1 TIMOTHY 2:11-15—A RORSCHACH TEST?

At the conclusion of Bruce Malina's work on the cultural anthropology of the NT World he writes,

> "The theological problem that has faced Christianity over the past two millennia… has been and continues to be how to make known the Good News of Jesus in terms of the ever-kaleidoscoping cultural scripts that cover the world like a crazy quilt. It is all too easy to read into the New Testament and make do with a Jesus in our own image and likeness. The New Testament thus serves as a veritable Rorschach inkblot, with Jesus coming across as a universal polymorph, a chameleon figure standing for and legitimating whatever individuals and groups choose to do "in his name," from a local fundamentalist commune to a worldwide church."[1]

Confessional writers would not so baldly express the power of culture over interpretation. But it has become increasingly common to argue that the bulk of evangelical interpretation has missed the true message of Scripture because we are not attune to the original cultural contexts.

It is surely not an accident, however, that the passages where the cultural background is often most contested tend to be passages that are controversial to contemporary sensibilities: the creation account, head coverings (1 Cor 11:2-16), homosexuality (Lev. 18-20; Deut 22:5; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9-10), gender norms (Eph 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7), and women's roles in church leadership or worship (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:9-15). And it is further striking that these are often the very questions that have experienced tectonic shifts in the last 150-200 years of interpretation.[2] The argument

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[1] Bruce Malina, The New Testament World; Insights from Cultural Anthropllogy, 3rd edition, pg. 221.

[2] This is not to say that pre-modern interpretation is univocal on all of these issues nor that the reinterpretations were fully correlated. The creation accounts, in particular, have tended to be shaped and reshaped by prevailing scientific views. The interpretation of head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11 began to shift somewhat earlier than the 19th century. Gender roles and women's leadership roles in the church began their shift in the late 1900s while homosexual readings arose in the late 20th century.

What can be strikingly said is that the cultural sensitive approach, attempting to ground each of these re-readings in the cultural background of the OT and 1st century worlds is a distinctly 20th-century approach. For a helpful summary of the history of interpretation in 1 Timothy 2, see Daniel Doriani's article in Women in the Church, ed. A. J. Köstenberger, T. R. Schreiner, and H. S. Baldwin. Also notice Appendix 1-2 in William Webb's *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*.

cuts two ways. It is entirely possible that pre-modern interpreters misunderstood Scripture's intent because they were not sensitive to the culture of the original contexts. But it's also possible that modern interpreters have given way to the pressure of their own cultures.

The question can go deeper still. Are culturally-sensitive approaches to Scripture more sensitive to the original culture or their own? And how would we know? Are we lost in a hall of mirrors, unable to distinguish ourselves from what we see? Is there a way out? Is Scripture reduced to a Rorschach test?

One possibility is to explore a test case where the distance between our own situation and the original context is particularly wide. As the most controversial passages in the pastorals and currently one of the most debated in the New Testament, Paul's commands for women to remain silent in 1 Timothy 2:11-14 offers that opportunity.

The Spectrum of Culturally Focused Approaches

Because it is so controversial, 1 Timothy 2:11-14 already has a daunting body of secondary literature and the exegetical debates are too broad for this paper.[3] The exegetical discussions typically hinge on (1) whether only women are in view in v. 11, (2) whether "I am not permitting" (ἐπιτρέπω) might be a suggestion from Paul, similar to 1 Cor. 7:6, (3) the meaning of "exercise authority" (αὐθεντεῖν), (4) whether "teach… or exercise authority" (διδάσκειν… οὐδὲ αὐθεντεῖν) are correlative or one might be negative ("harshly dominate") and the other positive ("teach"), (5) the logical links between Paul's commands (v. 12) and his supporting arguments (v. 13-14) drawn from Genesis that Adam was created first and that Eve was deceived, (6) whether Paul implies that women are constitutionally more inclined towards being deceived, and (7) the sense in which women are saved through childbearing or even if Paul's conception here is orthodox.

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[3] For a very careful treatment from a more egalitarian inclined view, see I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 455-469. Marshall gives a very carefully reasoned and disciplined reading of the passage that exegetically largely follows the traditional reading. But based on the fact that other passages allow women to teach (Tit 2:3; Acts 18:26; 21:9; 1 Cor 11:5 understands it to be spoken of heretical teachers and limited to Ephesus. This limits the application to specific local problems within Ephesus, reconstruction the situation around the Greco-Roman cultural trends towards emancipation (459), reacting to rabbinic patriarchal traditions (462). Marshall comments, "the context makes it clear that the prohibition is stated because there was something wrong with the teaching given by the women. Although, then, the prohibition may appear to be universally applicable to women, it is in fact meant for a specific group of women among the recipients of the letter."

