Among the most controversial passages in the New Testament, 1 Timothy 2:8-3:1a has been a key passage in the ongoing debate about the role of women in the church. This present study will seek to explicate the most natural reading of this passage through a consideration of its context as well as its literary structure.

The central purpose of 1 Timothy is to encourage Timothy to preserve sound doctrine over against the false teachings prevalent in the churches at Ephesus. In order to accomplish this purpose, Paul warns against false teachings in the community and gives Timothy guidelines for proper church worship and administration. The false teachings are described as (profane) myths (1:4; 4:7), speculations (1:4), meaningless talk (1:6), deceitful spirits (4:1), teachings of demons (4:1), old wives' tales (4:7), profane chatter (6:20), contradictions (6:20) and false knowledge (6:20). The teachings are distinguished by emphasis on genealogies (1:4), the law (1:7), ascetism (forbiding marriage and promoting abstinence from certain foods, 4:3), controversy and disputes (6:4), and the pursuit of money (6:9-10). Paul considers the teaching to be an affront to the conscience (1:19; 4:2; cf. 1:5; 3:19) and in view of 2 Timothy, deceptive and immoral (2 Tim 2:16-19; 3:1-9, 13). The letter identifies three men, Hymenaeus, Alexander and Philetus, as false teachers (1 Tim 1:19; 2 Tim 2:17; 3:9). It also appears that women may have been involved in propagating the teaching (2 Tim 3:6; cf. 1 Tim 4:7; 5:13). Scholars are virtually unanimous in their agreement that the false teachings are related to Gnosticism or proto-Gnosticism. The guidelines for church worship and administration include instructions on public worship (ch. 2), the qualifications for church leaders (ch. 3), the roles of widows in the community (5:1-16) and handling accusations against elders (5:17-22). The passage under consideration is found amidst the instructions on public worship.

The occasion for Paul's instructions on public worship can be inferred from his directives within the passage. Even a cursory glance at the passage reveals that Paul's primary concern is that public worship should be well mannered and respectful. Paul encourages peace, quiet, reverence and silence in public worship and prayer (vv.2, 10-12). He rebukes anger, argumentation and immodesty (vv.8-9). Paul's directives are disproportionately targeted towards

women in the community. Taking also 1 Timothy 5:1-17 into consideration, the women of the churches in Ephesus appear to be the primary cause of disruption in public worship and prayer. They are dressing immodestly (2:9) and concerned with pleasure (5:6). They are also idle, presumably in church affairs, and "gossips and busybodies" in the community (5:13). The situation is so severe among the women that they are bringing condemnation on the church and some have even "turned away to follow Satan" (5:12, 14-15). Clearly, one purpose of 1 Timothy 2:8-3:1a is to oppose this disruptive activity and encourage, in its place, a more acceptable code of conduct.

The code of conduct that Paul introduces for women in vv.9-12 is the source of endless controversy in the church today. Some regard these instructions as universal and normative prohibitions against women in leadership. This interpretation of the passage centres on Paul's instructions to women in v.12: "didaskein de gunaiki ouk epitrepw oude auqentein andro", allÆ einai en hsucia"" (GNT). Critical objections to such an interpretation, however, stem from the contentious meaning of the hapax legomenon, auqentein. The word auqentein is the present active infinitive of the verb auqentew, from the noun auqenth~. Aside from Byzantine citations and references to its adjectival derivatives, there are 314 known extant references to auqentew and its cognates extending in a period from 500 BCE to 600 CE (Wilshire 120-1). In the Roman period (30 BCE – 600 CE), the sources attest to a variety of possible meanings. The Kroegers give four possible meanings: (1) "to begin something, to be primarily responsible for a condition or action (especially murder)," (2) "to rule, to dominate," (3) "to usurp power or rights from another," and (4) "to claim ownership, sovereignty, or authorship" (84). Nevertheless, the lexical aids used in this present study are in agreement about its meaning in the passage under consideration. According to Grimm-Thayer-Wilke, Louw-Nida, and BAGD, auqentew in its biblical context conveys the second of Kroegers' four possible meanings. The modern translations also agree, translating auqentew as "usurp authority" (KJV), "have dominion" (ASB), "exercise authority" (NASB) or "have authority" (NCV, NIV, NLT, NRSV, RSV). The usual NT words to express this same idea, however, are exousia and kurieuw; both are quite common in Pauline

