

APPENDIX 6 (CHAPTER 13)  
SHORTCOMINGS IN COMPLEMENTARIAN ANALYSES  
OF 1 TIMOTHY 2

This appendix contains some additional criticisms of complementarian analyses of 1 Timothy 2. I begin with *WITC*, as representing a recent re-examination of the interpretive issues by a group of able complementarian scholars. I wish to say again that nothing I write here is intended as a personal criticism. The mindset with which the contributors have approached the issues, as eloquently described by Schreiner, should attract only praise.<sup>1</sup> My criticisms are of the reasoning.

Chapter 1, by Steve Baugh, is about Ephesus in the first century. It has the express purpose of highlighting points that illuminate the historical background of 1 Timothy 2, in order to assist with a correct understanding of it. After surveying what is known about some aspects of first-century Ephesian life from inscriptions and other historical evidence, Baugh's summary is that Ephesus was in most ways a typical, generally patriarchal, Hellenic society, which preserved its Greek roots in its political and cultural institutions. This conclusion disposes of theories that women were widely dominant in Ephesian culture.<sup>2</sup>

However, the chapter falls short of its expressed purpose, for Baugh tells us little about Ephesian beliefs, other than that the Ephesians worshipped Artemis

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1. *WITC*, 164.

2. But see the correctives on matters of detail in *DBE*, 219–221 (Belleville).

and were polytheists. His section on childbirth does not mention the belief that Artemis was the protector of women in childbirth. He does not reveal her links with astrology and magic. He says nothing about the likely contents of the books of magic that were burned in Ephesus (Acts 19:18–19). He passes over in silence the pagan mysteries which, for Timothy and other readers in Ephesus, stand in contrast with the mysteries of the true faith and of godliness (1 Tim. 3:9, 16). We are left without any information that might help us have a better understanding of the false teachings which Paul mentions in the letter.

*WITC* editor Andreas Köstenberger rightly observes in a 1994 article on methodology: ‘a general reconstruction of the Ephesian milieu in the first century must not be used indiscriminately in one’s reconstruction of the circumstances prevailing in the Ephesian church that occasioned the writing of 1 Timothy.’<sup>3</sup> Based on the finding that Ephesus was in most ways a typical Hellenic society, and without giving any consideration to 1 Timothy 1:1 – 2:8, Baugh concludes that Paul’s injunctions throughout 2:9–15 are not temporary measures in a unique social setting but are reminders to the wealthy women not to step outside their divinely ordered role in the new covenant community. This is an unwarranted leap. Baugh does not say how his conclusion about Paul’s intent can be derived from his general survey of the political and cultural institutions of the city, without any consideration of the context that Paul himself provides in his letter.<sup>4</sup>

Chapter 2, by Al Wolters, considers the meaning of *authenteō*. His thesis is that in 1 Timothy 2:12 *authenteō* means ‘exercise authority’. In support of this, he looks at usage elsewhere, similar words, ancient versions and patristic commentary. But, as Köstenberger rightly notes in his 1994 article, word studies of *authenteō* can only supply ‘a range of possible meanings’.<sup>5</sup> And as Moo says: ‘good exegesis always takes into consideration the larger context in which a text appears.’<sup>6</sup> Wolters does not look at the larger context. His attention to context is limited to the use of *didaskō* (teach) in the same verse and a reliance on Köstenberger’s flawed thesis about the two verbs in the verse both being positive because the conjunction between them is ‘and not’ (*oude*).<sup>7</sup> The idea that the meaning of a rare and disputed verb in a sentence can be confidently

3. Köstenberger 1994, 272.

4. *WITC*, 60, 64.

5. Köstenberger 1994, 265.

6. *RBMW*, 177.

7. *WITC*, 65–66, 113, 83–84, respectively. On Köstenberger’s flawed thesis, see appendix 4.

determined by attending to two other words in that sentence, without considering the whole train of reasoning of which the sentence forms part, cannot be defended.

