

Consistency in the Household of God:

A Limited Critique of G. Hugenberger's
Approach to I Timothy 2:8-15

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The Pastoral Epistles

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July 1993

Preface for Professor Gruenler

In choosing to write about the role of women in the pastoral epistles, I thought it would be most helpful to me if I interacted primarily with the article by Gordon Hugenberger you assigned. I have several reasons for this: 1) a broader approach could not meet with much satisfaction in the ten page limit; 2) Hugenberger's unusual approach to I Timothy 2, only recently published, compels attention by the church from both sides of the traditionalist/equalitarian aisle; and 3) I personally need to come to grips with this passage sooner rather than later.

In preparing this paper, I wish to acknowledge the help of Professor Hugenberger who discussed these matters with me further in personal conversation, going even so far as to recommend articles to me which oppose his position. So even as I raise questions about Professor Hugenberger's approach, I wish to acknowledge the first role he has in my life as my much respected pastor and friend.

Since I believe that one's presuppositions affect even exegesis, I think it only fair that an author announce his prior to commencing an essay. In my case, I have approached I Timothy as a traditionalist regarding women's ordination, and although I have tried to let the text shape me rather than me it, I am not sure that I have succeeded. This is all to say that even though I have tried to faithfully understand the passage, I may have in the end gotten it wrong, especially given the circumstance that I have yet to complete the studies which would make me even a rudimentary Bible scholar.

Thank you.

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July 28, 1993

Introduction

The majority of interpreters through church history have assumed that in I Timothy 2:8-15 Paul is addressing the church roles of men and women in general, and not the domestic relationship between husband and wife. The latter view is asserted by Gordon Hugenberger in his article, "Women in Church Office: Hermeneutics or Exegesis?"¹ Although Hugenberger demonstrates that this alternative exegesis is not novel to church history, his recent revival of it stands almost alone, so that it is difficult to find commentators that even consider the domestic option, whether in support or refutation.

However, Hugenberger presents the case for a domestic interpretation so compellingly that the church can no longer ignore this alternative treatment of our passage. Hugenberger gives challenge to both the traditional and the various "equalitarian" approaches to I Timothy 2. For our part, we agree with much of Hugenberger's argument, especially that the four modern approaches he summarizes are all inadequate in one way or another to a proper interpretation of our passage.² However, is Hugenberger's "fifth" approach, while convincing, so air-tight as to be indisputable? Are there weak points in his exegesis which may cast some doubt upon his conclusions? We think perhaps so.

This purpose of this paper then is to raise questions about Hugenberger's exegesis, and then attempt to demonstrate that even if Paul had in mind husbands and wives, his instructions are best understood as a model for both church and domestic life. We come down then much closer to Luther's rather than Hugenberger's exegesis of the passage.³

The format of this paper centers upon two basic aspects of Hugenberger's argument: 1) Language -- the appraisal of *aner* and *gyne* as requiring a translation of "husband" and "wife," which we conclude to be not necessarily so; and 2) Context -- the assertion that I Timothy 2:8-15 is part of an informal outline and best interpreted in light of other parallel scripture passages rather than by the

¹ Gordon Hugenberger, "Women in Church Office: Hermeneutics or Exegesis?", *Journal of Evangelical Theological Studies* 35:3 (Sep. 1992), 341-360.

² Hugenberger, p. 345-350.

³ Martin Luther, *Works*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, vol. 28, pp. 270-280. Hugenberger mentions Luther as one who exegetes *gyne* and *aner* in I Tim 2:12 as "wife" and "husband."

immediate context, which we conclude to be unlikely. Finally, as we are considering this second point, we hope to provide our positive reasons for considering I Timothy 2:8-15 as applicable to all of church life.

Language

Much of the strength of Hugenberger's approach depends upon the insistence that in Paul's writings, the use of *aner* and *gyne* in close proximity to one another requires a translation of "husband" and "wife," respectively. He argues that, apart from I Timothy 2, in 50 different uses of *aner* by Paul in eleven distinct contexts, it is invariably translated as husband. He goes on to wonder why Paul did not use the less ambiguous *anthropos* or even *arsen* if Paul had intended to signify that a women should not teach men in general, rather than just her husband.⁴ We shall explore how Paul uses each of these words in his writings to attempt to determine the forcefulness of Hugenberger's point.

