

A NOTE ON *AUTHENTEIN* IN 1 TIMOTHY 2:12

By Ashby L. Camp

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Paul states in 1 Tim. 2:11-15: ¹¹ Let a woman learn in quietness with full submission. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or *authenthein* over a man; rather, she is to be in quietness. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, by being deceived, came to be in transgression. ¹⁵ But she will be saved through childbearing, if they continue in faith and love and sanctification, with decency.

The word in italics, *authenthein*, is the present active infinitive of the verb *authentēō*. Complementarians and egalitarians disagree over what Paul meant by it. The former claim that it has a neutral or positive sense, that it means simply to have or to exercise authority. The latter claim that it has a negative or pejorative sense, that it means to exercise authority in an abusive or domineering way or to assume an authority that one does not rightly have. There have been many studies of the word by scholars, but the disagreement remains. In my view, this is not because the evidence is too close to call but because egalitarians are biased in their assessment of it; in the vernacular, they won't take "no" for an answer. In line with the historical understanding, I am convinced, for the reasons given below, that Paul is here forbidding women from having authority over a man in the church.

Before tackling the meaning of *authenthein* and a few other matters, it may help to summarize how I understand Paul's argument at this point in the letter. I am not here seeking to defend this understanding but simply to set it forth.

1:18-20 – ¹⁸ *I entrust this command to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies made earlier about you, so that by them you might wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience, which thing some having rejected suffered shipwreck concerning the faith. ²⁰ Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I handed over to Satan so that they may be taught not to blaspheme.*

Paul tells Timothy that his entrusting to him the command to wage the good warfare against the false teachers (see, 1:3-4) is in keeping with the prophecies that had earlier been made about him. By recalling these prophecies, what God had said about the gift and about Timothy's use of it in ministry, Timothy may be encouraged to wage this noble war against the false teachers.

2:1-7 – *Therefore, I urge, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, ² for kings and all those in high places, so that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and respectability. ³ This is good and acceptable in the sight of 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 at the right time. ⁷ For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, not lying), a teacher of Gentiles in faith and truth.*

Having been given this charge to wage the good warfare against the false teachers (note "Therefore"), Timothy's first order of business in fulfilling it is to counteract their exclusivist or elitist understanding of salvation, their apparent claim that some were outside of God's concern, by making sure that prayers were offered in the assembly for all people. He was to see that no group or class of people, including rulers and authorities, was excluded from the prayerful concern of the church, treated as being outside the scope of the gospel. Their restriction of God's loving concern possibly was related to their misuse of genealogies or the law generally, finding in them a divine favoritism of Jews regarding salvation.

Correcting this exclusivist vision that was promoted by the false teachers was a matter of first importance because God desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth and Christ gave himself as a ransom for all people (vv. 3-6). Refusing to pray for some people has a detrimental effect on evangelism, in both a direct and indirect way, and thus is contrary to the universality of God's desire. And it was because of God's desire to save all men that Paul was appointed (by God) a herald and an apostle, a teacher of Gentiles in faith and truth (v. 7). He insists he is telling the truth and not lying presumably because someone was rejecting the legitimacy of his Gentile-focused ministry in favor of a kind of (presumably Jewish) exclusivism.

2:8-10 – ⁸ *I want, therefore, the men in every place to pray, lifting holy hands, without anger or argument.* ⁹ *Likewise, [I want] women [to pray] in appropriate attire, to adorn themselves with modesty and decency, not with elaborate hairstyles and gold or pearls or expensive garments* ¹⁰ *but [with] what is fitting for women who profess reverence for God by good works.*

Given that praying for all people is of first importance in light of God's desire that all be saved, God wants the men to pray free from the anger and argument that are hindrances to effective prayer (2:8). And he likewise wants the women to pray¹ clothed in an attitude of modesty and decency, meaning free from the pride and carnality that are hindrances to effective prayer, attitudes that are evident in the wealth-and-status-flaunting and sexually provocative hairstyles and clothing that he mentions. God desires a spirit of humility and contrition in those

