

Q. What does Paul mean when he says that he does not permit a woman to usurp authority over a man?

A. The question comes from 1 Timothy 2:12: "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." I have already touched upon this verse in "The Role of Women in the Church" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/women.html>). Nevertheless, this verse merits further discussion, especially because of the controversy surrounding the word that is translated "usurp authority."

The context of the verse shows that Paul is giving instructions to Timothy about the meetings of the *ekklēsia*—the assemblies of God's people. He starts the chapter by saying who should be prayed for, and he then specifies some kinds of people (civil rulers), and he explains why. I want to pick up the text of the chapter in more detail beginning in verse 8. I will do this in the style of a commentary. To save some verbiage cross-referencing the King James Version with translations of the Greek, I will simply start out with my own translation. You can, of course, follow along in the King James or any other version you like.

:8 "I determine [*boulomai*—a common word for determine or desire], therefore, that the males [*tous andras*—this contains the definite article "the" and uses the word for the male sex, not just humans in general. Paul is giving instructions for the males of the *ekklēsia*] pray in every place [*en panti topō*—that is, in all the meetings, everywhere], lifting up intrinsically pure [*hosious*—used by the Greeks to refer to that which the gods determined before time to be intrinsically pure as opposed to what later became pure by ritual. Paul's intent probably is to point out that the hands need no ceremonial cleansing or washing to be lifted up in prayer. It is possible that Paul is thinking of the hands as a sort of heave offering or wave offering, intrinsically pure and therefore acceptable to God.] hands apart from [*chōris*—at a space from] wrath [*orgēs*—violent passion] and argumentation [*dialogismou*—lit. "dialog"; logical argumentation, disputation]". In this verse, Paul is getting back to his original thought

in verse 1 that prayers are to be made for all kinds of people, but he now explains that this should be done only by the males.

:9 "Likewise also [that is, this is also his determination] that the women arrange [*kosmein*] themselves in well-arranged [*kosmiōi*] dress (*katastolēi*—lit. "that which is let down" as a dress over the body), with downcast sight (*aidous*—it is a word that conveys shame with respectful timidity) and sound mind (*sōphrosunēs*—lit. "safe mind"; sober mind), not in braids (*plegmasin*—plaits) or golden ornaments (*chrusōi*—precious things of gold) or pearls or expensive clothing (*himatismōi polutelei*),"

Although Paul, in the above verse, gives details about what women should not do, he does not detail about what is the proper arrangement of dress. He purposely leaves that detail out of this verse because the specifics of dress are to be culturally determined. We must not make the mistake, however, of thinking that Paul is always leaving things up to culture. When he gives details, they are to be followed. And always, the principles must be followed.

:10 "but (which is fitting [*prepei*—what is suitable] for women professing [*epaggellomenais*—the noun of this verb means that which is promised in an announcement. Therefore, "promising" or "professing."] godliness [*theosebeian*—lit. "reverence for God" or "Godly worship"] through good works." The women's profession is through (*di'*) good works.

:11 "Let a woman learn in stillness [*hēsuchia*—this is the word translated "peaceable" in v. 2 of the King James Version. In that context, it means undisturbed by persecution. In Greek literature, it is variously used for still, quiet, rest, silence, even enforced silence. It can be difficult to separate physical stillness from silence. Paul does not use the coarser word *phimoō*, "muzzle," but it is used in the Bible for Sadducees (Matthew 22:34) and foolish men (1 Peter 2:15). In 1 Corinthians 14:34, he uses the more specific word, *sigatōsan*—be silent, be hushed, hold their peace—for women in the *ekklēsia*. *Hēsouchia* implies a silence and stillness that comes from inner tranquility. The women are to learn in stillness and silence, passively], in all [*pasēi*—this can also be translated here as "full"] subjection [*hupotagēi*—lit. "arrangement under"; thus, subordination, submission]"

Because of the difficulty verse 12 can present, I am translating it very literally, even though this will sound a little awkward in English.

:12 "A woman [*gunaiki*—woman or wife], to be teaching [*didaskain*], I am not permitting [*ouk epitrepō*—lit. "revolve upon"; thus, "turn over" or "permit"], neither to be having authority [*authentēin*—because the explanation here is so long, I have put it in the paragraphs that follows.] of a man [*andros*—man or husband], but to be in stillness [*hēsuchia*—as in verse 11]."

