

An Exegetical Brief On 1 Timothy 2:12 (οὐδε ἀθηντεῖν ἀνδρός)

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An exegesis of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 was presented in the October, 1981 issue of the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (Vol. 78, No. 4). In that article the conjunction οὐδέ was explained as being epexegetical (explanatory). On this basis the point was made that what follows the οὐδέ does not add a second instruction to what precedes; instead, what follows explains what precedes. Thus Paul is not forbidding two things (that a woman teach and that she have authority over a man) but one thing (that a woman be involved in the kind of teaching in which she has authority over a man).

The question has been raised whether Paul's thought might not be expressed this way: Paul is forbidding a woman to do two things in relationship to a man, namely, she is not to teach a man and she is not to have authority over a man.

Grammatically, this is a possibility. The two infinitives (διδάσκειν and ἀθηντεῖν) could both have "man" as their object even though the noun is stated only with the second infinitive. And this would be true even though διδάσκειν would normally take an accusative object rather than the genitive ἀνδρός which is in the text. The case of the object in Greek is determined by the nearest verbal form, in this verse by ἀθηντεῖν rather than by διδάσκειν.

Although from a grammatical standpoint it is possible that Paul is forbidding two things, there are several problems with this suggestion.

First of all, the rest of Scripture (e.g., 1 Cor 14:34; Eph 5:22-24; 1 Pe 3:1-6) establishes that *the moral principle* is simply that a woman is to be subordinate (i.e., not to have authority over a man). If the interpretation of this verse says that a second independent command is given, namely, that a woman is not to teach a man, then *another moral principle is being established*, namely, that it is a sin for a woman ever to teach a man.

Some suggest that the all-inclusiveness of this interpretation can be obviated by limiting the application of this command to the assembly of worshippers. But then one has established a ceremonial law (i.e., a law to which only Christians are bound, not the rest of the people in the world). In the New Testament there are no ceremonial laws, only moral laws. Furthermore, the context of 1 Timothy 2:12 does not limit what Paul says in this section to an assembly of worshippers (cf. *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 4, pp 243 and 244).

Others suggest that the emphasis is on the meaning of the word διδάσκειν here. That is, the emphasis is on the kind of teaching being done in which there is a master teacher (διδάσκαλος) to whom others submit as disciples (μαθηταί). This makes sense, but only if the following expression, "a woman is not to have authority over a man," is explanatory. Then what follows indicates that διδάσκω in this verse has the narrow meaning of master teaching and not the wider meaning of general teaching, as it often does. In this latter case one is really saying that the οὐδέ is an explanatory rather than a coordinating conjunction in this verse.

The second problem is that if Paul meant to make "a woman is not to teach a man" an independent command, there really is no apparent reason for him to add the second command about having authority over a man. If, however, "teaching" is merely the application of the principle, then the reason is apparent why he would also add the principle itself that a woman is not to have authority over a man. As in 1 Corinthians 14:34, Paul adds the principle in a grammatical way which indicates that God does not forbid *all teaching* of a man by woman (in 1 Cor 14 *all talking* by a woman in the company of men), but *only that teaching* (in 1 Cor 14 *only that talking*) by which a woman would violate the principle that she is to be in subordination.

The third problem is that if Paul is forbidding a woman to teach a man in the broad sense of the term and not in the narrow sense of not having authority over a man, then there is a clear conflict between 1 Timothy 2:12 and Acts 18:26 where Priscilla was involved in teaching in the broad sense of the term. Then no wife should ever explain any part of God's Word to her husband. Then no woman should ever be asked to answer a

question in Bible class because by the use of questions the teacher is not only getting the class to think things through for themselves, but he is using one member of the class to help teach the others rather than telling them everything himself. Then no woman should ever be allowed to write for *The Northwestern Lutheran* because this too is at times a form of teaching.

If a woman is not to teach any man in the broad sense of the term, there is also a conflict between 1 Timothy 2:12 and the words "teaching them [διδάσκοντες]" in Matthew 28:19,20, unless we say that these words in Matthew are spoken only to men. Then no woman should ever be involved in evangelism work of any type where she would be speaking to a man. Then there is also a conflict between 1 Timothy 2:12 and the words "teach and counsel one another [διδάσκοντες καὶ νοουθετοῦντες]" in Colossians 3:16, unless we say that in the church service those psalms and hymns and spiritual songs which teach and admonish should be sung by men only. In this case no woman should sing some of the liturgical responses and many of the hymns we use, and certainly no woman should be a member of the choir.

The examples used above show how there is teaching of a man by a woman which can be done in the home, in the church and in society which does not violate God's moral principle that a woman is to be subordinate to man. In two of the passages (Mt 28:19,20 and Col 3:16) women as Christians are even commanded by God to be doing a general kind of teaching (διδάσκω). They are to share their faith with others, explain God's Word to anyone less knowledgeable and give evangelical admonition by a hymn or a gentle personal reminder.

All of us might prefer in our weakness to have a set of rules to guide us, a set of ceremonial laws such as the Old Testament people had. Then we would know exactly what to do in every case instead of having to examine each case in which a woman is teaching a man to determine whether it violates the moral principle or not. We might like to have rules such as "a woman should not teach a man" or "a woman is to be silent in church" to make it easier to instruct our congregational members or to rein in brethren in the ministry who try to push the principle to its outer limits of "freedom" (or, to say it more crassly, try to get away with as much as possible). But God did not give us a set of rules which would limit our New Testament freedom; instead he gave us only moral principles to use in testing everything in our life.

Principles leave some gray areas, but in so doing they give us that freedom by which we can truly express our love for our Savior. We express our freedom by the way we willingly put those principles to use in our life as we test everything and then draw back from anything which would even begin to press the limits of a principle.

In matters of stewardship we always need to be careful that we teach the principles and ask our people to apply those principles in love for their Savior, without telling them, for example, what their individual offerings ought to be. In the matter of fellowship it took some time for many of us to understand that our task was simply to teach the principles without setting up rules which told people, for example, exactly when they could and when they could not pray with a Missouri Synod relative.

So, too, in the matter of the role of man and woman in God's order of creation, above everything else we need to teach the principle. The applications made in Scripture should be used only to help clarify the principle for ourselves rather than being made into rules.

When a teaching position by its very definition (e.g., pastor, congregational leaders) requires others to submit to the person in that position, obviously a woman cannot serve in that position. When a teaching position by its practice (e.g., some Bible class leaders, some church committees) calls on a person or group of people to act in an authoritative way and the others involved agree to submit to the authority of the given person or group of people, a woman cannot serve.

As far as a woman teaching a man is concerned, then, each situation needs to be examined by its definition or by its practice rather than by a general rule (supposedly based on 1 Timothy 2:12) that a woman is never to teach a man. In this way, as with the application of all the other moral principles established by God in his Word, the careful testing we do in applying the principle of woman's subordination to a situation in which a woman is teaching a man gives us another opportunity to express our thanks to our Savior in a concrete way.