

The Influence of the Cult of Artemis on the Woman in I Timothy 2:9-15

Several years ago, I was called by the Tulsa Police Department to a home where a young man committed suicide by cutting off his right hand with a pocketknife and bleeding out. We found him dead with his head slumped to his chest and a pool of blood at his feet. Before the young man died, he laid his pocketknife on the middle of an open Bible with these words underlined: "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown in hell" (Matthew 5:30). I will never forget the gruesomeness of discovering the young man's right hand in a trash can, nor the words of the lieutenant as he walked around the room muttering under his breath, "Stupid, stupid, stupid." The man took the words of the Bible and obeyed.

However, there is something mighty stupid about a man who reads Scripture and acts on words without taking time to look at their meaning, particularly when the overall tenor and teaching of Scripture is opposite of the action he is compelled to take! If anybody ever tells you that women should never teach men, or that women should never be in leadership over men, or that women should be silent around men, then you should mutter under your breath, "Stupid, stupid, stupid." These people, well intentioned as they may be, are committing spiritual suicide by acting on words of Scripture without looking at their meaning. The system they seek to impose is opposite to the overall tenor and teachings of Scripture on the subject of women. Here are the words some commit spiritual suicide over:

"In like manner also, see that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety." (I Timothy 2:9-15)

I recently had a Christian man paraphrase for me I Timothy 2:9-15 and then tell me, "I will never have a woman lead me, teach me, or allow myself to be in a position where women usurp my authority over them because I believe the Bible!" My friend has the problem of reading words of Scripture and acting on them without taking time to understand their meaning.

Until you understand the problem Timothy faced (the man to whom the words in I Timothy 2:9-15 are written), and until you are familiar with Ephesus (the place where Timothy lived), and until you have a working knowledge of the Amazons (the warrior women that the ancient Greeks believed founded Ephesus), and until you comprehend the influence of the cult of Artemis and the Temple of Artemis which was in Ephesus, the meaning of the Apostle Paul's words will never be rightly understood.

The subjugation of a woman is a system of man's fallen nature.

If the work of Christ involves... breaking the fall, then the implication of His work for the liberation of women is plain. Jesus Christ came to liberate subjugated women. The cultism in evangelicalism regarding women's behaviors will only be broken when people lay aside stupid, false obedience to I Timothy 2:9-14 and realize the meaning of Paul's words to Timothy.

Ephesus and The Temple of Artemis

The Artemis Temple was the first religious temple in the world made completely of marble. The richest man in the world in his day, King Croesus (595-547 BC) of Lydia (modern Turkey), ordered the Temple of Artemis be constructed in honor of the Greek goddess Artemis. Generations of people, even in America, have used the phrase "Rich as Croesus" to describe wealthy people in their day. King Croesus is given credit by many historians as the inventor of gold and silver coinage. His wealth is legendary, and he gave his riches to fund the building of the Temple in Artemis.

Work on the Temple of Artemis began in 550 BC and took over a century to complete. King Croesus lived long enough to stuff the foundation of the Temple of Artemis with tens of thousands of gold coins to serve as talismans, ensuring the Temple's protection from destruction. Croesus was a contemporary of Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian Empire. Cyrus was the king who defeated the Babylonians, freeing the Jews from their Babylonian captivity, enabling them to return to Jerusalem to rebuild Solomon's Temple. Therefore, the Temple of Artemis and the Second Temple in Jerusalem (the post-Babylonian exile Temple in Jerusalem) were both built during the same time period (6th century BC).

However, it was only the Temple of Artemis that became one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World because of its stunning beauty. The Temple of Artemis was a temple dedicated to the power, beauty, and strength of women. Marble artisans from all over the world carved Amazon women into the base of the 120 columns. Amazons were "warrior women" from an area north of Ephesus and the Black Sea (modern Ukraine). These Amazon women were known for their fierce fighting ability and had been made famous by the Greek poet Homer in his portrayal of them in *The Iliad*.

