

(Con)texturing Ideologies of Modesty, Authority, and Childbearing in 1 Timothy 2:8–15

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Abstract

Feminist and gender critical biblical scholarship has shown how texts ideologically function as products of their ancient social and cultural norms. In my dissertation work on Pauline texts, through isolating the ideological component of socio-rhetorical-interpretation, I demonstrated how these texts are “ideologically textured” within their ancient social context. In this article, I bring a combination of approaches from ideological criticism and theoretical insights from feminist criticism to bear on both the biblical text of 1 Timothy 2:8–15 and contemporary interpretations of this text. The latter is exemplified by the conservative Christian blogger, “The Transformed Wife.” Beginning with an examination of how both Paul and the blogger establish authority amongst believing communities, I then interrogate three areas of focus within their ideological purview: modesty, authority, and childbearing. I conclude that (con)texturing (a taxonomy of approaches that I propose which reads for ideological texture within text and context) provides a productive way to engage with the enduring influence of biblical texts and their harmful interpretations for wo/men.

Keywords: ideology; gender critical; modesty; authority; childbearing;
1 Timothy 2:8–15

1. Introduction

Attend a solid biblical church today, women, and “learn in silence with all subjection” (1 Tim 2:11) as God commands. It’s not difficult at all!
–Lori Alexander¹

I would rather err on the side of taking the Bible too literally rather than too liberally.
–Lori Alexander²

The injunctions by Lori Alexander on her Facebook page for women to learn in silence “as God commands,” and its direct reference to 1 Timothy 2:11, shows the ongoing influence of biblical texts in the contemporary context of Christianity, especially in the United States. Lori Alexander, the 63-year-old woman behind “The Transformed Wife” blog, book, and social media pages, is married to Kenneth Alexander, with whom she has four children and nine grandchildren. She has over 135 000 followers on her Facebook page and her book has sold thousands of copies. Her statement that she would rather err on the side of taking the Bible too literally than too liberally captures much of the contemporary backlash demonstrated in the Trump era of politics against liberation hermeneutics, specifically those within Black, feminist, and queer paradigms.

Alexander’s blog posts, and the comments on her social media platforms³ from people who align with her version of biblical wo/manhood, shows the extent to which the notion of male headship and female subordination⁴ is not just accepted, but is being actively promoted in the United States and in many other parts of the world, including in my own context, South Africa.⁵ “God-ordained” roles such as submissive wife, silent learner, homemaker, and mother are prescribed for women, while head of the household, provider, protector, and priest are reserved for men. Recently, there has been a range of scholarship that has challenged these views from historical, gender-critical, and feminist

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- 1 Lori Alexander (The Transformed Wife), “Attend a solid biblical church today, women, and ‘learn in silence with all subjection’ (1 Tim 2:11) as God commands,” Facebook, July 10, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/thetransformedwife>.
 - 2 Lori Alexander, “Abiding in the home with contentment,” *The Transformed Wife* (blog) July 10, 2022, <https://thetransformedwife.com/abiding-in-the-home-with-contentment/>.
 - 3 E.g., <https://www.instagram.com/thetransformedwife/?hl=en>; <https://twitter.com/godlywomanhood>; <https://www.pinterest.com/thetransformedwife/>; <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsPbQz30YqPNOE4pKedswUA>.
 - 4 I use the terms that conform to the gender binary in the same way that it is understood in the biblical text and the social context, being fully aware of the arguments regarding the importance of recognising gender beyond the binary. My use of the binary in this article is therefore functional.
 - 5 The Worthy Women’s Movement and The Mighty Men’s Conference are prime examples of this. See S. Nadar, “Palatable Patriarchy and Violence against Wo/men in South Africa – Angus Buchan’s Mighty Men’s Conference as a Case Study of Masculinism,” *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa* 102, no. 1 (2009): 551–61; S. Nadar and C. Potgieter, “Liberated through Submission?: The Worthy Woman’s Conference as a Case Study of Formenism,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 26, no. 2 (2010): 141–51.

perspectives.⁶ I locate this current article, which focuses on the hermeneutical aspects of the discourse, within this growing body of work that seeks to make sense of the ancient text and context for contemporary gender contextual norms.

2. (Con)texturing⁷ 1 Timothy: Feminist Hermeneutics and Ideology

In the article, I have chosen to use the neologism wo/men following Schüssler Fiorenza's lead in articulating the idea of the intersectionality of oppression (as theorised by scholars such as Crenshaw, Hill-Collins, and others)⁸ for the discipline of feminist biblical studies. The foundation of this intersectionality is expressed through her preference for the word "kyriarchy" instead of patriarchy in her work. She asserts that it allows "us to investigate the multiplicative interdependence of gender, race, and class stratifications as well as their discursive inscriptions and ideological reproductions."⁹ My use of the term wo/men, therefore, relies on this foundational understanding of kyriarchy and in particular how in prescribing gender norms for women, men are ultimately implicated in the promotion of toxic forms of gendering. As a Black male biblical scholar, I maintain that despite the injunctions issued by "The Transformed Wife" being restricted to women, they actually have implications for constructions of masculinities since the pressures of enforcing roles related to headship and leadership have been shown to lead to harmful expressions of unbridled masculinity.¹⁰ While toxic masculinity is beyond the scope of this article, I wish to keep it in purview through the use of the neologism wo/men.