For a well-reasoned complementarian approach, see Women in the Church, ed. A. J. Köstenberger, T. R. Schreiner, and H. S. Baldwin and in particular, Schreiner's essay, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15."

I understand the passage mostly according to its traditional reading: (1) The command is addressed only to women for a reason. (2) "Not permitting" is a direct prohibition, (3) Αὐθεντεῖν is used in the more general sense of exercising authority. (4) "Teaching" and "exercising authority" are both justifiable uses of normal spiritual gifts when done properly; while not a full hendiadys, they can be read together so that Paul forbids teaching in a way that exercises authority. (5) Drawing from the creation narrative grounds Paul's commands in timeless realities. (6) I do not believe that Paul bars women from teaching with authority because they are more prone to error, nor that the logic of v. 13 is based on primogeniture. Rather, his logic seems to be that Eve was created as a helper to Adam and at the fall she coopted Adam's leadership while Adam abdicated his responsibility. And yet Paul's logic in Romans 5 is still that Adam's bore federal responsibility for humanity's lapse. (7) The promise of being saved through childbirth is a general statement of the dignity of femininity as demonstrated in the seed promises—the hope of humanity has always been a birth.

Assuming this exegetical grid, my interest is more specific to the hermeneutical relationship between assumed cultural background and exegetical applications. Observing the various configurations of backgrounds and hermeneutical strategies can teach us important general lessons about exegesis.

Paul Gives Way to Patriarchalism

At the farthest extreme, some writers affirm that the original recipients of 1 Timothy were deeply patriarchal and that the author's instructions match it.[4] For instance, feminist theologian Annette Bourland Huizenga, reads 1 Timothy 2:11-15 rather similarly to traditional complementarians, albeit caricatured at times. Huizinga understands Paul (or pseudo-Paul) to say that women ought to learn in silence, subordinate to men. She translates αὐθεντέω as "have authority over" and correlated with "teaching." Paul follows these commands with two arguments (v. 13-14) linked to Genesis 3—that Adam was created before Eve and that Eve only was deceived. Huizinga thinks that Paul has drawn these arguments from Jewish, patriarchal traditions. Eve represents all women and the serpent's deception over Eve likely

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[4] Huizenga, Annette Bourland. *1–2 Timothy, Titus*. Wisdom Commentary Series. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016, 24-29. Similarly, Jewett comments that Paul inherited his view of women from Judaism and continued with it even though we was probably aware that it was incongruous with the rest of his theology. *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 112-119.

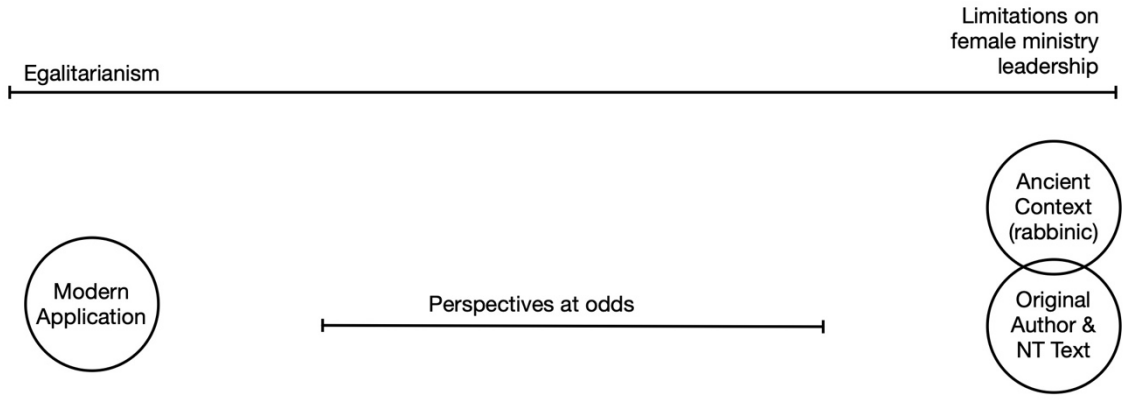
Typically, this type of reading also denies Pauline authorship. Huizinga, for instance, maintains that Paul would have taken issue with the questionable teachings of the 2nd century pseudonymous writer who adopted his persona—particularly the suggestion that a woman could be saved through child-bearing. For a full bibliography of such approaches see Köstenberger, A. and Schreiner, T. *Women in the Church* (Third Edition). Crossway, pg. 249, note 7.

included a sexual element, something that Paul believes all women are prone to by their inheritance from Eve.

