

Discussion Paper on 1 Tim 2:8-15

1. Introduction

I feel privileged to be invited to participate in these discussions. I also feel bound to offer a health warning.

The Health Warning

I am not trying to cover all the exegetical work done on 1 Tim 2. That requires something far bigger than what I can offer here.

Further, my understanding is that what would best serve your discussions is a paper that outlines both exegetical conclusions and what I think I, and those like me, think we are doing when we exegete these texts in the ways we do. I stress the **ways**. Obviously traditionalist interpretation has a spectrum, and I occupy simply one point along that. Hence I think you want a paper that strives towards self-awareness.

I think you want clarity, brevity and simplicity, too. So I aim to minimise scholarly paraphernalia.

This means that time and space preclude detailed interaction with the exegeses of my fellow-evangelicals who do not share my conclusions. I regret this, but want to add that the issue is not simply 'Have I reached "evangelical" conclusions, as in employing recognised "evangelical" techniques?' but rather 'What are my responsibilities of care and fellowship to evangelicals who reach different "evangelical" conclusions using those same techniques?'

This takes me to my last warning. Many of us over the last 20 years have found it alarming and destabilising that apparently the same methods have yielded mutually incompatible conclusions. This goes beyond the present debate, as important as it is to our life as the body of Christ. It raises questions about the clarity and perspicuity of Scripture as it addresses us. A hidden emotional stake for us all, perhaps, is the evangelical urge to find the uniquely right answer to the exegetical question. If we cannot find it here, where else may we fail?

Since I think there are even deeper things at issue than the present issue, I intend to explore one aspect of the nature of Scripture at length before turning to the specific text.

Understanding of the unity of the Word of God

All this takes us to the unity of the Word of God. If God's Word is not a unity, then the issue of how to obey God on this matter disappears: both approaches 'work'. However, we do not take this path. This is because, I think, we share the conviction that God's Word is in some sense a unity.

I say, 'in some sense'. Christ's explanation in John 5:39 that the Old Testament bears witness to him provides a focal point to Scripture. Certainly, Christ is the lens for the New Testament.¹ Christ is the focal point for the Father's plan for the cosmos (Ephesians 1:9-11), and there is one plan for human history (Compare Paul in Acts 20:27 and the concept of a single, whole plan or counsel (*'pasan tēn boulēn'*). Such a unity relates to our

¹ As J. I. Packer argued with clarity and brevity in *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*.

fundamental doctrine of God, that his omnipotence, perfect goodness and omniscience mean that his words can be a unity in a way mine cannot, limited as they are in power, goodness and knowledge.

But this unity is not simple. God has revealed his words in all kinds of ways and through all kinds of people and over different cultures and times and in markedly different languages. Scripture is diverse, yet inspired by the one Spirit. Anselm long ago commented that God is the source not just of the physical existence of diverse things in the cosmos, but also the various diverse goods of these diverse things in this diverse cosmos.²

In the triune God himself, of course, there is ultimate unity (One God), and ultimate plurality (Three Persons). The plurality in the Godhead, though, as in the cosmos, is a plurality and diversity of mutual inter-relation.

I wonder here whether we may not need to be more nuanced in the way we talk of Scripture's unity (which is a truth I wish to defend), while recognising its inter-related plural diversity.

Unity means of course that one looks for coherence and consistency in understanding God's word. Certain construals are impossible, such as, that the Cross was a divine mistake, or that Jesus is bad. That said, our stress on context, whether the immediate context of a verse within a book, the book within the canon, the book in its

² *Monologion* 1

social and historical context, all can be properly related to the right search for consistency and coherence ('how does this fit?').

The diversity of Scripture, though, makes the search for coherence and consistency much harder. Some material can seem more resistant. One thinks of the difficulty in preaching on, say, the food laws in an interesting and engaging way. And some attempts at coherence are simply wrong. Jesus is emphatic in Mark 12:24, 27, that the Sadducees construe the books of Moses wrongly. In later history, of course, the early Arians had a strong doctrine of Scripture and an enthusiasm to construe the text. They passed at least that test of 'evangelicalism' (compare the 'evangelicalism' of current Jehovah's Witnesses).

It is intriguing that both these misconstruals related to attempts at coherence, and in both cases there was a large measure of coherence. Coherence is obviously highly desirable, but a coherence can be wrong. Thus, Hilary of Poitiers commented on Arian exegetes that the coherence was one they had imposed.

Clearly this may raise the stakes for us all. We realise that merely employing of 'correct technique' is not enough. For the Arians did that and they were, in my view, sadly but rightly anathematised in 325. This in turn should prompt a certain epistemic humility. Is the coherence I see one I bring to the texts, or one the texts cumulatively bring to me?