To begin with *anthropos* we discover that Paul uses it 125 times in his epistles.⁵ With a handful of exceptions,⁶ Paul uses *anthropos* in a general or theological sense in every instance, such as in Romans 2:9 for example: "There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek." In this sense, *anthropos* represents the human race, or a part thereof, including women. When he discusses particular situations, such as in Titus 3:10, Paul still uses *anthropos* to indicate that he is speaking of men in general, to include women. The point is that *anthropos* is not used by Paul as "man" in apposition to women, nor does it lend itself naturally to such a use, since its meaning is almost always more general.

The one exception which Hugenberger mentions that must be dealt with is I Corinthians 7:1b: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" followed immediately by a lengthy discourse on

⁴ Hugenberger, p. 354.

⁵ Including the plural.

⁶ Apart from I Corinthians 7:1, the exceptions can be categorized as: 1) a designated title applied to an individual (II Thes. 2:3; I Tim. 6:11); 2) a theological identification of Christ with man, governed by an immediately preceding verse (Phil. 2:8; I Tim. 2:5); 3) quotes from the Old Testament (Eph. 5:31); and 4) Paul referring to himself (Rom. 7:24; II Cor. 12:2-6).

marriage in which Paul switches to *aner* to describe the duties of husbands. It seems clear that Paul uses *anthropos* specifically to indicate a single man in contrast to *aner*, and so one could speculate that this option was available to Paul in I Timothy 2 to clarify his intent that women were not to teach all men. Besides being speculative, the problem with this is twofold: 1) we still have no example of a passage in which *anthropos* and *gyne* are regularly used in apposition; 2) this example uses *anthropos* as a single man, perhaps a confusion Paul wanted to avoid in light of the particular ascetic-minded heretics at Ephesus "who forbid marriage" (I Timothy 4:3). That is if Paul had used *anthropos* several times in contrast with *gyne* he may have appeared to be advocating celibacy.⁷

We move on then to consider the most clearly masculine of our options, the word *arsen*. If Paul had intended a strict prohibition of women teaching men, why did he not make it abundantly clear by using *arsen* in contrast to *thylu*, as in Romans 1:27?⁸ *Arsen* is exceedingly rare in the New Testament, occurring in only two verses from Paul, and in only four other passages, two of which are quotes of Genesis 1:27: "Male and female He created them."⁹ The other instance it occurs in Paul, besides Romans 1, is in Galatians 3:28: "... there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." By choosing the rarely used *arsen* and *thylu*, Paul seems here to be specifically referencing Genesis 1:27 and connecting the genders' ontological equality to their soteriological equality.¹⁰ It was a word choice rooted in deep theological meaning and specifically not related to men and women's functional roles in the church or otherwise.

Paul's choice for *arsen* in Romans 1:27 is even more obvious. He is discussing the practice of homosexuality in contrast to "the natural function" between men and women. When one remembers that the New Testament word for pervert or homosexual is *arsenokoitys*,¹¹ it is not surprising that Paul used *arsen* as he did to emphasize their extreme gender proclivity. The point to

⁷ Cf., however, I Corinthians 7:26 at the end of the passage, where *anthropos* seems to be used to represent both married and unmarried persons.

⁸ Hugenberger, p. 354.

⁹ Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6. The other passages are Luke 2:23, another quote from the Old Testament, and Revelation 12:5,13 in which *arsen* is used in apposition to "child".

¹⁰ See also I Pet. 3:7.

¹¹ Found in I Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1:10.

all this is that like *anthropos*, *arsen* is not a word which would be used naturally to denote differences between men and women in everyday church life. One could equally, if vainly, speculate why Paul did not use vocabulary that more clearly indicated husband and wife in a domestic context, if that was his intent, as he does in Titus 2:4-5.¹²

Finally, we come to the word in our I Timothy passage, *aner*, to discover how it is used in the writings of Paul and the New Testament. What we find is that the primary distinction of *aner* in Paul is exactly its use to connote "men" in contrast to someone else, usually "women". Other New Testament writers, such as Luke and James, maintain a less consistent distinction between *aner* and *anthropos* than does Paul, but Paul at least always uses *aner* in a precise manner.¹³ The vast majority of Paul's 59 uses of *aner* he uses in apposition to *gyne*, but in I Corinthians 13:11 and in Ephesians 4:13, he uses *aner* specifically in contrast to "child," since *anthropos* would apparently be inadequate for the comparison. Likewise, he uses *aner* in apposition to *gyne* when he discusses marriage relations, in conformity with the Greek language, precisely because the gender distinction is necessary to describe marriage. Thus *aner* and *gyne* become properly translated "husband" and "wife."¹⁴

But *aner* and *gyne* in close proximity are in no way required to be translated as "husband" and "wife" if the context dictates otherwise. Prominent examples of this are found several times in Acts when the context indicates that the plural *aner* and *gyne* are best translated "men" and "women."¹⁵ Hugenberger dismisses these examples as not relevant to I Timothy 2, since they are "lists" and in the plural, but his logic for doing so is not clear to us, especially since the majority list only two things, exactly *aner* and *gyne*. These examples carry even more weight if one is disposed to believe that Luke aided Paul in writing the pastoral epistles (II Timothy 4:11).¹⁶

¹² Paul uses the unusual words *philandros*, "loving one's husband," and *oikouros*, "keeper at home," in addition to *aner*. See also perhaps I Peter 3:7 which uses the unusual *gunaikeios*, "feminine one," for wife.