Homer (c. 750 BC) also gave tribute in *The Iliad* to Artemis, the Greek goddess of women and of war. Artemis is called by Homer "Artemis the Hunter, Queen of the Wild Beasts" (*Iliad* 21.470). Artemis is also presented as the goddess Phosphorous or Light (Strabo, *Geo.* 1.9.). If worshipped properly and prayed to during childbirth, Artemis promised to deliver women from death while giving birth. For this reason, women in the ancient world revered and worshipped Artemis. Likewise, men worshipped Artemis during times of battle and war.

Since the ancient world was always at war, Artemis was often on the lips of men during times of battle. The Greek men (and later the Romans) prayed to Artemis (the Romans called her Diana), not Apollo in times of battle. In Greek mythology, Zeus fathered the twins Artemis and Apollo through the Titaness Leto. The Artemis cult taught that Artemis was superior to Apollo because she was born first.

When men and women entered the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus, the women would wear fancy hair braids, bedeck themselves with jewelry and ornate clothes as they prayed to Artemis. Heliodorus said, "Their locks of hairs carry their prayers." There were no sacrifices in this Temple. The women worshipped Artemis with their clothing, jewelry, and their words. Artemis, in turn, gave them their sexual prowess over men and their deliverance during childbirth. Likewise, men came to Artemis, acknowledging their need of her strength during a time of war.

The men would hold up hands, palms up, just above their waist as they prayed for victory in battle. Not surprisingly Ephesus, above all other places in the ancient world, celebrated the power, strength, and beauty of women and their ability to use their sexual prowess to manipulate and dominate men. The Temple operations, which included prostitution and craftsmen who sold gold and silver idols of Artemis, drove the economy of Ephesus. Hundreds of thousands of people visited the city annually.

Paul and Timothy's Presence in Ephesus in the Middle of the Artemis Cult

Acts 18:24 through Acts 20:1 records for us that Paul and Timothy spent three years in Ephesus (c. AD 55-58), by far the longest time Paul spent in any one city during his three missionary journeys. Paul almost lost his life during a riot in the city because silversmiths who made little statues of the goddess Artemis were upset that Paul and Timothy were cutting into their business by winning converts to Christianity. Paul would later write in **I Corinthians 15:32** that he "fought wild beasts at Ephesus." Did he fight lions, tigers, and bears? No, the wild beasts were the people of Ephesus who were devoted to Artemis, "The Queen of the Wild Beasts." When Paul left Ephesus in AD 58, he traveled south for about 30 miles to the island of Miletus and then called for wise leaders of the church in Ephesus to join him at Miletus where he said to them, "After I leave, savage wolves will come among you and will not spare the flock. Even some among you will arise and distort the truth to draw away disciples after them" (cf. Acts 20:29-30). Sure enough, less than five years later (AD 63) the Christians in Ephesus were in trouble. There were some women or maybe even a single woman, most likely a new convert out of the Artemis cult, who had begun to teach false truth in the assembly at Ephesus. Timothy is sent to Ephesus to help the church and give some correction. Timothy sends to Paul a letter from Ephesus, giving Paul an update on what is happening and asking some specific questions about how he should proceed (a letter that is not extant). The Apostle Paul sends a response to Timothy, a letter we now call I Timothy. It's important to remember (as we have seen) that nowhere in Scripture does Jesus, Paul or any other apostle restrict women in the assembly. In fact, when a false teacher nicknamed Jezebel begins to have influence among believers in the city of Thyatira, Jesus does not reprimand the church for having a female teacher. He upbraids the church for not doing anything about her false teaching (Rev. 2:24).

The Meaning of I Timothy 2:9-15

Now, let's look again at I Timothy 2:9-15 again in order to discover the meaning of the words:

1. "Let the women adorn themselves in modest apparel" (v.9).

Obviously, there were women coming to the assembly of Christ in Ephesus similar to the way they used to go to the Temple of Artemis, dressed to kill, with braided hair, gold, pearls, and fine clothing. Paul is letting Timothy know that this mode of dress, was not conducive to the worship of Christ.