Let me stay with the Arians. That debate was in large measure over the LXX text of Proverbs 8:22 (*kurios ektisen me archēn hodōn*

autou eis ta erga autou), and one has to say the Arian case on that verse in the LXX was *prima facie* attractive. I wonder whether some feel that 1 Tim 2 also has just such superficial attractiveness in the traditionalist case. Athanasius and others argued, of course, at several levels against Arianism, but a key plank in their arguments was that Arianism produced a wrong coherence: a non-Gospel coherence. And Athanasius' theology very much cohered around the Gospel. This is evident in *De Incarnatione* as he works out that only a divine Son can save.

I find Athanasius' example illuminating. His account of the Incarnation is set within a Gospel framework of Creation, Fall and Redemption. Creation has a key part in this, since it shapes our understanding of what the Fall is (an act of undoing of Creation, a 'de-creation', bringing death rather than life, and challenging God's Word in suggesting that what God speaks shall not be so). It also shapes what Redemption involves, a restoring (and more) of the Creation that God originally established, in which the Creative Word he uttered is vindicated and fulfilled. The vice of Arianism is that its inadequate account of the Word made flesh meant that creation could not be restored. It does not cohere with Creation-Fall-Redemption. It is non-Gospel. Creation-Fall-Redemption is a simple enough account of the Gospel, but it is profoundly powerful and productive.

I find this instructive, too, in relation to Jesus' refutation of the Sadducees and their denial of resurrection. Their misconception is fundamental in the light of the Gospel based on Creation-Fall-

Redemption, since it distorts what Redemption from the Fall involves, the restoration of life.

I have wondered, though, whether my fellow evangelicals may not have questions about me similar to those Athanasius had about Arius: whether my exegesis of 1 Tim 2, like Arius' of Proverbs 8:22, is counter to the Gospel itself. The Gospel, after all, should surely be the co-ordinating, cohering principle. God has one plan for the cosmos, one plan for human salvation focused on Jesus: of course any text must be located within that frame, and finds its proper place within that frame.

In terms of our self-understanding as evangelicals, we naturally do not think 'responsible' exegesis, using responsible techniques, is the only thing that must happen (we have anyway no monopoly on that, nor on strong doctrines of Inspiration). We do, though, see ourselves as Gospel people, and this implies that the Gospel itself is critical as an organising principle for us.

So it is a perfectly fair question for my non-traditionalist fellow-evangelicals to ask me how a traditionalist interpretation fits 'evangelically' – with the Gospel, the evangel.

I think, then, that my task includes relating traditionalist exegesis of 1 Tim 2 to this admittedly very broad Gospel frame of Creation-Fall-Redemption.

Some Questions of Method

I should add, for completeness' sake that there are three further broad considerations relating to method, not all of which can be adverted to here.

First, how do different exegetical techniques interact? How do e.g. background studies intersect with theological understandings of the Bible as inspired?

Secondly, how does a textual understanding of what 1 Tim meant in, say, 64 CE apply to the polity of the Church of England in our cultural context?

Thirdly, at some point we must consider the character of the reader. I fear we risk reducing the reading of Scripture to the technically expert application of several procedures, somewhat like expecting the right laboratory techniques to produce a standard result every time. I caricature for clarity. My misgiving is that earlier generations of Christian readers stressed that the Scriptures must be approached with humility. Hence the Fruitful Exhortation To The Reading And Knowledge Of Holy Scripture states:³

'And, if you be afraid to fall into error by reading of holy Scripture, I shall shew you how you may read it without danger of error. Read it humbly with a meek and lowly heart, to the intent you may glorify God, and not yourself, with the knowledge of it; and read it not without daily praying to God....'

Many have remarked that some of our intra-evangelical debates have regrettably not been marked by fraternal charity. Perhaps they

³ First Homily in the First Book of Homilies

have not been marked by humility either. But there is no point in either side 'winning the debate' if in the process we become proud, albeit technically expert, readers of Scripture. When we deal with a very familiar text, we risk starting to think we have 'mastered' it or 'cracked' it. I am not sure this sits easily with the humility the homily requires.

2. Context and and Gospel coherence

2.1. *Prima facie*

At first glance, 1 Tim 2:12 provides some restriction on the activities of a woman (*gunē*). Questions arise, *inter alia*, around what kind of restriction (e.g. in Paul's personal or apostolic capacity?), what kind of activity and what kind of woman.

2.2. *Internal context*

We naturally turn to context. The immediate explanation for Paul's position occurs in vv 13 and 14 (note the introductory *gar* in v 13). This explanation relates to Creation (v 13) and Fall (v 14), with a final comment on female redemption (v 15). The explanation thus seems to tie the restriction, whatever it is, to the Gospel pattern of Creation-Fall-Redemption. This precludes, in my mind, the possibility that Paul was speaking merely in his personal rather than apostolic opinion.