The primary meaning of *authentēin* in Greek literature is "to have full authority or power over." It is also used of the author or perpetrator of something, and it is even used of a murderer. It can also mean to take in hand. It is used meaning "warranted" and "authentic."

This word is the subject of many extensive and scholarly articles. It is found in 82 places outside of the Bible, where it is found only here. Of the 82 places, only two predate Paul's use. The precise meaning of these two is disputed, such as between the choices of "exercise authority" or "compel." But most scholars agree that the word has to do with authority. On the other hand, there are some people who claim that it means sexual promiscuity in pagan rites. But this makes absolutely no sense in the context of this verse.

Some writers also try to make an issue of the supplied word "usurp" [in the King James Version], or "assume" in other translations. They say a woman should not usurp or assume authority over a man but she can be given that authority by the church. But then the question must be asked, Why would Paul single out women? Is Paul saying that only women must not usurp or assume authority but men can usurp or assume authority? That hardly seems correct.

But the issue surrounding "usurp" or "assume" is really of no importance because "usurp" and "assume" are supplied words based on the assumption that *authentēin* refers to the wrong use of authority or usurped authority. But the word order or syntax of the sentence with the *ouk... oude* privatives (the words translated "not" and "neither") normally carries a positive construction. In other words, for the people mentioned (in this case, women) the thing forbidden is absolutely forbidden, not just a corruption of it, such as usurping. Therefore, it is likely that *authentēin* also should be taken positively—that is, it is absolutely forbidden to women.

Thus, the simplest translation avoids "usurp" and "assume" and even the word "over." It is best to simply translate the word as "to have authority of." *Andros* is in the genitive case, so it is perfectly legitimate

to say "authority of a man." "Authority over a man" can also be grammatically correct, but I see no compelling reason to use "over." Jesus said we are not to exercise authority over as do the rulers of the nations (Matt. 20:25-28; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:25-27). Also, some writers find in "authority over a man" the loophole that would permit women to exercise authority over other women. But Paul is not talking about segregated assemblies.

What Paul is saying is that women are not to have the authority of a man. Another point to be made here is that the meaning of *authentēin* is already implied in v. 11. Paul uses the two verses together. A woman is to learn and not teach; a woman is to be in submission and not have authority. Also, learning and being in submission are complimentary, as are teaching and having authority. A teacher has authority over those who are learning in stillness and submission. Paul, under inspiration, denies the teacher/authority role to women. It is reserved for men. But why?

:13 "For Adam was formed [*eplasthē*—to shape a plastic material] first [*prōtos*], then Eve.

:14 "And Adam was not deceived [*apatēthē*—deceived or deluded], but the woman being deceived [*apatētheisa*—deceived or deluded, some manuscripts have *exapatētheisa*—thoroughly deceived or deluded], has come to be [*gegonen*—implies permanency] in transgression [*parabasei*—overstepping or act of going aside]."

:15 "but she will be kept safe [*sōthēsetai*—OR saved] through the childbearing [*dia tēs teknogonias*—note the definite article "the" here], if they continue [*meinōsin*—OR abide in] in faith and love and holiness [*hagiasmō*], with a sound mind [*sophrosunēs*]." There are many theories concerning this verse. Some say the definite article in "the childbearing" make it refer to the birth of Jesus. That is, women will be saved through the birth of Jesus. But the second half of the verse would make that salvation conditional. Also, it is not the birth of Jesus that saves, but His death. I have taken the stand in "The Role of Women in the Church" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/women.html>) that it is parallel to 1 Corinthians 11:8-12; that, although Adam was created first and Eve was created from him, their equal opportunity for salvation is pictured by the fact that women give birth to men. Another interesting theory is taking it to mean that a woman will be kept safe from the temptation to take on a man's authority if she concentrates on the home—exemplified in having and raising children. This fits with the second half of the verse: they will be kept safe from this

temptation if they concentrate on being keepers at home and continue in faith, love, and holiness with a sound mind.

In summary, looking at the meaning of the Greek words, the syntax of the wording, and the context of 1 Timothy 2:12, we see that Paul is forbidding to women the role in the *ekklēsia* of teaching and having a man's authority. That this is not merely a cultural eccentricity that can now be dismissed is seen in the fact that he bases his decision on the creation order and the fact that Eve was deceived. Women are to be silent and still and in all submission when the men pray and are not to teach or have a man's authority in the assemblies. So says Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

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