Huizinga complains that for eighteen centuries men have used these words to bludgeon women into "their supposedly God-ordained roles of wife and mother." Though the pseudonymous author "wrote for his own time and place, I believe he would be quite satisfied to learn that his instructions have influenced gender perceptions not only in the church but in the long history of Western societies." Nor are the instructions of 1 Timothy 2 isolated, since they cohere well with Paul's similar instructions in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Jewish interpretations of Genesis 3, and contemporary patriarchal sensibilities in the Pythagorean letters and Plutarch.[5]

Huizenga's approach is clearly unpalatable for confessional interpreters. Nor is her anti-reading any support for the traditional interpretation since her objective is to demonstrate that it is misogynistic. What is relevant to our purpose here is that she can plausibly draw from greek, roman and especially jewish sources to argue for a patriarchal cultural background. Patriarchalism is not hard to find from nearly any of the possible streams of tradition, though Huizinga and others tend to emphasize rabbinical backgrounds over the Artemis cult or links that are specific to Ephesus.

It is also interesting that once the link is broken between Paul's instructions and what is normative for the church today, interpreters no longer need to especially concern themselves with the relationship between ancient and contemporary culture. One could approach 1 Timothy 2, reject the author's views and then conclude with whatever we prefer, from radical feminism to male chauvinism or anything in between.



[5] Specifically Huizenga cites the Pythagorean letters, *Melissa to Kleareta*, line 6 and Plutarch's *Moralia, On Listening to Lectures*, 39B.

Patriarchalism on Trajectory to a Better Way

A second approach is best represented by Canadian theologian William Webb in *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*. Acknowledging a "gap between the world of the text and that of the interpreter," Webb suggests a "reapplication of the text" through a redemptive-movement hermeneutic.[6] On issues such as slavery or gender roles, Scripture was measured in its prescriptive approaches. As a pastor might patiently move his congregants towards the end goal rather than compelling conformity all at once, Scripture accommodated to the hearers in categories they could understand. In the sphere of ethics, biblical commands offer seed ideas, breakouts or trajectories that pushed back against their ancient contexts. "The interpreter extrapolates the biblical movement toward a more just, more equitable and more loving form. If a better ethic than the one expressed in the isolated words of the text is possible, and the biblical and canonical spirit is headed that direction, then that is where one ultimately wants to end up."[7]

Applying this hermeneutic to 1 Timothy 2 and similar passages, Webb is prepared to assume "that the social reality of the biblical writers was the world of patriarchy" because it was the only available option. "Thus it is understandable that the biblical writers spoke to their communities from the perspective of patriarchy." In fact, this can explain shadows of patriarchy in the Genesis account, even before sin entered the world—God was accommodating to the cultural categories and thought frameworks of the original audience.[8] The warning that Eve was deceived (1 Tim 2:14) represents current views and realities in Paul's day—women were credulous like children (c.f. Isa. 3:12) because of their lower educational attainment and marrying young.[9]

What makes this fit within a redemptive-movement hermeneutic is that for Webb, Scripture takes an imperfect view but a more liberal and enlightened stance relative to the patriarchy of the era. In 1 Timothy specifically, the instructions for women to learn quietly at least places them among the learners—a tremendous advance on rabbinic perspectives. From here we can trace where the ethic would have pointed in a modern society that offers women more opportunities and even to the ultimate ethical ideal—interdependence and mutual submission.[10]

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[6] Webb, 25.

[7] Webb, 36.