The wider context speaks of activities that become the people of God (prayer [2:1-3 and 8] and good deeds rather than showy dress [2:9-10]). This broader context in chapter 2 is shot through with Paul's Gospel concerns (the rationale for prayer in v 3, the reminder

of the Gospel in vv 5-7). The thought, then, is of the redeemed people of God as it goes about its distinctive life in a pagan world.

This suggests that the restricted activities relate to the life of the people of God amongst themselves, rather than their public life in the 'secular' world. This speaks against seeing the restrictions as dealing with authority, in, say, politics or business. Rather the congregational activities of God's redeemed people are in view, in what we would term mixed adult public worship.

Moving wider still, chapter 1 relates to Paul's charge to Timothy (1:3) to permit neither the teaching of different doctrine (*mē heterodidaskalein*), nor pre-occupation with myths (*mēde prosechein muthois*). Paul relates this (vv 7-11) to a wrong concern with the Law, which he sets in a right Gospel context (1:11). Two things are striking here.

First, the masculine participles in 1:7 (*thelontes, noountes*) indicate that, while the 'wrong-teachers' may have included women (masculine participles and adjectives can include females), the 'wrong-teachers' certainly included men. Hence the rationale for the restriction in 2:12 cannot simply be that only women were teaching falsely.

Secondly, the false teaching prominent here relates to the Law. Indeed, Paul's primary teaching correction is to state the right use of the Law (hence 1:8ff) This most readily speaks of Judaising rather than Romanising influences in the Ephesian church. This fits

poorly with seeing the Ephesian problem simply in terms of the impact of *Romanitas*, or related Romanising impulses.

2.2. External evidence

Turning to external matters, I should mention two background influences: the Diana cult and *Romanitas*.

Ephesus was, of course, the centre of a Diana cult. Some have argued this was a fertility cult privileging the female principle over the male. Yet it is worth noting that scholars by no means all agree that Ephesian Diana is to be taken as a fertility cult rather than, as in other Diana cults, a virgin goddess with moon and hunting associations. Epithets ascribed to Ephesian Diana such as virgin, pure, huntress and straight-shooter link rather with traditional Greek mythic forms than Great Mother fertility cults. It has been observed that the protuberances on the goddess's statue which are so often called breasts lack nipples, have been found on male gods and clearly virgin goddesses. To this extent a simple linking of the Ephesian Diana cult to that of Cybele or Demeter is more than a little speculative. Further, Ephesian Diana had male priests and indeed Ephesus had male magistrates at this period. In any case, even clearly fertility-oriented female deities seem to have been consistent with a male priesthood and some strongly patriarchal social patterns (obvious literary evidence comes from Apuleius' *Golden Ass*). The *Megabuzos*, or eunuch priest, should not be overstressed since there were a number of other ritual roles/priesthoods held by non-eunuch males.

As for female priestesses, these are strikingly absent in the riot of Acts 19, when it would be natural to expect a word from them. Epigraphic evidence tends to locate them in terms of their fathers, and on at least one occasion envisages them discharging the expenses of office through their parents. This does not demand a construal of a radically feminist Ephesus on the basis of the Diana cult, whether fertility or not.

As for *Romanitas*, Roman names in the epigraphic record show Roman impact. Exotic hairstyles may likewise have been associated with Roman fashion. But by contemporary standards, Roman culture was still legally and at the formal political level patriarchal. The *pater familias* is a Roman legal institution, after all. Further, the false teaching which was Paul's immediate concern is judaizing, as we have seen. Gossip, idleness and possible promiscuity are by no means the exclusive preserve of *Romanitas* and its accompanying attitudes. Hellenistic poets had been satirising just these things in women some 2 centuries earlier.

Other 'hard evidence' from Ephesus does not seem to disclose a city with markedly different attitudes to women from that in other great hellenised cities in the region.

This does not mean I disregard external evidence. Rather, the external evidence here provides no reason for narrowing the *prima facie* restriction in 1 Tim 2:12.

2.3. Semantic and grammatical studies

Several issues arise here, each deserving a monograph.

On translating *hēsuchia* in vv11, 12 as 'silence' or 'quietness' (as in, without contradiction and interruption), I am content that this means 'quietness', since Paul elsewhere envisages women praying.

Grammatically, on the idea that 'authority' (*authentēin*) and 'teach' (*didaskēin*) form a hendiadys meaning 'teaching with authority', I think the distance between the two does not permit this. Rather the sentence apparently works as a restriction in the first place on teaching (V 12 starts with this), with the addition, 'not even to exercise authority' (*oude authentēin*), forming almost an afterthought. But the order suggests 'teaching' is Paul's first thought. The two concepts are very closely related, because teaching seems to have an authoritative function in the NT church (hence the circumscriptions on what is taught and who teaches in the Pastoral Epistles). Thus, I think the restriction refers to teaching and the exercise of authority as two related activities.