¹³ With the exception of when he is quoting the Old Testament (Rom. 4:8; 11:4).

¹⁴ Rom. 7:2,3; I Cor. 7:3,4,10,11,13,14,16,34,39, 14:35; Eph. 5:22,23,24,25,33; Col. 3:18,19; I Tim. 3:2,12; Tit. 1:6, 2:5.

¹⁵ Acts 5:14; 8:3,12; 9:2; 17:12, 34; and 22:4.

¹⁶ This, some argue, accounts for much of the "medical" tendencies in the vocabulary not common in the other ten Pauline epistles. See Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1958, p. 62, 67.

Finally, we come to the disputed texts, namely I Corinthians 11:3-16,¹⁷ I Corinthians 14:34-35 and our own, I Timothy 2:8-15. It is obvious to us that if Paul had intended to speak to contrasting domestic roles in marriage in these passages, he would have in all likelihood chosen to use *aner* and *gyne* for "husband" and "wife." But it is equally obvious to us that if he intended to speak to contrasting gender roles in the church, he would also have probably chosen to use *aner* and *gyne*. Given the above discussions of his three options for "man," *aner* appears by far to be the most natural choice to discuss "man" in contrast to "woman" when it involves functional roles. The answer for our passage may be in fact, that by choosing *aner*, Paul is precisely drawing a close parallel between the relationships in the family and the relationships in the church.

Thus we conclude that Paul's use of the words *aner* and *gyne* is ultimately indecisive in determining his exact intent in I Timothy 2:8-15. The question must finally be decided, as in all scripture interpretation, by context.

Context

In arguing for a domestic interpretation of I Timothy 2:8-15, Hugenberger chooses to rely more heavily upon parallel passages elsewhere in scripture, rather than on the immediate context surrounding our passage. Although he does answer at some length the charge that the passage is best understood as addressing the public worship of the church, he never satisfactorily responds to those who hold I Timothy 3:15 to be the organizing statement of the whole book: "...I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church...."¹⁸ Likewise, Hugenberger is not impressed that our passage is immediately followed by a lengthy discourse on qualifications for church office, favoring instead an "informal outline" which places the two passages side by side with no outstanding relevance to one another.¹⁹

What is relevant for Hugenberger is Paul's reference to the example of Adam and Eve which

¹⁷ While "husband" and "wife" seem most appropriate for *aner* and *gyne* in this passage dealing with headship (cf. Eph. 5:23), interpreting them as such throughout seems to cause some difficulties of logic, particularly in verse 12 where it would imply that husbands are born through the wife, rather than through woman in general.

¹⁸ Hugenberger, p. 343.

¹⁹ Hugenberger, p. 357.

he asserts is elsewhere always used as a paradigm for the marriage relationship.²⁰ Even stronger evidence for Hugenberger however is the impressive parallel passage in I Peter 3:1-7 which he says "must be determinative for our exegesis of I Timothy 2."²¹ We will examine each of the above points in reverse order to attempt to evaluate the appropriateness of Hugenberger's approach to our passage.

To begin with the parallel passage in I Peter, the strong similarities between the two texts are hardly disputable. What is disputable is whether that necessitates identical applications for both passages. We answer that it is entirely possible to have similar passages whose interpretations differ in accordance with their contexts. A brief example of this is the parables of the blind leading the blind,²² found in Matthew 15:14 and Luke 6:39 which read:

'Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.' (Matthew 15:14, NASB)

And He also spoke a parable to them: 'A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall in a pit?' (Luke 6:39, NASB)

The two texts are virtually identical in every way, and if taken apart from their contexts we should conclude that their meanings and applications are identical. However, only a closer look at each of their larger contexts reveals that they illustrate very different points. The Matthew parable serves as a statement of judgement against the Pharisees for their failing to understand the futility of human regulations in curtailing sin (Matthew 15:1-20). The Luke parable is meant to demonstrate the great danger of a disciple being more concerned with other people's sins than with his own (Luke 6:37-42).