¹ The translation I provide of 2:9 is favored (in meaning if not in actual translation) by many scholars. See, e.g., C. K. Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New Clarendon Bible (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 55; Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Hermeneia, trans. by Philip Buttolph and Adela Yarbro (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 45; Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, TNTC, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 84; Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 263 (fn. 203); Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 102-103; Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 215-216; Walter L. Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy/Titus*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 93-95; I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 446-447; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, BTCP (Nashville: Holman, 2017), 109; Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 165-166; Christopher R. Hutson, *First and Second Timothy and Titus*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 67. Collins does not supply "to pray" in the translation of v. 9 but clearly understands vv. 9-10 as a reference to women praying in the worship assembly. Raymond F. Collins, *I & II Timothy and Titus*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 64-65. The choice is governed by the context of the passage and by the view one has from other texts of the propriety of women praying in the assembly. I am convinced that Paul here assumes the women will be praying, just as he assumes the men will be praying. See also, Ashby L. Camp, "[Women Praying Vocally in Worship Assemblies.](#)"

who approach him not a spirit of superiority and self-exaltation or a heart that is trolling for sexual interest (2:9-10).

2:11-15 – ¹¹ *Let a woman learn in quietness with full submission.* ¹² *I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; rather, she is to be in quietness.* ¹³ *For Adam was formed first, then Eve.* ¹⁴ *And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, by being deceived, came to be in transgression.* ¹⁵ *But she will be saved through childbearing, if they continue in faith and love and sanctification, with decency.*

Having instructed the women about the need for modesty and decency in praying, he reminds them how that modesty and decency is to manifest in terms of teaching, instruction in the word or will of God. Women in the assembly are to learn in quietness and with full submission to male leadership in the church (v. 11), meaning they cannot challenge or contradict the teaching delivered by the men. Verse 12 explains that, in keeping with that divinely ordained submission, they likewise cannot teach in the assembly. Paul wants them to be clear that praying is a different kind of speech than teaching. It is a nondidactic expression of personal gratitude, praise, and devotion to God, like singing, whereas teaching is delivering to men the authoritative word of God. As such, teaching is inconsistent with the submission that women are called to manifest in the assembly. The same point is made in 1 Cor. 14:33b-36. He adds that this divinely ordained submission also prohibits women from having authority over men in the church, the family of God.

Paul gives the reason women are not allowed to have those roles identified in v. 12. He says in v. 13, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve." It was not because of any situation in Ephesus but was a choice expressed at creation. Paul did not need to explain how Adam's being created first translates into male leadership because the notion of the "firstborn" being the leader required no explanation in the first century. The concept of primogeniture, the leadership right of the firstborn, is all over the OT and was taken for granted in the Greco-Roman world.

In v. 14, Paul gives an additional reason why women are not permitted to teach or to have authority over a man. Referring to Genesis 3, he says that Adam was not deceived but the woman, by being deceived, came to be in transgression. His point is that Eve rather than Adam was the one deceived by the serpent in the Genesis account. The fact the serpent went after Eve supports his point about male leadership as a well-known scriptural example of harm that followed subversion of the divinely ordained pattern of leadership.

The point of v. 15 seems to be that, contrary to what they may have heard, women remain faithful, and thus are saved, by accepting their God-given role, which role is symbolized by the distinctly female ability of childbearing. In other words, women are not to define their faithfulness, to define their Christian calling, in terms of the male role. Their salvation is to be "worked out" (Phil. 2:12) along a somewhat different path than that of men. Faithfulness is expressed differently in men and women.