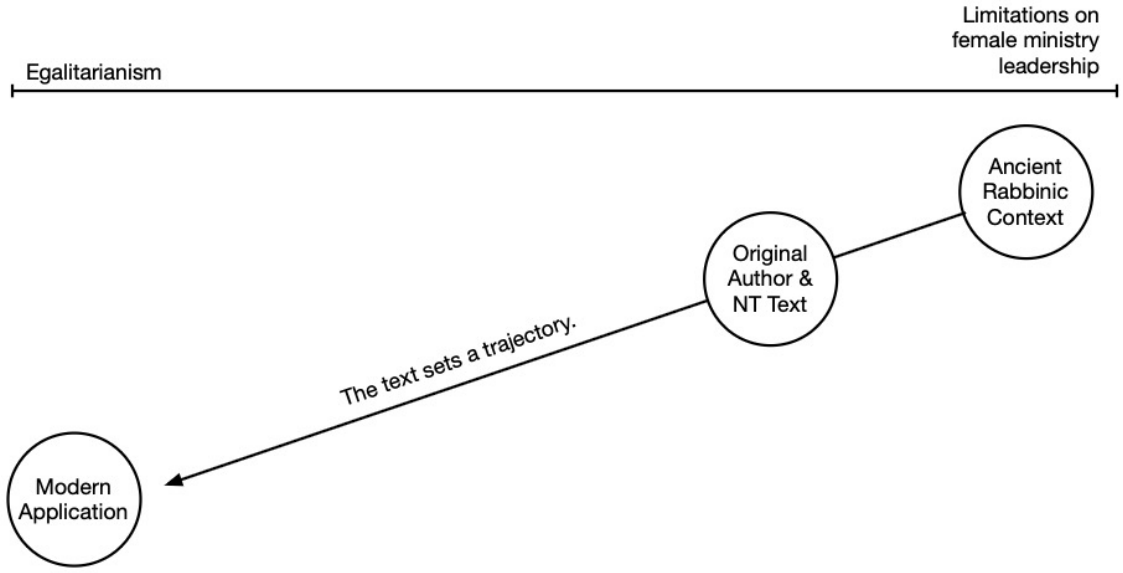
[8] Webb, 154-55.

[9] Webb, 225-231

[10] Webb, 241-44

Broader critiques could be made of Webb's hermeneutic.[11] But in respect to 1 Timothy 2:11-15, Webb has no need to project an egalitarian or polemical cultural background. On the contrary, forming a proper trajectory for his hermeneutic requires that Paul's instructions are relatively more progressive and enlightened and therefore incline his assumptions about ANE and Greco-Roman culture further towards patriarchy.

Webb's approach also highlights the fact that hermeneutical conclusions in a backgrounds-focused approach are formed by two decisions, not one. Interpreters first draw conclusions about what the cultural background was like; they then decide how that background relates to the text and to the present. As we will see, both decisions must be made in the right configuration to reach specific exegetical outcomes.



[11] Webb's notion is surely troubling that "Christians should be able to confidently say that there is much within Scripture that needs an infusion of greater justice, greater compassion and greater equity in the treatment of human beings" (43). Implementing this hermeneutic grants a huge amount of power to interpreters, or worse, erodes our confidence that the text can speak with authority. To read and apply the text we must (1) know the ancient context, (2) where Scripture was placed relative to that (including changes that developed throughout salvation history), (3) draw the trajectory line accurately towards the eschatological ideal, and (4) know where that trajectory ought to stop. For more extensive critiques see Wayne Grudem, _Should We Move Beyond the New Testament to a Better Ethic? An Analysis of William J. Webb, Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis._ Presented Nov. 19, 2003 at ETS 55th Annual Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia. Thomas R. Schreiner. "William J. Webb's *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*: A Review Article." *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6, no. 1 (2002): 46–65.

The New Roman Woman

Bruce Winter proposed a different background for understanding 1 Timothy 2 and other passages—the "new roman woman." Drawing from literary, epigraphic and legal data, he argues that women were not necessarily suppressed in a powerful patriarchal structure as previously assumed. Rather, the first century introduced a new dynamic of high-prestige, liberated women who engaged in educational or philosophical pursuits rather than caring for the household. Identified by their excessive dress and characterized by sexual excess, they pursued the same predatory infidelity that men had practiced with impunity. Winter is able to cite multiple first-century cultural commentators condemning the trend, and on that basis, he suggests that Paul's concern might be to protect the Christian community both from these entrenched sins and from the false charges that might result. While acknowledging that the data is more complex, Phillip Towner and others have integrated the "New Roman Woman" as the primary background for understanding 1 Timothy 2:11-15 so that Paul's instructions were occasional for a specific cultural trend. As such, they are not universally normative and should be applied to today only in principial form—men and women should treat one other with respect.

