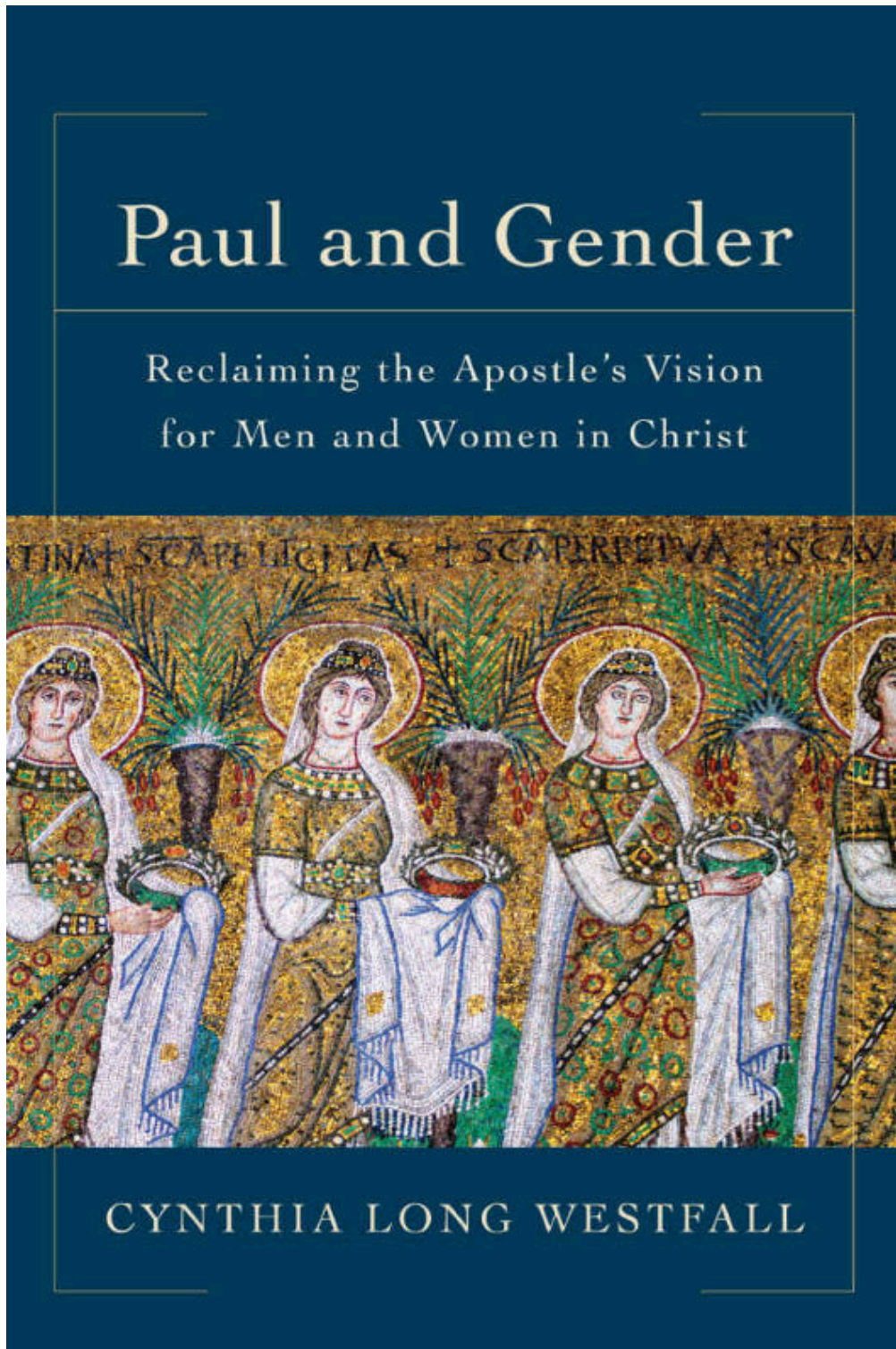


Teaching, Domineering, and More in 1 Timothy 2:11–15

On Cynthia Long Westfall · Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf · February 2021 · revised October 2026

“Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. But I do not permit a woman to teach, nor to rule over the man, but to be silent; for Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and fell into transgression. But she will be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and love and holiness with self-restraint.” (Elberfelder Bible, CSV edition, a German Bible translation; rendered here from the German)



Westfall, Cynthia Long. 2016

Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ.

Baker Academic, Grand Rapids. **Chapter 9 (from p. 279).**

The German edition of this newsletter contained my translation of chapter 9 of Cynthia Long Westfall's book, which deals with 1 Timothy 2:11–15. The English original cannot be reproduced here. Please read the chapter in the book itself: Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), ch. 9, pp. 279 ff. – [Baker Academic](#). My afterword below refers to this chapter.