Whatever the meaning of *authenthein*, it is important to notice that Paul in 2:12 prohibits two activities. He does not permit a woman to teach (*didaskhein*) nor (*oude*) *authenthein* over a

man. It is a mistake to fuse the two infinitives (*didaskein* and *authentein*) into a single prohibition so that the second defines the manner of the first. Thus, Douglas Moo states, "That teaching and having authority are 'closely related' is, of course, true, as it is true that both ministries often are carried out by the same individuals, but here and elsewhere they are nonetheless distinct, and in 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul prohibits women from conducting either activity, whether jointly or in isolation, in relation to men."² Thomas Schreiner likewise observes, "Two things are forbidden for a woman: teaching and exercising authority over a man."³ After a detailed examination of the issue, Andreas Köstenberger concludes:

Further, a proper understanding of the function of οὐδέ [nor] and of the meanings of the infinitives διδάσκειν and αὐθεντεῖν leads the interpreter to understand Paul to be prohibiting two activities that are related yet distinct. Women are prohibited from serving in church positions that would place them in authority over men, whether by teaching them in the ecclesial context or by ruling over them in an authoritative church position.⁴

In recapping his analysis in the concluding chapter of the book, he states:

I then turned to examine how juxtaposing διδάσκειν ("to teach") and αὐθεντεῖν ἀνδρός ("to exercise authority over a man") with οὐδέ might affect the meaning of the two activities. I concluded that there is no syntactical warrant for understanding the construction to merge the two activities into a single idea – such as "seizing authority to teach a man" – which is more restrictive than either activity by itself. Instead, while the meaning of the two activities in such a construction may overlap, a degree of distinctiveness remains. In this case, in referring to two related activities in his prohibition, Paul is moving from a more specific activity (teaching) to a more general activity (exercising authority over men).⁵

Kevin DeYoung states, "Two commands are in view, not just one. To put it another way, Paul is not just opposed to authoritative teaching (where nonauthoritative teaching could be permissible?). He prohibits women doing two different, but related things, in the church: teaching over men and exercising authority over men."⁶

² Douglas J. Moo, "What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?" in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Womanhood & Manhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 187.

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, "The Interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:9-15" in Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds., *Women in the Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 190.

⁴ Andreas J. Köstenberger, "A Complex Sentence" in Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds., *Women in the Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 160.

⁵ Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Conclusion" in Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds., *Women in the Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 342-343. Andreas and Margaret Köstenberger state in *God's Design for Man and Woman* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 209 (fn. 29), "The conjunction linking 'to teach' and 'to have authority' (*oude*, 'or') indicates that the two activities, while related, are not identical. While teaching does involve the exercise of authority, there are other ways a person may exercise authority apart from teaching (e.g., participate in important decision making)."

⁶ Kevin DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 83.

As already stated, egalitarians deny that Paul in v. 12 is prohibiting women from having authority over men in the church. Rather, they insist that *authenteō* means that Paul is only prohibiting women from exercising authority in an abusive or domineering way or assuming an authority that they do not rightly have. In other words, it is not authority per se that is prohibited but some misconduct related to that authority. In their view, there is no bar to women being appointed to a leadership position. In that case, their authority is not improperly seized but is duly granted. And the fact they are in a position of authority over a man is not a problem as long as they do not misuse it by "domineering" over a man.

Paul wrote 1 Timothy around AD 64. Al Wolters, drawing on the prior work of Henry Scott Baldwin, has shown that there are only five sure occurrences of the verb *authenteō* prior to AD 312, the year that Christianity was officially recognized under Constantine, and only three of them predate Paul's letter.⁷ This does not mean, of course, that the word was unfamiliar to Timothy. Indeed, Paul would not have used it without explanation if he was not confident Timothy knew its meaning. The low number of known occurrences is probably because the word was considered a colloquial word, one used in informal conversation, "so that writers with literary pretensions avoided it."⁸ Since literature is the primary source for ancient words, one would expect a word that was shunned by writers to be discovered less frequently, but that need not reflect its rarity in everyday life. That being said, one can only work with what one has.