writings. In light of these popular alternatives, the traditional rendering may not accurately reflect Paul's intent. There are at least two mitigating points that might challenge the traditional rendering of auqentein:

(1) A traditional rendering, which excludes women from teaching, is inconsistent with the broader context of the PE, the Pauline corpus, the NT and the OT. Women in the OT and the NT do teach and have authority over men. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul instructs Timothy to entrust the Gospel to "faithful people who will be able to teach others," which is an inclusive exhortation that men and women should teach. Such inclusive exhortations can also be found in 1 Cor 14:26, 31 and Col 3:16. Elsewhere, Paul acknowledges the teaching ministry of women: (a) Priscilla, who even instructed an Apostle named Apollos (Acts 18:26) and ran a church (and presumably taught) in her house with her husband Aquila (1 Cor 16:19), and (b) Junia, a woman Paul calls "distinguished among the apostles" (Rom 16:7). In addition, Phoebe is recognized by Paul as a deaconess of the church, which, though not necessarily a teaching position, remains a position of authority. There are also many other women that Paul thanks or greets in his letters for their hard work and we cannot exclude the possibility that at least some these were leaders and teachers. Also, testimony throughout Scripture identifies women as prophetesses. The role and office of prophetess can include both forthtelling and foretelling. The former refers to interpreting and applying Scripture to a given situation, which is essentially the same as teaching. In the NT, Anna (Lk 2:36ff.) and Philip's four unnamed daughters (Acts 21:9) are also recognized as prophetesses. Moreover, 1 Corinthians 11:5 demonstrates that many other women possessed this gift. In the OT, Miriam (Ex 15:20), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14) and Isaiah's wife (Isa 8:3) are given the title prophetess. We must also add the names of two significant OT women leaders that possessed divinely ordained authority over men, namely Deborah and Esther. If the traditional rendering is accepted then, it is clear that Paul would not only be contradicting himself but the testimony of the rest of Scripture.

(2) As discussed, 1 Timothy 2:8-3:1a is set against false teaching in Ephesus that involved women. The Kroegers suggest that this false teaching was a "Gnostic or proto-Gnostic mythology glorifying Eve" (117). Given such a context, do any of the other possible definitions of auqentein fit the passage? The Kroegers argue that there is another workable translation of auqentein, namely "to claim authorship" (103). In such a case, the prohibition in v.12 is a response to Gnostic origin myths that regarded women, such as Eve, as the originator of life (110-113; 117-125). The Kroegers also note that the use of oude may "introduce an infinitive of indirect discourse," which means that auqentein is the subject of what should not be taught (191). Assuming the Kroegers' rendering of auqentein, the passage could be translated, "I do not permit woman to teach that she is the originator [or author] of man, but she is to be in conformity" (191). Though scholarly opinion has yet to accept this position, there is no persuasive reason to reject the possibility of such a translation; it is consistent with Greek grammar, the historical context and the passage.

So, given these mitigating points, any interpretation of auqentein and the code of conduct in vv.9-12 must be tempered by its canonical and cultural setting, regardless of the specific rendering. Throughout Paul's writings there is a sensitivity to cultural norms. The writings of Paul and other NT authors, while they hint at a radical transformation of society and the social structure (Mt 22:30; 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11), continually urge Christians "to 'submit to' the institutions of the world (1 Pet 2:13) and (as far as possible) through generally acceptable behavior to make a redemptive impression in it (1 Thess 4:11-12; 1 Tim 3:7; 6:1)" (Towner 74). As these institutions and their values have passed away, the instructions relevant to those institutions have become unnecessary, e.g. slavery. As such, even if the traditional rendering is accepted, the prohibition should not be regarded universally normative in light of the scripturally consistent emancipation of women that is taking place in our society.