Winter's survey is an illuminating journey into the messy, baudy cultural scandals of the era, but the background is surely more complex.[12] Is there any further indication that the "new roman woman" was a particular problem at Ephesus? Or that the dynamics across the New Testament represent anything more than timeless gender struggles?[13]

But the greatest weakness of the proposal is chronological—were the female behaviors and corresponding complaints about them from men actually something new rather than mere timeless laments? The framework may be a century late. Emily Hemelrijk observes that in the late republic (first century BC) there was already a marked increase of education for wealthy and less-wealthy women.[14] And even here she

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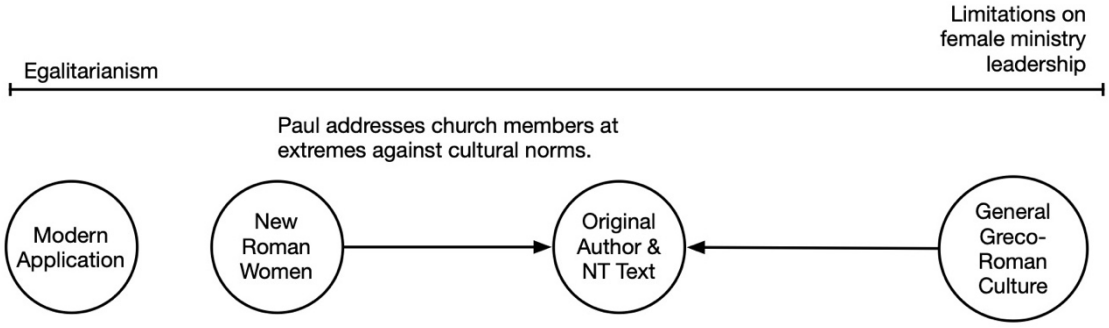
[12] Massey, Preston T. "Is There a Case for Elite Roman 'New Women' Causing Division at Corinth?" *Revue Biblique* 118, no. 1 (2011): 76–93. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44091005. See also Alicia J. Batten, "Neither Gold nor Braided Hair (1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3): Adornment, Gender and Honour in Antiquity," NTS 55, no. 4 (2009): 497 note 73.

[13] An argument can be made that 1 Timothy has a particular focus on women in 1 Tim. 2:9–15; 1 Tim. 3:11; 5:2–16. Interpreters also highlight the focus on "weak women" in 2 Tim. 3:6–7 who are captured by false teachers. But general discussion of women in the church falls far short on basic evidentiary standards for the new roman woman, a much more specific cultural phenomenon, especially when 1 Tim. 2:9–15; 1 Tim. 3:11 are both set in the context of gender-specific admonitions made to men. And the extended instruction about widows seems to be the exact opposite of wealthy, urbane women flaunting their independence. 2 Timothy 3:6-7 offers a closer connection, especially if v. 7-8 are understood to refer to the "weak women," though this only one of the exegetical possibilities.

[14] Emily Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna.* Routledge, 1999.

acknowledges that the trends we observe might be as simple as how many data sources have been preserved. Treggiari argues from a survey of letters written in the 1st century BC that the ideal of Roman marriage had already shifted so that "it is impossible in any of these letters from husbands to wives to find the domineering tone that Rome's original patriarchal institutions might lead us to expect" (258). Rather, the ideal of marriage is already an equal partnership (254-256) and "subordination of the wife, I would argue, was not essential or important by the time of Cicero" (261). In fact, many of the commands Paul gives in the New Testament are not reactions to a rollicking new trend, but rather similar to contemporary exhortations that had been made a century before or earlier.[15]

As Schreiner observes, the same cultural background can lead to either an egalitarian (Philip Towner) or complementarian (Bruce Winter) application.[16] This is because, as we have already observed, two interpretive decisions are actually involved—both how to understand the projected culture and then how to respond to it. And assuming the pathway of the argument, if Paul coined his instructions to confront a new and errant cultural trend in his day, one wonders if modern second-wave feminism might not be a perfect contemporary analogue—sexually liberated, assertive, counter-cultural and anti-patriarchal. Given a culturally-aware approach to interpretation, how might Paul address similar dynamics in the modern church?[17]



[15] Treggiari, Susan. *Roman marriage: iusti coniuges* from the time of Cicero to the time of Ulpian. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

[16] Thomas Schreiner, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9–15: A Dialogue with Scholarship" in *Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*. Edited by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner. 3rd ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016, pg. 209.

[17] I suspect that both the cultural dynamics and the application are more timeless. Because of sin, men and women have always veered from the biblical ideal of loving partnership towards sexual excess, suppression and rebellion. Meanwhile, common grace, the image of God, and creational norms express themselves in the more commendable ideals of Cicero, Paul, and healthy relationships between the genders today.