Köstenberger rightly insists in his 1994 article that the process of interpretation should include reconstruction of the historical and cultural background, a survey of the passage's literary context and attention to the flow of the argument.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps because of the structure of the book, in chapter 3 his syntactical examination of verse 12 and his discourse analysis of verses 8–15 pay scant attention to any of these. He dismisses the relevance of the historical and cultural background. His analysis does not acknowledge that Paul expressly states in 1 Timothy 1 what his concern is, namely, combating false teaching and promoting a saved life of love and goodness; nor does it notice that Paul explicitly connects what he writes in 1 Timothy 2 to that concern by starting with 'therefore' (2:1, repeated in 2:8). Attention to context and to the flow of the argument only begins substantially at 2:8, largely ignoring 1:1 – 2:7. Paul's stated concern therefore plays no role in Köstenberger's analysis of verses 8–15. Having ignored the false teaching in his analysis, in his conclusion he summarily dismisses its relevance for understanding Paul's train of thought. These flawed steps enable him to conclude that Paul's concern is not as Paul has stated but is for upholding a proper authority structure.<sup>9</sup>

Chapter 4, by Tom Schreiner, is the heart of the book. Over some sixty-three pages he offers a detailed and comprehensive interpretation of verses 9–15. (I will here include page references.)

He correctly notes:

- Paul's concern in 1 Timothy 1 is to respond to false teaching, and the word 'therefore' in 2:1 and in 2:8 connects Paul's remarks in chapter 2 with this topic (174).
- The appointments of elders and deacons discussed in 3:1–13 are for the purpose of making the church a bulwark against false teaching, as 3:14–15 indicates (179).
- Paul immediately returns to the threat of false teaching and the need to resist it in chapter 4 (179).

One might conclude from these uncontroversial remarks that 2:8–15 is concerned with the topic of resisting false teaching. However, the false teaching

8. Köstenberger 1994, 263.

9. *WTTC*, 117–118, 152–161, 159, n. 85.

plays no role in Schreiner's interpretation of verses 9–14 (176–216). He expounds those verses on the only basis which enables him to support the complementarian ban on authoritative teaching by women, namely, by arguing against the relevance of what Paul says he is writing about (205–206, 210–212). But Schreiner then brings Paul's concern about false teaching back in for the purpose of trying to explain 2:15 (221). This inconsistent procedure must lead any dispassionate reader to doubt his exposition.

Chapter 5, by Robert Yarbrough, summarizes a wide range of views on 1 Timothy 2, but does not engage directly with Paul's reasoning.

In chapter 6 Denny Burk surveys English versions of verse 12. His survey omits to mention the ASV's rendering 'have dominion over'. He accepts the views of Wolters and Köstenberger, briefly discusses the grammar of the verse, and concludes in favour of 'exercise authority' or 'have authority'. He can gain comfort from the fact that at least one prominent egalitarian scholar nearly agrees with this meaning, but Burk arrives at his conclusion without any consideration of how this meaning might or might not fit into Paul's train of reasoning in the actual context.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly his conclusion lacks a sound basis.

The weakness of complementarian analyses of 1 Timothy 2 is reflected in the structure of *WITC*. After Baugh's chapter, it proceeds with backwards logic. The meaning of *authenteō* as 'exercise authority' is determined first, without proper attention to the context of Paul's use of this word, and the expositions which follow are then largely fashioned on the basis of this meaning.<sup>11</sup>

Grudem's approach in *EFTB* suffers from corresponding methodological defects. He starts with his beliefs about male–female authority structures, which he sees as implied in Genesis 2, then expounds 1 Timothy 2:11–15 in the light of those beliefs and without looking at what Paul says in 1:1–2:7.<sup>12</sup>

Smith's exposition shares a similar flaw. She notes the relevance of false teaching to 2:1–2, but her exposition then makes no mention of it until she reaches verse 15. In similar vein, Sandom starts her exposition of 1 Timothy 2:8–15 with the words 'We should note the context of this passage' but then

10. *WITC*, 279–296. Padgett 1997, 25, opts for 'have authority', but with 'a subtle negative connotation'.