There seems to be more to the problem, however, than misconduct in public worship and prayer. As noted, false teaching appears to be running rampant in the community and as such,

the passage may be applying correctives to aspects of this teaching. In order to elucidate these correctives, it is necessary to examine the literary structure of the entire pericope, 1 Timothy 2:1-3:1a, on public worship. The pericope integrates two parallel passages, 2:1-6 and 2:8-3:1a, which are separated by a statement of Paul's apostolic authority in 2:7. The two parallel passages feature corresponding elements. Both sections begin with didactic instructions that address proper conduct in prayer with allusions to the disruptions in the community (2:1-4; 2:8-12), which are followed by statements introduced by the conjunction gar (2:5-6a; 2:13-15) and completed by proclamations affirming the authority of those statements (2:6b; 3:1a). The didactic instructions establish a code of conduct that "is right and is acceptable in the sight of God" (2:3). The conjunctive statements may either be proofs advanced in support of the didactic instructions or doctrinal statements designed to correct or refute the false teachings. Despite scholarly opinion favoring the former, it is interesting that most scholars note the polemical tone to the passage, which would seem to favor the latter. For instance, Kelly states that "the linking conjunction For shows that the statement is advanced in support of what precedes," but also acknowledges that Paul "was probably conscious of taking issue with . . . Gnostic theory" (63). Indeed, there is significant weight to the argument that the conjunctive statements are employed as correctives rather than proofs:

(1) The problem of worship under consideration in this passage directly proceeds from Paul's harsh words against two of the false teachers in Ephesus (note the use of the inferential conjunctive oun to begin this passage). As such, these teachers and their teachings are still being addressed.

(2) The conjunctive statements refute known Gnostic beliefs. Inferring the underlying heresy from these statements, the heresy is polytheistic, accepts many mediators, rejects the incarnation (the humanity of Jesus) and the universality of the salvific plan. It asserts that Eve was created first, was not deceived and did not sin. Fee, Kelly and the Kroegers all recognize these elements as distinctly Gnostic and likely contemporary to the writing of this epistle.

In view of the considerations, the most natural reading should be that the conjunctive statements are not proofs but correctives.

The last verse of the passage under consideration is also quite difficult. The statement that "she will be saved through childbearing" has also been translated as "she will be saved through the birth of the Child [referring to Jesus Christ]," or "she will be brought safely through childbirth" (NRSV 2:15n). Here again, the most natural reading must take into account the context. It is likely that Paul has in mind the prohibition against marriage that forms a part of the false teaching in the community. Paul is, therefore, reiterating the importance of childbearing over against a false teaching espousing celibacy. Moreover, the use of the singular may mean that Eve is still the subject of the sentence. Eve, therefore, is saved from her transgression through bearing children, if her children, the "they" of the second clause, "continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty" (2:15). Nevertheless, it is an unusual statement that is difficult, if not impossible, to interpret in that Paul nowhere else makes a similar statement that might clarify his intent in this verse.

As this study has shown, 1 Timothy 2:8-3:1a is a passage almost as rife with controversy for the church today as the false teaching that precipitated its writing. At the very least, the extent of the controversy should dissuade any person from using this passage as a universal, normative prohibition against women. Doing so, draws attention away from the central message of the passage, which is that worship and prayer should be undertaken by all people, male or female, with an attitude of mutual submission, reverence and peace. Neither men nor women should allow their earthly concerns to detract from offering worship and prayer that "is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior" (1 Tim 2:3).

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Translations Consulted: ASB, GNT, KJV, NASB, NCV, NIV, NLT, NRSV, RSV.