The Artemis Cult

A final cultural framework is actually an amalgam of multiple elements, centered around the Artemis cult. Though somewhat dated, the work of Sharon Hodgin Gritz has been influential.[18] For her, Ephesus was a mercantile center, a cultural melting pot of east and west and combined more traditional greek culture with more emancipated roman culture. In the case of the church this would be further combined with the patriarchal traditionalism of the Jewish diaspora that would never entertain even the possibility of women speaking in a synagogue service. Finally and most importantly, Gritz traces the central role of the Artemis cult in the civic life of Ephesus where women were very typically the key leaders. Data from further afield such as the Oxyrhynchus papyri (upper Egypt, 1st century BC—7th AD) link Isis (possibly a similar mother goddess to Artemis) with the mystery cults, exalting women above men.[19] All of these influences could stand behind a projected heresy that Paul confronted. In the religious vibrancy of Ephesus, wealthy women may have been vulnerable because of their seclusion at home and lack of education—strictures enforced by Greco-Roman society. Greedy spiritual leaders could take advantage and draw them away towards a gnostic heresy. "This susceptibility on the part of women resulted not from any inherent weakness in their nature as females. Their cultural socialization and the fluid religious milieu of Ephesus led to their gullibility as 'little, silly women.'[20] This then strongly brackets Paul's instructions. If Paul addressed a highly unusual situation in which uneducated women exalted themselves above men for the purpose of teaching heresy, his commands do not extend to other cities and time periods.

The problems with this construction are myriad. First, the reconstructed background is extremely fragmentary and nearly impossible to document. Gritz herself concedes that it is difficult to make strong assertions about women's status since much was changing in the era and most of our information regards wealthier women (15). The specific philosophy and emphases of the Artemis cult are even harder to establish since it was famously multiform and expressed itself differently across the ancient world.[21]

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[18] Sharon Hodgin Gritz, Paul, Women Teachers and the Mother Goddess at Ephesus: A Study of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 in Light of The Religious and Cultural Milieu of The First Century. Lanham, Maryland: University Press, 1991.

[19] Gritz, 35, note 43.

[20] Gritz, 111-112.

[21] In fact, the cult of Artemis was a sprawling and diverse merging of a Greek cult with the later Roman Diana and at times even the moon-goddess Selene (5th century BC). Hubert Martin comments, "We may, at least to a point, account for the confusing multiplicity and ambivalence in Artemis' personality by regarding her as a humanized representation of untamed nature, which appears benign and life-giving at one time or place and cruel and destructive at another. And we may risk going somewhat further by regarding her as simultaneously a representation of what the Greek male, in the collective psyche of a male-dominated society, both admired and feared in the female. But Artemis is

Lynn LiDonnici points out that modern scholars are far more concerned to build a full etiology of the Artemis cult than the adherents themselves ever were. The result is a unified account drawn synthetically from disparate and scattered resources ranging across a millennium and wide geographic space and the false impression that one could summarize the cult around a core of consistent beliefs.[22]

But it is not enough to demonstrate that ideas of female-superiority existed somewhere in the Greco-Roman world; this would also need to be demonstrable specifically at Ephesus and at this period of time. The problem is that Gritz's conclusions are probably anachronistic. After carefully surveying the epigraphic and 1st century evidence S. M. Baugh concludes that overt female leadership in Ephesian civic life largely post-dated the NT era.[23]

But the greatest weakness stems from the very thing that makes the reconstruction difficult to counter—the complexity of overlapping cultural strains. If the situation at Ephesus was shaped by Jewish patriarchalism, Greek traditionalism and intellectualism, the new Roman emancipation, incipient Gnosticism, and the multi-form Artemis cult, the possible combinations multiply exponentially. Perhaps these interface together exactly as Gritz expects. But cultures are complicated and unpredictable. And if our knowledge of each of these strains is only fragmentary guesswork, nearly any cultural reconstruction is theoretically possible. The sheer malleability of the data points substantially erodes any confidence that we know what was happening.

One could counter that these requirements are too high. Would not a plausible reconstruction suffice if it allows for the interpretation? Possibility is not factuality and the mere possibility of historical backgrounds is not sufficient basis for reshaping texts. Gritz has not merely offered a possibility; she has made a positive assertion that substantially changes the impact of the text's instructions. To whatever extent cultural background becomes a key factor in readjusting our readings, it falls to the interpreter to demonstrate that they are more than speculations. If ten different hypothetical cultural reconstructions could lead to ten different readings, it will not do to pick the one we prefer, claim that our preferred scenario could have been plausible and then positively assert as factual the reading that follows.