I am not persuaded that the mischief addressed here is the gossiping which may have been taking place (see 5:13). That explains neither the apparent breadth of restriction (any teaching in a mixed congregational adult setting), nor the rationale Paul gives in terms of Creation and Fall.

Concerning the much-controverted word *authentēin* I am not persuaded that at this period this only refers to bad exercises of authority, rather than an exercise of authority. Apart from semantic studies, it is striking that Paul starts the restriction with his reference to teaching. The simple *didaskēin* (as against 'other'

teaching or 'false' teaching') does not suggest negative connotations. Rather the contrary.

Contextual reasons also make it unattractive to see *didaskein/authentein* in necessarily pejorative terms. To begin with, men also are capable of false teaching and usurping authority, but Paul issues no blanket restriction on male teaching as he appears to do here. Moreover, some women manifestly taught well, and Paul knew it (Priscilla is the obvious example), and this again makes one wonder why an apparently general prohibition is issued. Furthermore, taking *didaskein/authentein* in necessarily pejorative terms provides a poor fit with Paul's rationale, which is an appeal to Creation and Fall.

At this point I confess to deep questions about application if *didaskein/authentein* is taken as usurping authority and false teaching in the Ephesian context. If the version of 'feminism' in Ephesus generated by Romanisation and other forces called such a powerful reaction in Paul, and that 'feminism' was comparatively mild by our contemporary standards, then the obvious question is why would not the prohibition apply even more today with far stronger versions of feminism on the table? If what Ephesian women were doing counted as 'usurpation', what counts as 'usurpation' now?

Concerning restriction with respect to whom, I do not think the woman/man references can be restricted to husbands and wives. It seems more general. For elsewhere when dealing with a wife's submission or learning from her husband, this is marked by the

adjective *idios*, 'one's own' (1 Cor 14:35; Eph 5:22; and 1 Peter 3:1). The exception is Col 3:18, where in any case some textual evidence exists in favour of *idios* or the possessive pronoun *humōn* ('yours'). More significantly, the text of Col 3:18 does have the article (**the** males/husbands), and this can suggest 'your'. Obviously 1 Tim 2:12 lacks both *idios* and the definite article, leaving the impression of 'any man', not just 'your' man or 'the' man.

Finally, I turn to the vexed question of 'saved through childbirth'. Given Paul's upholding of free grace in chapter 1, he is unlikely to introduce salvation through the 'work' of childbirth here. Rather, this should be taken closely with v 14 and the reference to the Fall. The Fall is associated with pain in childbirth (Gen 3:16), and this continues even after the advent of the Gospel. Verse 15 aims, then, to comfort women: notwithstanding the actions of the archetypal woman Eve, of course salvation is available for women, even though a signal mark of the Fall, pain in childbirth, continues. This continuing mark does not indicate women have no share in Redemption. Grammatically, the preposition *dia* here indicates the attendant circumstances, in the midst of which, or despite which, an action takes place.

2.4. Coherence

This is a very 'traditional' reading of 1 Tim 2:12. How is it 'evangelical' in the sense of a 'Gospel' reading?

I think it is 'evangelical' because it fits the pattern of Creation-Fall-Redemption. The explanation of vv 13-14 is in terms of **both**

Creation (Adam's prior formation) **and** Fall (Eve's hearkening to the serpent). The Creation pattern was displaced by the Fall as Adam listened to Eve, that is, was 'taught' (*didaskein*) by her, and authoritatively directed (*authenthein*) by her. (A classic case of male abuse of power by irresponsibility?). Redemption, as a restoration of creation, involves repudiation/repentance by men and women of this Fall pattern of wrong *didaskein/authentein*. In the redeemed people, this is symbolised by men rightly accepting what Adam wrongly refused, *didaskein/authentein* responsibilities, and by women rightly refusing what Eve wrongly took, *didaskein/authentein* responsibilities. In this sense, the 'traditionalist' order within the Church proclaims Creation-Fall-Redemption, and coheres with the Gospel.

Hence, reverting to the earlier central Athanasius/Arius question, I do not think the traditionalist position on 1 Tim 2:12 is necessarily non-Gospel. Rather the reverse.

This means, I think, that our discussions need to be 'evangelical' both in the use we make of right evangelical exegetical techniques (E.g. 'what does *authenthein* mean in context?'), and in the way we see an exegesis cohering or otherwise with our Gospel, our evangel. I wonder whether we do not need to share with each other quite what the evangel is. If nothing else, this would give a profound perspective on what it is we share and what we do not.