse of Eve in whatever role society assigns to them by living the Christian life in that role. If the role of women is to bear children and not teach or have authority in a given culture, then the women will be saved by their faith, love, and holiness in that role. Submission may require Christians to live as strangers in a strange land and not fully enjoy the freedom that Christ bought.

I've never heard a preacher preach or seen an author write that women who can't bear children will be damned. If this were so, then it would be better for a single woman to bear children out of wedlock than to die childless! What an absurd conclusion. Therefore, we very properly and consistently limit this teaching to its cultural time and place, just as the preceding verses must be so limited.

¹³⁷ Greek does not follow English in the use of definite articles. A Greek "the" often does not refer to a single or particular object and thus often doesn't mean "the" as we use the word in English.