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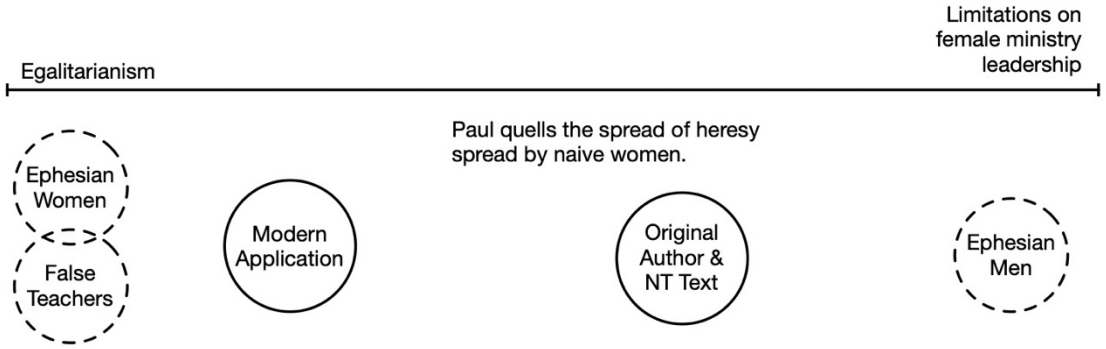
perhaps the most difficult of the Hellenic deities to comprehend and will undoubtedly always elude full explanation." Hubert M. Martin Jr., "Artemis (Deity)," ed. David Noel Freedman, The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 465.

[22] LiDonnici, Lynn R. (1992). "The Images of Artemis Ephesia and Greco-Roman Worship: A Reconsideration". Harvard Theological Review. 85 (4): 389–415.

[23] See "A Foreign World: Ephesus in the First Century" in Women in the Church, ed. A. J. Köstenberger, T. R. Schreiner, and H. S. Baldwin.

And even if we grant that this cultural scenario happened, it is not at all clear that a more egalitarian reading must follow. To begin, much of the New Testament is situational; are the New Testament commands restricted only to those scenarios? To use a counter-example, Paul faced a horrifying case of sexual perversion in 1 Corinthians 5 and gave specific instructions regarding church discipline and chastity. Are these instructions also limited to Corinth?



As a summary note, both the approach focused on the new roman woman and the Artemis cult bracket Ephesus as a unique and non-normative. But Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy also appear in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 followed by the support, "as the law also says." 1 Peter 3:1-6 probably also contains hints of gender distinctions linked to women limiting their verbal assertions. Will we bracket each of these passages as well, particularly when the clearest reference to women's role in public worship is only three chapters earlier (1 Cor. 11:5)? Or to turn the argument around, egalitarian arguments rely on the set of passages that seem to grant more liberty to women (Num 27; Judges 4; Acts 18:26; Rom 16:1-7; Gal 3:28; Phil 4:2). Why does the logic of unique local circumstances not apply to them? And even if Paul addressed a particularly intractable situation in Ephesus, why is it impossible that his instructions must not apply more broadly to other churches? What if Paul answered a very specific, localized need with robust principles and dictates that are universally applicable, even in healthy churches? Is there any exegetical basis for saying that this did not happen or could not have happened in this case?

Can we know what 1 Timothy 2:11-15 means?

The wide spectrum of cultural reconstructions raises significant doubts that the data points clearly in any direction. The problem is more intractable than just whether Greek, Roman, rabinnic, or cultic influences prevailed. The reconstructions yield entirely opposite and incompatible assumptions about what was happening at Ephesus.

	Ancient Cultural Context	Paul's Concern	Hermeneutical Model	Modern Application
Huizinga	Patriarchal (Rabinnic)	Patriarchal	Reject the motivated agenda of pseudo-Paul.	Full Egalitarianism or Feminism
Webb	Patriarchal (Rabinnic)	Patriarchal but moving towards liberty	Trace a progressive trajectory across salvation history	Soft-patriarchalism, Egalitarianism
Winter & Towner (New Roman Woman)	Patriarchalism (rabinnic and greco-roman traditionalism) in tension with… Egalitarianism (the rise of the new Roman woman)	Confronting a troubling cultural trend to protect the nascent church from disrepute.	Ephesus was a unique situation; 1 Timothy 2:11-5 may not be normative.	Elder and pastoral ministry open to women.
Gritz (Artemis Cult)	Women teaching heresy, deceived because of low education and proto-Gnosticism in the Artemis cult.	Settling internal disputes within the church and quelling the spread of heresy.	Ephesus was a unique situation; 1 Timothy 2:11-5 may not be normative.	Elder and pastoral ministry open to women.
Traditional Reading	A generalized pattern for the church	Because of enduring gender roles, women should not lead in the church.	The cultural situation in Ephesus is not directly in view.	Elder and pastoral ministry limited to men.