2. "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection" (v. 11).

The reason I believe the problem in Ephesus is a particular woman who is in a teaching position within the assembly is that the noun "woman" is in the singular, not the plural. In verses 9 and 10, the word "women" is plural, but in verse 11, Paul switches to "the woman" or possibly "that woman." This silence of women can't be a universal prohibition for all time against all women teaching men because the word "silence" is *hesuchia* (quietness). It is used in I Timothy 2:2 to describe what the character of every believer should be, both males and females. It never means "don't speak," but asks for humility.

3. "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (v. 12).

This is the key phrase. First, the phrase translated "I suffer not a woman to teach" is literally in the tense of "I am not now permitting a woman to teach." Again, the woman not now permitted to teach is in the singular. It is the same woman of verse 11. This woman needs to learn in quiet humility before she ever presumes to teach because she is still too influenced by Artemis cultic beliefs. This verse can NEVER be used as a proof text for women never teaching men or having "authority" over men. This phrase "usurp authority" translates one Greek word *authentein*. This word is used only here in the Bible. This word was used, however, in classical Greek literature and it meant "to murder someone." Paul could have chosen

nearly fifty Greek words to speak of the ordinary exercise of authority, but he chose a word that more represents someone "dominating, controlling, or subjecting one to harm." Of course, this is precisely what the Artemis cult taught women to do. Artemis was the female goddess of fertility and war. Women in Ephesus were taught to use their voices, their charm, their sexuality, and their beauty to dominate, control and subjugate men. It seems that this woman in Ephesus was a convert.

4. "For Adam was formed first, then Eve."

Timothy, tell the woman causing problems that her notion she should always have the floor and direct the assembly because she believes women are superior to men--since Artemis came first and Apollo came second--is a misguided belief. The truth is God created man first then He formed Eve from Adam, so it is very appropriate for her, a woman who considers herself a descendent of the Amazons, to sit quietly and learn from those who are older and wiser, even if they are males! Artemis taught the power of women to dominate men through sexual prowess, but Christ teaches that men are equal to women and there's nothing wrong with a woman learning from others before she begins to teach men.

5. "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" (v. 14).

And Timothy, remind her that the Scriptures teach that Eve was deceived. Contrary to what she learned in the Temple of Artemis, males are not always her problem. To be deceived and in need of correction is just as much a possibility for her as it was for Eve. She must move away from her belief in female superiority, a belief reinforced by the Artemis cult.

6. "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith..." (v. 15).

Timothy, tell this woman that she will be okay during childbirth, even if she totally and fully renounces her trust in Artemis. The one true God will deliver her from death during childbirth, not Artemis.

7. Paul wrote Timothy to correct the problems in the assembly on behalf of "Him who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen" (I Timothy 6:16).

The people of Ephesus called Artemis the goddess of Light. The men approached Artemis in the Temple with hands raised above their waist praying for victory in battle and in war. Paul is simply correcting the errors of teaching of this Artemis convert, and it is specific instruction, not universal. A few years ago, I received the following letter that illustrates the problems I wish to correct in evangelical churches.

"We spent five years at a church filled with gender role nonsense. It has a way of making women paranoid about their actions, lest they are perceived as being domineering women. One of the church elders took my husband aside one day while at work. He wanted to know about that status of our marriage because I seemed too interested in discussing theology on our church email loop. Women were completely forbidden from speaking in the (very participatory) service, including the one day that all the men except one were at a retreat. (We couldn't even make announcements about the church garage sale.) While women were allowed to discuss theology elsewhere, I guess I must've broken some unspoken rules. I would often be the only women in a group of men standing around discussing theology. Occasionally joining a discussion on the church email loop somehow led this elder into assuming Mr. Hoppy must be very displeased to have such a "domineering wife." He defended me as best he could. By the time we bailed out of that church, yes, the elders were sitting around at lunch with their wives discussing what a "domineering" wife I am."

In the context of Artemis in Ephesus, this specific prohibition on that woman speaking makes sense.