11. Another important feature of the reasoning is that submission is understood to be contrasted with the exercise of authority: *WITC*, 135 (Köstenberger), 187–188 (Schreiner). But submission can as easily be understood to be contrasted with domination.

12. *EFTB*, 29–45, 65–74.

ignores the context which leads up to 2:8–15, except for stating that Timothy has been left in charge of the church at Ephesus. Nothing of 1:1 – 2:7 is mentioned in her exposition. Poythress, when interpreting 2:8–15, similarly ignores the immediate context and Paul's train of reasoning from 1:1 to 2:7. He discusses 2:8–15 without any reference to the false teachings which are Paul's stated concern.<sup>13</sup>

The central question to which these expositions give rise is: why do these complementarian scholars believe or assume that verses 11–14 are a digression, away from Paul's main topic of combating false teaching? Köstenberger considers that Paul signals a change of topic by starting verse 11 with the word *gunē*. This is a weak argument, which ignores Paul's flow of thought. Its weakness is a symptom of the unsatisfactory method adopted, which is, explicitly, to ignore the context until after analysis of the syntax.<sup>14</sup> Grudem's justification is that no Ephesian women were teaching falsely, so verses 11–14 cannot be about combating false teaching; in substance, this is also Schreiner's view.<sup>15</sup> But in chapters 12 and 13 we saw the evidence in Paul's letter that some Ephesian women were indeed teaching falsely, and identified also the features which tie 1 Timothy 2 together as a connected train of thought concerned with combating false teaching.

Once we see from the context what 1 Timothy 2 is about, the translation of *authentēin* as 'exercise authority' strikes an evidently discordant note. Paul is not writing in chapter 2 about who should exercise authority over the church assembly. He is not writing about this subject anywhere in 1:1 – 2:10, so why should we suppose a sudden switch to this subject in 2:11–14? He does not say that the quarrelsome men (2:8) or the immodest wealthy women (vv. 9–10) have been exercising authority over the public assembly, whether legitimately or illegitimately. Eve did not exercise authority over Adam (vv. 13–14). The childbearing (v. 15) has nothing to do with exercising authority over the assembly. Even when Paul moves on to the subject of elders in chapter 3, he makes no remarks about elders having or exercising authority over the church, whether

13. Smith 2012, 26–40; Sandom 2012, 154–160; *RBMW*, 237–250 (Poythress), especially 242. Moo (*RBMW*, 176–192) considers some possible content of the false teaching but still expounds the critical part of 1 Tim. 2 without identifying how Paul's train of thought flows on from his remarks in 1:1 – 2:7.

14. *WITC*, 155, 152–153.

15. *EFBT*, 280–284; *WITC*, 205 (but Schreiner acknowledges, albeit only as a possibility, that some of the women may have been teaching falsely).

in the public assembly or otherwise.<sup>16</sup> The exercise of authority is not the issue that he is addressing. The context of chapter 2 shows that Paul is concerned that a woman might teach a man falsely, not that women might authoritatively teach men true doctrine. This context stands, even if the details of the interpretation that I have offered in chapters 12 and 13 are mistaken.

I must suggest that the subject of authority structures for public worship in 1 Timothy 2 is a mirage. It arises from a misreading of chapter 2 as a set of instructions for public assemblies, coupled with a cultural belief in past centuries that men should always be in charge.

*WITC* has certainly helped to clarify the interpretive issues. I stand in awe of the prodigious labour and erudition that has gone into it. But the reasoning is unsatisfactory. It is grieving to conclude that devout and able scholars have put such great efforts into advancing an interpretation which divorces verses 11–14 from their context.

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16. We can infer from 3:5 that Paul's view of eldership includes a responsibility to exercise authority, but in this passage his actual description of the elders' task is 'taking care' (*epimeleomai*) of the church. This is the same word as is used of the good Samaritan and the inn-keeper, taking care of the injured traveller (Luke 10:34–35). Paul makes no express mention of the exercise of authority in chapter 3.