In a similar manner, it is very plausible that Peter and Paul, while using almost identical language, could have had very different intentions in mind. We conclude therefore that a passage's immediate context must be the most determinative factor in its interpretation. Furthermore, the comparison of I Timothy 2 to I Peter 3 should be further tempered by possible comparisons to other

²⁰ Hugenberger, p. 352-3. The passages in question are I Cor. 11:8-19; II Cor. 11:2-3; and Eph. 5:31.

²¹ Hugenberger, p. 355.

²² As introduced in a class taught by T. Gordon.

texts as well. While not quite so impressive as the Peter parallel, a similar passage to I Timothy 2:11-12 is I Corinthians 14:34-35. They compare as follows, with the words in italics signifying a counterpart in the other passage:

Let a wife/woman (*gyne*) quietly receive instruction (*manthaneto*) with all submissiveness (*hypotage*). But I do not allow (*epitrepo*) a wife/woman (*gynaiki*) to teach or exercise authority over a husband/man (*andros*), but to remain quiet (I Timothy 2:11-12, modified NASB).

Let the wives/women (*gynaikes*) keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted (*epitpepetai*) to speak, but let them subject (*hypotassestosan*) themselves, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn (*mathein*) anything, let them ask their own husbands/men (*andras*) at home; for it is improper for a wife/woman (*gynaiki*) to speak in church (I Corinthians 14:34-35, modified NASB).

Roughly one third of the major words in each text have direct counterparts in the other. This is competitive with the approximate one quarter of the major words that I Peter 3:1-7 shares with I Timothy 2:8-15, although this latter pair still has a clear edge as a parallel, as the selections are longer and some of their shared words exceedingly rare.

The point is that in contrast to I Peter's emphasis on the domestic relationship, the I Corinthians passage clearly instructs the submission of wives/women in public church matters, and seems to stress an inherent connection between home and church conduct. Of course, as discussed above, immediate contexts must be the strongest determining factor in all these passages. Our present point is only to show that if I Timothy 2 can be pulled in the domestic direction by text comparisons, so can it be pulled in the "public church" direction by other comparisons.²³

We move on then to discuss Hugenberger's argument that the Adam/Eve paradigm in verses 13-14 indicates a domestic interpretation. He reinforces this by pointing out that the childbearing theme of verse 15 also strongly suggests a domestic environment. While we do not dispute that the primary tenor of these verses reflect a husband-wife relationship, we see no reason to limit their application to such. For one, as Adam was the first husband in authority over his family, so was he

²³ Another possibility is that a word or phrase can have a double or complex meaning made clear by its context, as in I Corinthians 11:27-29 where "body" seems to refer to both the communion bread, cf. I Cor. 11:23-26, and to the community of saints, cf. I Cor. 10:17, 11:17-22. Similarly then, I Timothy 2:8-15 may have two levels of application, one to the family and one to the church.

the first elder in authority over the "church." Covenant families were precisely the church until Israel was established through Moses, and the family heads were the God-ordained authorities in religious as well as domestic matters. The fact that Paul alludes to Adam, as well as the fact that Peter alludes to Abraham in I Peter 3:6, may thus hint at the intertwining nature of domestic and church authority. Verse 14 then would illustrate the disastrous effects upon the family and the church when that authority is either abdicated by men or usurped by women. (That is, Adam failed in his duty to guard the garden and judge the serpent while Eve failed in hers by conversing with the serpent apart from her husband.)²⁴

This connection between family and church authority seems to be precisely what Paul had in mind when he stipulated just after this passage that an *episcopos* (overseer) be, among other things, "apt to teach" (*didaktikon*, I Timothy 3:2) in contrast to a wife/woman who is not to teach (*didaskhein*) a husband/man (I Timothy 2:12). Furthermore, an overseer is to be "one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity" (I Timothy 3:5). But Hugenerger fails to explain what connection, if any, there is between these verses and the preceding "household code" of chapter 2. In our judgement, the passages of wifely submission and church office are intimately linked by virtue of their proximity. In the words of P. Barnett, "I Tim. 2:9-15 should be read with one eye on I Tim. 3:1-7."²⁵

Conversely, the requirement for an overseer to manage his own household well makes the most sense, in light of I Timothy 2, if he is a man. That is, although a wife may manage a household, it is the husband who is ultimately responsible for the care and discipline of the family, since the wife is "not to exercise authority over a husband/man" (I Timothy 2:12). As Paul goes on to say in 3:5, "if a man does not know how to manage his own household well, how will he take care of the church of God?" Barnett interprets Paul's concern to keep women out of the episcopate,

not in terms of woman's inability to occupy the office... but rather what effect this

²⁴ This view is also held by John Piper and Wayne Grudem in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL, 1991, p. 73.