The earliest sure occurrence of *authenteō* is The Papyrus BGU 1208.38 from Egypt, which is dated to 27/26 BC. Wolters reconstructs the background of the letter as follows:

Tryphon, the writer of the letter, was a senior official of the Roman taxation bureaucracy and was in a position of authority over Antilochos, the tax farmer (τελώνης) who dealt directly with Kalatyti the ferryman. Antilochos had imposed a new leasing contract on Kalatyti, which meant that the latter would have to pay Antilochos a higher rent for the use of the government-owned ferry that he operated, which in turn meant that he (Kalatyti) could make no profit. Tryphon overruled Antilochos so that the latter granted Kalatyti a leasing concession that called for the same rent as before.⁹

The relevant sentence in Tryphon's letter about the incident is (per Wolters): "Since I *had authority* [*authentēkotos*, perfect participle of *authenteō*] with respect to him, he immediately granted Kalatyti the ferryman a concession [which allowed the latter] to make a profit at the same rent."¹⁰ Wolters states:

The meaning "have authority" for ἀθεντέω [*authenteō*] fits such a scenario quite well, since it would describe the relationship of a senior official to his subordinate

⁷ Al Wolters, "The Meaning of Αὐθεντέω" in Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds., *Women in the Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 70-83.

⁸ Wolters (2016), 66. Wolters states (p. 70), "Its rarity in surviving Greek literature before 312 is probably at least partially due to the fact that it represented a colloquial or subliterate stratum of the language." For references regarding the colloquial nature of ἀθεντέω, see A. Wolters, "A Semantic Study of ἀθεντέω and Its Derivatives," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 1 (2000), 145-175.

⁹ Wolters (2016), 74.

¹⁰ Wolters (2016), 73-74.

in a bureaucratic hierarchy. Although Tryphon appears to have overruled Antiochos, nothing in the context suggests that he did so without just cause; in fact, he seems to have been protecting Kalatyitis from the notoriously extortionist practices of the *τελῶναι* [tax farmers]. In any case, since Tryphon used *αὐθεντέω* [*authentēō*] to describe his own behavior, the verb unlikely had a pejorative connotation.¹¹

According to Wolters, the two other sure occurrences of *authentēō* prior to 1 Timothy meant "be superior to" and "originate." The remaining two occurrences prior to AD 312 meant "rule" (second century) and "act on one's own" (second or third century). He states in his concluding reflections on his full presentation, which includes a review of the occurrences after AD 312:

With respect to the alleged pejorative meaning [of *authentēō*], my investigations have confirmed earlier studies' conclusions that *αὐθεντέω* [*authentēō*] in general is used overwhelmingly in a positive or neutral sense. It is significant that even authors like Wegener and Marshall, who defend a pejorative sense of the verb in 1 Timothy 2:12, acknowledge that this meaning is extremely rare elsewhere. The evidence adduced in this chapter shows that even the rare places where the verb is widely thought to be used pejoratively are susceptible of another interpretation. In any case, isolated examples from centuries later would hardly constitute significant evidence for New Testament usage.

A strong argument that *αὐθεντέω* [*authentēō*] regularly has a positive or neutral meaning is that it often occurs in Christian contexts with God or Jesus Christ as its subject. Furthermore, as we have seen, it is also frequently used of other revered persons or things (e.g., the apostle Peter, Pope Damasus I, Pope Leo I, grace as opposed to law, and the Christian Scriptures).¹²

Schreiner says regarding Wolters's study:

Scholars have vigorously debated the meaning of *αὐθεντεῖν*. The most likely rendering is "exercise authority." . . . Al Wolters demonstrates in his very careful study in this volume that the meaning "exercise authority" is almost certainly correct. It is evident reading Wolters that many scholars bypass or distort the evidence in constructing a meaning for the infinitive.¹³

Wolters's conclusion about the sense of *authentēō* is confirmed by Köstenberger's careful study establishing that the two concepts connected by *oude* are viewed either both positively or both negatively. After reviewing usage of the verb *didaskein* [to teach] in the NT and in Paul's writings specifically, he concludes, "Since, therefore, the term *didaskein* is best understood to be used positively in 1 Timothy 2:12, and since *oude* coordinates terms that are viewed either both positively or both negatively, *authentēin* should be seen as denoting an activity that is viewed

¹¹ Wolters (2016), 74-75.