Afterword

My German translation was made in haste in 2021 and was reviewed in October 2026. Through Westfall, several things about this short Pauline text have become clearer to me. I have looked at the German commentaries available to me. Here are just a few notes. This is not a review of the individual interpretations.

William Barclay, 1956: For this grand old man of biblical exposition, it is clear: the restrictions on women teaching are rooted solely in the historical context. They were meant to counteract the bad reputation of the Christians. What counts for him is a person's gifting and service, entirely independent of gender.

Lorenz Oberlinner, 1994, Herder, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament¹ (extensive, thorough, illuminating, but historical-critical)

"Since for the Pastoral Epistles the significance of Christian faith and life is shown in its effect on unbelievers (cf. 3:7; 5:14; 6:1; Titus 2:5, 8, 10), there is nothing to prevent the Paul of the Pastoral Epistles from orienting his picture of the ideal Christian woman toward the 'ideal of the simple, virtuous woman working in the quiet of house and family,' which corresponds to both Hellenistic-Roman and Jewish ideas."²

"For an interpretation of our passage that is appropriate to the subject and corresponds to the intention of the Pastoral Epistles, it will be of particular importance to answer the question to what extent the contemporary historical context or the circumstances of the congregation that led to these instructions can be determined."³

"The historical context must always be taken into account with the instructions for women formulated here, both with regard to their historical assessment and with regard to the possibilities and limits of their later influence."⁴

Heinz-Werner Neudorfer, 2004, *Historisch-Theologische Auslegung (HTA)*. I consider this series the best there is in the German language. (In English, I have about 15 such good commentaries available in my Logos version.)

Among other things, Neudorfer points out that the "likewise also the women" refers to the public prayer of women. Like all the others, he also thinks here of instructions mainly for the church's worship service. In my opinion, he also struggles to formulate a consistently coherent interpretation of this passage, but he points out many interesting details.

He also gives a brief overview of the discussions about the roles of men and women, which I know in this breadth and over this length of time only from the English-speaking world. This overview is now more than 20 years old.

Hans Bürki, 1983, Wuppertaler Studienbibel

Bürki emphasizes that all the instructions refer to an abuse. On the whole worth reading, and it highlights the context of the letter.

Brethren movement: Darby (Synopsis, 19th century), F. B. Hole, Arend Remmers (1986), William MacDonald (1989)

The commentaries of the Brethren movement *all* share this feature: the cultural context, the situation in Ephesus, and the personal character of the letter are practically insignificant or unknown to them. These reflections shaped my thinking for a long time. They agree on the following:

It is (mainly) about the gathering for worship.

It is about the roles of man and woman laid down by God. The man stands above the woman. This is grounded in the creation of Adam and Eve. This is called the creation order.

All of them regard feminism as the cause when this text is not accepted literally and as the authoritative Word of God.

The text, they say, is simple and clear.

Hole: “First, in creation God gave the man precedence and leadership. This is mentioned in verse 13. Then follows what happened at the Fall, when Eve took the lead and was deceived. That is what verse 14 is about. This passage is entirely unambiguous and clear. There is really no doubt about what is taught here.”⁵

MacDonald: “By basing his arguments on creation, Paul rules out any idea that cultural problems could be at issue here.”

In light of Westfall's study, however, the following could be the point:

It is not about the creational role of men and women.

Paul addresses specific problems of men and women and describes the countermeasures. Such problems may exist in a similar way in many places – or not at all. Here it is specifically about Ephesus, where Timothy was staying.

The very brief reference to creation does not describe a timeless or transcendent creation order. This mention serves as an analogy, as a comparative example for the women concerned. “Adam was created first” is compared with husbands who knew sound doctrine and were to teach their wives at home.

Eve was deceived in the same way as some women in Ephesus, who therefore needed instruction. (Perhaps this text also suggests that Adam, who received the commandment before Eve was created, had not taught her enough about this commandment. But that is only an assumption.)

It is also quite possible that Ephesian (later Gnostic) myths about creation are being corrected, in which Eve was the first created and Adam the one deceived.

So whoever elevates these few words into a creation order makes the woman, that is, every woman, into a sex that can be led astray, as if men could not be led astray, or perhaps less so. This reading of the text contradicts the whole biblical picture, in which men are just as easily led astray and deceived as women: it is not a women's problem, it is a human problem!

That Adam was created first and the woman afterward does not automatically make Adam the head or leader. A temporal sequence is no reason for that. The animals created first do not stand above human beings either. The human being was created last. In this connection we often hear the words "crown of creation." If you apply this way of thinking to Adam and Eve, Eve, as the one created last, would be the higher-ranking one. Of course, that is not the case. A temporal sequence may create a difference, but not a hierarchy. If a wife is older than her husband, we would not conclude that she is the higher-ranking one and he the subordinate one.