But the problem is worse. We have noted that these frameworks involve two different decisions. The cultural background of patriarchalism, the new roman woman or other influences must be matched with a hermeneutical model. This second decision could be (1) adversarial (the text parrots its culture and should be repudiated as in Huizinga) (2) or trace how the text speaks relative to its culture and extend the trajectory to the present (Webb) (3) or view the original cultural context as distinct enough from the present that it is not normative (Belleville) or (4) affirm how the text corrected its culture and extend that as normative for today (the complementarian, traditional reading of 1 Timothy 2).

Though each of the four alternatives surveyed here reach the same outcome—egalitarianism—they reach that conclusion in entirely different ways using incompatible hermeneutic models. Combine, for instance, the feminist background of the Artemis cult with William Webb's trajectory model and the application for today is an extreme patriarchalism. Or combine the background of traditional patriarchalism

from Huizinga and Webb with the model that Paul addressed a situation unique to Ephesus and the logic of the passage falls apart.

The problem is that to whatever extent background controls the meaning of 1 Timothy 2:11-15, our confidence that we have understood and applied the passage is no more certain than our cultural reconstruction. Even if each of the models has found a different pathway to egalitarianism, the paucity of solid information about the situation at Ephesus means that the conclusions are at best possibilities. If original culture shapes our reading of 1 Timothy 2:11-15, the meaning or at least our certainty about it have been lost.

Sufficient Guidance

There is another option. Each of the four options surveyed here began their hermeneutical argument on the foundation of the ancient culture standing behind Paul's command. But why? Are some ethical mandates so different from our contemporary expectations that the difference turns our mind to culture? If so, the operative background controlling our reading is not the ancient but the contemporary one.

Before allowing projected backgrounds to entirely shape our readings, we ought to have specific details in the text or certifiable extrabiblical data. And this approach has, at least, the strength of being able to say that we are focused on the text. Ours is not a Rorschach inkblot view.

But that does not remove the fact of cultural background as an exegetical consideration. Knowledge of animal husbandry practices can help us understand the groups of sevens in Genesis 7:2.[24] Knowing the history of textiles illuminates the high values at stake in Gen. 45:22; Judg. 14:12; 2 Kings 5:22–23; Is. 3:6–7; Matt. 27:35. In other cases, some practices should be principalized based on differences between the ancient context and today—foot washing (John 13:1-17) or the holy kiss (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Th. 5:26) seem to be obvious candidates. How then will we know the difference? I tentatively offer two considerations.

First, cultural backgrounds can weigh into our exegetical calculus but only to the degree we can solidly support them. All exegetical decisions are evaluative, weighing the merits of the evidence. Logical, grammatical, exegetical and situational concerns are all potential considerations, but each data point also carries a percentage of confidence. We should know the strength of our data points and dampen our

[24] Glenn Kerr, "The Clean Animal Count in Genesis 7:2: A Cultural, not Primarily Exegetical, Question." Unpublished presentation. Bible Faculty Summit, July 30, 2024.

confidence accordingly. By definition, most projected cultural backgrounds are only possibilities and should not be the primary consideration controlling our exegetical decisions.

Secondly, cultural backgrounds must be understood in light of the classic attributes of Scripture. In respect to **inerrancy,** dismissing Paul's teaching because he was patriarchal is not an option. In respect to **authority**, Scripture speaks authoritatively to every culture in every time and place. This means that if the commands of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 are awkward in our contemporary context, it is not a valid reason to set them aside. In respect to **clarity**, Scripture can be understood and obeyed without requiring extensive knowledge of ANE or Greco-Roman culture, particularly in respect to core questions of salvation and practical obedience. In respect to **necessity** and **sufficiency**, Scripture contains the resources necessary to be saved and live faithfully.

And this logic extends not only to individuals but also to churches.[25] Is a woman's role in church leadership an important question for the obedience and flourishing of churches? The volume of writing on 1 Timothy 2:11-15 seems to suggest that it is. And if that is true, Scripture has spoken to us in ways that can be known, believed and obeyed. That should be a sufficient testimony—one that is not fundamentally dependent on data points beyond our access. Given the speculative backgrounds projected and fragmentary state of the data, this does not include cultural background.

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[25] I am indebted to Michael Riley for this line of thought.