²⁵ Paul W. Barnett, "Wives and Women's Ministry (1 Timothy 2:11-15)," *Evangelical Quarterly* 61:3, 1989, p. 233. Barnett's approach to the passage is to interpret *aner* and *gyne* most likely as "husband" and "wife" and yet show that the passage still prohibits women from holding authoritative office in a church.

incumbency would have on marriages within the church and indeed on the value of the mothering role.... What happens in the church must not overturn, deny, or detract from the roles and relationships of men as husbands and fathers and women as wives and mothers which are rooted in the very creation of God.²⁶

This approach of a strong parallel between church and family functions matches exactly with those who hold I Timothy 3:15 to be the thematic summary of I Timothy, that is as a letter which is concerned in its entirety with establishing the church at Ephesus in proper structure, spirit and doctrine as Paul realizes that his days are drawing to an end. In this view, I Timothy 2:8-15 necessarily addresses public functions of the church, just as teaching truth and confronting heresy (chs. 1, 4; 6:3-16, 20-21), praying for all men (2:1-7), ordaining officers (ch. 3, 5:17-25), pastor-member relations (5:1-2), caring for widows (5:3-16), slave-master relations (6:1-2) and the use of wealth (6:17-19) are all community functions/concerns of the church.

Strangely, Hugenbergger mentions the "household of God" view of I Timothy's structure, but does not explicitly refute it apart from stating his own view of a "flexible" informal outline. Rather, he demonstrates in depth that I Timothy 2 need not be understood as instructions for a worship service.²⁷ Hugenbergger refutes the false dichotomy of those who view the passage as having to address either a public worship service or the private home life by rebuffing that the real choice is between a public worship service and the whole of married life. But in so doing, Hugenbergger himself falls into a false dichotomy, because, at least in our judgement, the best choice is that the passage addresses either married life alone, or the whole of church life -- not just the worship service.

The application then of the "household of God" view is that the guidelines for the duties and treatment of the various members of the church are analogous to those of the family, that is, in accordance with gender and age (I Timothy 5:1-2). As V. Poythress puts it,

According to Paul, the fundamental principles regarding the structures of the human

²⁶ Barnett, p. 237.

²⁷ Hugenbergger, p. 352.

family are to be applied to the church as God's household (I Timothy 3:15). Our personal relations to others in God's household should take into account what kind of persons they are, whether young or old, male or female (I Timothy 5:1-2). In particular, the structure of family leadership is to be carried over into God's household: qualified men are to be appointed as overseers, that is, fathers of the church. A woman, however capable and gifted she may be, can never become a father of a family. She is simply not so constituted. Likewise, a woman may never become a father in God's household. She may become a 'mother' in God's household, and exercise the roles indicated in I Timothy 5:2; 3:11; 5:9-10, 14; Titus 2:3-5; II Timothy 1:5. The life of the church never overthrows but rather enhances the life of the family, based on God's design from creation.²⁸

We conclude then, that as wives are to be submissive to their husbands in marriage, so too should that marriage order be upheld in the ministry of the church,²⁹ so that only men are to be ordained as elders (*episcopos/presbuteros*) and to teach in official capacities. A woman then may participate or lead in any ministry that is permissible to be conducted by a non-ordained member.³⁰

If one accepts that part of Hugenberger's argument which asserts that I Timothy 2:8-15 should be understood as addressing husbands and wives, we hope we have shown that the passage is best understood when applied to both church and marriage. That, however, may depend more upon the assumptions with which one approaches the text than with the information with which one departs. If one approaches with high views of both Deborah in the Old Testament and what Hugenberger calls the "precarious" evidence of women leaders in the New Testament, then one is likely to see in the text another marriage exhortation, despite its larger context. If one happens to approach the text with a lower view of the previous alleged evidence, however, then one will probably read Paul's admonition to wives/women as merely a reinforcement of an assumed belief in the New Testament church that its ordained leadership is reserved to men.

²⁸ Vern Sheridan Poythress, "The Church as Family," in Piper and Grudem, p. 239.

²⁹ Where wives represent the natural order of women, and thus in this text, represent the proper position of all women in the church, in accordance with I Timothy 2:15. See also Barnett, p. 229.

³⁰ We include the diaconate within a woman's sphere, in light of Rom. 16:1, I Tim. 3:11, and the fact that it is primarily a ministry of service, not of teaching or ruling.

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