¹² Wolters (2016), 113.

¹³ Schreiner (2016), 194-195.

positively as well. The context confirms, then, Wolters's claim that *authentēin* has a positive meaning."¹⁴ Kevin DeYoung explains the significance this way:

So Paul is either forbidding women from teaching error and domineering, or he is forbidding them from teaching and having authority over men altogether. The latter is the case because (1) *didaskēin* [to teach] is almost always used positively in the Pastoral Epistles, (2) there is no object after *didaskēin* (such as "error" or "falsehood"), and (3) 1 Timothy 2:13-14, which give Paul's reasons for the command (verse 13 especially), would be unnecessary if he were forbidding only teaching error and domineering.¹⁵

Some attempt to assign a pejorative meaning to the verb *authentēō* by asserting that *authentēs*, the noun that is believed to have given rise to the verb, meant "murderer," but that claim ignores the fact that *authentēs* had two different meanings in ancient Greek. Many have contended that these different meanings were rooted in separate etymologies, like the English homonyms bat (the flying mammal) and bat (the baseball equipment), but regardless of whether that is true, it is a mistake to think a verb derived from one meaning of the noun is to be interpreted in light of the other meaning. As Wolters explains:

Here, however, we run into a problem that has caused much confusion in discussions of ἀθηντέω [*authentēō*], namely, the fact that ancient Greek used ἀθέντης [*authentēs*] in two very different ways. . . .

Whether or not ἀθέντης/"murderer" and ἀθέντης/"master" are etymologically distinct, however, it is a serious error to assume that the meaning of the one (and the meaning of its derivatives) must be understood in light of the other. After all, no one thinks that an ear of grain has connotations of hearing. If a political commentator says, "In the current political race, a recurring issue has been one candidate's race," no one will confuse the two senses of the word race and no one will conclude that the denominative [derived] verb *to race* has anything to do with racism or the like. By the same token, it is a basic methodological mistake to assume that we should understand the verb ἀθηντέω in the light of both ἀθέντης/"murderer" and ἀθέντης/"master," leading to the conclusion that it means "instigate violence."

Instead, the picture that has emerged from studies of the word ἀθέντης [*authentēs*] and its derivatives in ancient Greek is that all these derivatives, with the exception of a single occurrence of ἀθηντέω [*authentēō*], are based on ἀθέντης/"master," not on ἀθέντης/"murderer," and therefore have to do with mastery or authority of some kind.¹⁶

The neutral or positive sense of *authentēō* is confirmed by the ancient translations of 1 Tim. 2:12. Wolters reviews the Old Latin versions of the *Vetus Latina*, dating from the third

¹⁴ Köstenberger, "A Complex Sentence" (2016), 134.

¹⁵ DeYoung (2021), 82.

¹⁶ Wolters (2016), 68-69. Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 150, gives only the definition "master."

century and later, which have four different translations, and six additional translations: Sahidic Coptic (second century); Bohairic Coptic (third century); Gothic (fourth century); Vulgate (fourth century); Peshitta Syriac (fifth century); Harklean Syriac (seventh century). All of these versions, with one possible exception, "agree in translating ἀθεντέω [*authenteō*] with a verb that is related to a noun designating someone in authority and that has the general meaning 'be in authority over' or 'rule.'"¹⁷ The exception is the Peshitta, but the relevant text is arguably corrupt. Wolters states:

Some scholars claim that one or another of the ancient versions strengthens the case for a pejorative understanding of ἀθεντέω [*authenteō*]. However, with the exception of the Peshitta (which presents us with either an outlier or a corrupt text), the versions give no basis for this claim. Thus it has been asserted that the Latin *dominari* of the Vulgate carries a pejorative connotation, as in "domineer." But the Latin verb, though it can on occasion carry such a negative nuance, regularly has a neutral or positive sense, simply meaning "rule," "reign," or "govern." As examples of its positive sense, consider places where the Vulgate uses *dominor* to describe the rule of God (see Judg. 8:23; 2 Chron. 20:6; Ps. 58:14[59:13]; Dan. 4:14); the rule of the Messiah of Old Testament expectation (see Num. 24:19; Pss. 71[72]:8; 109[110]:2; Zech. 6:13); or the rule of Jesus Christ in the New Testament (see Rom. 14:9).¹⁸

Regarding attempts to impute a pejorative meaning to *authenteō* on the basis of Arabic versions, Wolters states: "However, these Arabic versions are not only dated very late (ninth century and later) but are generally not based on the original biblical text. Thus the oldest Arabic version of the Pauline epistles is dated to AD 867 and is based on a Syriac translation, not on the original Greek. Such daughter translations are an unreliable guide to the semantic nuances of the Greek."

As DeYoung indicates in his statement quoted above, if Paul were merely prohibiting women from misusing authority by exercising it in an abusive or domineering way, there would be no reason for him to ground his command on the fact Adam was created first. Abuse of authority is wrong whether done by a man or a woman, so it would make no sense to justify its prohibition by pointing to the fact Adam was created before Eve. Moreover, as DeYoung observes, "it would be strange for Paul to warn women against domineering, but not men, given that he is writing to a man and the false teachers we know of were men."¹⁹ Indeed, nothing is said in 1 Timothy (or in 2 Timothy or Titus, for that matter) about women being false teachers. As Wayne Grudem says, "[T]here is no evidence that women were teaching false doctrine at Ephesus. And so the claim turns out to be speculation without any hard evidence to support it."²⁰

It is noteworthy that a large majority of English versions render the phrase simply as "have authority" or "exercise authority" over a man with no connotation that the authority is

¹⁷ Wolters (2016), 84.

¹⁸ Wolters (2016), 85. Thus, John Wycliffe translated the Vulgate non-pejoratively as, "I suffer not a woman to teach nor to have lordship to the man" (see, [Christ Church MS 145](#)).

¹⁹ DeYoung (2021), 82.

²⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 284.

being abused or misused. Those translating it "have authority" include RSV, NIV 1984, NRSV, NKJV, HCSB, NJB, NAB, NLT, and CSB. Those translating it "exercise authority" include NASB 1995, NASB, NET, LEB, LSB, and ESV. The claim that these neutral or positive renderings are a twentieth-century innovation stumbles on the fact that the early Latin renderings, including the Vulgate, were not pejorative, nor were those of William Tyndale (1526), Miles Coverdale (1535), John Rogers (1537), and Richard Taverner (1539), all of whom rendered the word "have authority." Martin Luther's rendering (1545), "be a leader," was likewise neutral or positive.²¹

The translation "usurp authority" entered the English stream with the Great Bible in 1539 and found its way into the King James Version of 1611,²² but that rendering was never understood to mean that a woman could have authority over men in the church as long as she did not obtain it illegitimately. Rather, it was accepted from other texts that a woman could not have such authority, and therefore any possession of it by her was *ipso facto* a usurpation of authority. That is why the new wording did not provoke controversy and why English-speaking churches after its introduction continued to prohibit women from having positions of authority. James MacKnight's comment on 1 Tim. 2:12 in the early 19th century is illustrative: "The Greek word ἀϑεντεῖν signifies both *to have* and *to exercise authority over another*. In this passage it is properly translated *usurp authority*; because when a woman pretends to exercise authority over a man, she arrogates a power which does not belong to her."²³ To the extent "usurp" is here divorced from its broader theological context and pressed to mean that only a woman's misbehavior in obtaining authority is prohibited, Marvin Vincent's words apply: "The A. V. *usurp authority* is a mistake."²⁴