Anyone shaped by a hierarchical outlook will understand the words "created first" in this way. But is that what Paul intended? In the parallel in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul cancels this conclusion, or rather forestalls it, to make clear that there is no hierarchical difference. [1 Corinthians 11:11–12] Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

All in all, many interpreters who know the original language of the New Testament say that this is a difficult text. For that reason alone it is not permissible to turn it into such a far-reaching ban on teaching and leadership.

The interpreters of the Brethren movement outdo one another in assigning every woman her subordinate place and imposing silence on her in the meetings. According to them, the idea that women could also lead is pure feminism.

Moreover, none of them can give a plausible reason why childbirth is mentioned as well. Praise to Westfall, who shows how this very topic has to do with false teaching (not marrying, living celibate in order to be saved in this way) and also with Artemis, the patron goddess of Ephesus, who was known and worshiped throughout the Roman Empire.

I have noticed how the interpreters of the Brethren movement in particular are ultimately surprised themselves by this strict ban on teaching (if it is interpreted that way). You find this only between the lines. You notice it in how hard they then try to emphasize how important the ministries of the sisters are, as if they had to make up for something. But that is not necessary at all if in Ephesus it concerns a particular group of women, or even one particular woman, who is forbidden to teach and to dominate her husband.

I point out once more, as described in my book *Women, Forgive Us! (Frauen, vergebt uns!)*, that teaching never means ruling. A man, too, is not to rule over the woman or by means of teaching. The New Testament does not know this idea. In 2:12 it is about a negative pair of terms, teaching and domineering. It must not happen this way, neither through a woman nor through a man.

A word in the second letter to Timothy makes it very clear: men and women alike have the commission to teach – without distinction, whether in a private home or in the gathering. Paul says: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others." (2 Timothy 2:2) "People" means human beings (Greek *ἄνθρωποι*, *anthrōpoi*), that is, men and women!

Finally: this text is applied and used so often and so intensively with regard to the behavior of women. By men. But are these also the men who pray everywhere with lifted hands when they meet? How literally do men follow this instruction of Paul?

What follows is a suggested text: I render the *Pauline text freely in my own words, the way I would explain it briefly and concisely – as far as that is possible at all*. I have incorporated the insights from Westfall's chapter.

1 Timothy 2:8–15, paraphrased by Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf:

Dear Timothy, to get the problems in Ephesus with some men and some women under control, the following should happen: the men should start to pray. Wherever they meet. In public. Instead of arguing about myths and false teachings. Anger and quarreling hinder prayer. Praying together leads to a quiet, peaceful life. With lifted, open, and receiving hands that are clean of strife and violence, they should worship our Savior God together and intercede for all people at God's throne.

It is just as important that the women – I mean above all the wealthy women – show themselves modest wherever they appear and are seen. Their adornment should not consist of elaborate, eye-catching hairstyles, not of gold and pearls, and not of expensive, extravagant clothing. Such adornment draws attention to them and is often meant to outdo other women. Women who follow the Messiah have no need to put themselves on display like this or to exercise influence and dominance in this way. There is an adornment and an influence that is worth more and is even respected by all people: good works.

The woman should learn what the truth of the gospel is. Willing to learn, attentive, and eager for knowledge. In her own home. In particular, I do not permit one of these women to keep spreading all these false myths and teachings. She should not exalt herself over her husband, dominate him high-handedly, and lecture him. She should listen when her husband explains sound doctrine to her. She needs it. For she lacks knowledge, and this ignorance does great damage when she spreads myths in the households. The creation of Adam and Eve is the fitting example for this situation. Adam was created first, and he was the one who was to teach Eve. He was not deceived. But Eve was deceived and misled. She crossed the line. The same will happen to some women in Ephesus if they do not willingly learn from their husbands: like Eve, they will be deceived and become a snare to others.

And these women must know that they will be kept safe in childbearing. Despite Eve's deception and the great pains of childbirth that followed from it. God our Savior saves – not Artemis, the man-made patron goddess of Ephesus. That is why they should concentrate on faith and love and holiness. Together, as married couples who, like Adam and Eve, are one flesh. The women should not be afraid to have children, and the men should exercise sexual self-control and remember that too many pregnancies are a danger to their wives.

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf, February 26, 2021, revised October 2026

Notes

1. Oberlinner, L., *Erster Timotheusbrief*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, Herder, Freiburg; Basel; Vienna 1994 (in German).
2. Oberlinner, L., 83–84.
3. Oberlinner, L., 85.

4. Oberlinner, L., 89.

5. Hole, F. B., *Grundzüge des Neuen Testaments*, Christliche Schriftenverbreitung, Hückeswagen 1989, 1380 (German edition).