Church history contradicts the claim that women were permitted to teach in the assembly or to exercise authority in the church. After surveying the relevant evidence, the renowned church historian Everett Ferguson concludes (emphasis supplied):

From the standpoint of history, the evidence of Christian writings of the second to fourth centuries is in continuity with the New Testament. . . . *Women were not appointed as elders, nor did they take public speaking roles in the assembly as prophets, teachers, or leaders in the assembly.* Where women did take these roles in heretical and schismatic groups, the practice was a basis for objection to these groups.²⁵

²¹ See, Denny Burk, "New and Old Departures in the Translation of ἀϑεντεῖν in 1 Timothy 2:12" in Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds., *Women in the Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 282-286, who mentions Tyndale and Luther. BDAG (p. 150) defines the word simply as "to assume a stance of independent authority."

²² The Roman Catholic Douay-Rheims Bible of 1610 rendered the word "have dominion," meaning simply to have power or authority over. This is also how it was rendered in the ERV (1885) and ASV (1901). Richard Challoner's 1752 revision of the Douay-Rheims Bible rendered the word "use authority."

²³ James MacKnight, *A New Literal Translation, from the Original Greek, of all the Apostolical Epistles* (Philadelphia: DeSilver, Thomas, and Co., 1835), 449.

²⁴ Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), IV:225.

²⁵ Everett Ferguson, *Women in the Church: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Abilene, TX: Desert Willow Publishing, 2015), Kindle edition (Location 964).

The third-century document known as the *Didascalia of the Apostles* (3.6) includes: "It is neither right nor necessary therefore that women should be teachers, and especially concerning the name of Christ and the redemption of His passion. For you have not been appointed to this, O women, and especially widows, that you should teach, but that you should pray and entreat the Lord God." As expressed in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (Book III, Ch. VI), a collection of preexisting materials on church order compiled in the fourth century, "We do not permit 'our women to teach in the church,' but only to pray and hear those that teach." William Weinrich, who was a professor of historical theology, concluded:

The evidence shows that the Pauline statements against women speaking in the church were consistently upheld. Contrary practices were regarded as innovative and opposed to the truth and were, by ecclesiastical discipline and censure, excluded from the church. The practice of the early and medieval church was followed without question by the churches of the Reformation, both Reformed and Lutheran, and by virtually all other communions until the most recent past.²⁶

This is the understanding reflected in the [Danvers Statement](#) that was drafted by many leading Evangelical scholars and published in November 1988.

The fact Christian leaders throughout history did not understand the prohibitions of 1 Tim. 2:12 to be limited to Ephesus is no surprise given that Paul indicates in 1 Tim. 3:15 that his instructions were not so limited. He says he is writing that Timothy "may know how it is necessary to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God." The church of the living God is certainly not limited to Ephesus.

Moreover, Paul grounds the prohibitions of female teaching and having authority over men on the order of creation – for Adam was made first, then Eve. This makes it obvious that the restriction is not dependent on a local situation or circumstance, as does the fact Paul in 1 Cor. 14:33b-36 prohibited certain female speech in the assembly in Corinth on the same grounds, namely that it was inconsistent with the submission women are called to express, a submission reflected in the law of Moses. Paul adds in 1 Cor. 14:33 that this restriction applies *in all the churches*, so the attempt to confine 1 Tim. 2:12 to Ephesus is groundless.

Culture creep is a powerful force, as is evident in the ongoing search by some so-called Bible teachers to find divine approval of homosexual conduct. Feminists and their theological allies have for 50 years tried to neutralize Paul's prohibition in 1 Tim. 2:12, to claim, in essence, that when Paul said, "I DO NOT permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man," he really meant "I DO permit a woman to teach and to have authority over a man." I think their claims are flawed and must be resisted.

²⁶ William Weinrich, "Women in the History of the Church" in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Womanhood & Manhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 279.