6 See, for example, B. A. Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2021). Barr, a specialist in medieval history, women's history, and church history, provides a systematic and historical account of the traditions of patriarchy which have actively minimalised or erased women's authority and historical roles as leaders.

7 The idea of (con)texturing builds on the notion of texturing of texts contained in Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996). I develop this further to consider the texturing of context through my use of the concept (con)texturing.

8 K. W. Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 140 (1989): 139–67; P. Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Empowerment and Consciousness* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

9 E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), 118.

10 J. Jodamus. "Between 'Dad's Army' and Vulnerable Masculinities: Exploring 1 Corinthians 4:14–21 and 11:1 for 'Redemptive Masculinities'" *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 171 (2021): 5–9.

Moreover, in writing the term in this way, especially in this article where I focus on “The Transformed Wife,” I seek to echo Musimbi Kanoyoro’s¹¹ argument that women are often the custodians of (patriarchal) culture, and that this assertion should not be restricted to women in Africa only. The discourses of Lori Alexander’s “The Transformed Wife” constitute an important source of cultural and religious reasoning within the American context, where white evangelical women are often socialised into accepting roles of submissiveness and non-leadership as part of the complementarian movement.¹² The idea of complementarity within these movements is directly derived from biblical texts such as 1 Timothy 2:8–15. In this article, through a feminist theoretical framing, I seek to explore how similar rhetorical tools are used in both the biblical text and the writings of Lori Alexander through her social media posts “The Transformed Wife.” By juxtaposing these rhetorical tools and ideological strategies of the ancient text and contemporary interpretation, the rhetorical reasoning behind misogynist religious beliefs is laid bare, and this, I argue, can offer one pathway towards dismantling them.

Scholars within the socio-rhetorical interpretation paradigm have shown that the study of a text’s argumentative/rhetorical texture often reveals the social and cultural presuppositions as well as the networks of reasoning inherent in it which depict the cultural milieu of that epoch.¹³ These networks of reasoning can serve a number of functions, but in this article I focus on the ideological functioning of these networks of reasoning, in so far as they uphold systems of patriarchal domination. As such, I proceed with an understanding of ideology offered by the sociologist, John Thompson, who asserts that “to interpret ideology is to explicate the connection between the meaning mobilized by symbolic forms and the relations of domination which that meaning serves to establish and sustain.”¹⁴

Thompson suggests that ideology operates in five basic ways, namely through “legitimation,” “dissimulation,” “unification,” “fragmentation,” and “reification.” These five modes are operationalised through particular rhetorical strategies. It is not necessary to provide a definition of each of these modes here (these will be provided later). My analysis of 1 Timothy 2:8–15 and the interpretations offered by “The Transformed Wife” will show how the social and cultural presuppositions and networks of reasoning contained in the argumentative texture of the text and its interpretations reveal the relations of patriarchal domination they uphold. While some modern readers

11 M. Kanyoro, “Engendered Communal Theology: African Women’s Contribution to Theology in the 21st Century,” in *Talitha Cum!: Theologies of African Women*, eds. N. Njoroge and M. Dube (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2001), 158–80.

12 See A. E. Murray, “Building Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: White American Evangelical Complementarian Theology, 1970–2010” (PhD diss.; University of Toronto, 2021).

13 V. K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1992), 64.

14 J. B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 293.

may find the reasoning offered in 1 Timothy 2:8–15 to be outdated and flawed, as the social media posts by Lori Alexander reveal, when placed within an authoritative ideological framework, the text is still viewed as appropriate for setting present-day gender norms, with regard to three specific issues: modesty, teaching authority, and childbearing. Before examining how the biblical writer and Alexander ideologically texture their arguments in each of these three areas, it is worthwhile to first consider how relations of domination are established through ideological tools such as claims to legitimate authority within the text of 1 Timothy and in the claims on “The Transformed Wife” social media posts.

3. Ideological Framing of Authority: Text and Context

The prohibitions in 1 Timothy 2:8–15 are founded upon Paul’s¹⁵ assertions in 2:7:

For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth; I am not lying), a teacher of the gentiles in faith and truth (NRSV).

The main thrust of ideological texture proceeds from this verse and reverberates throughout 2:8–15. In 1 Timothy 2:7, the text establishes Paul’s power within the Ephesian community by claiming divine authority for him from God and Christ, as an appointed herald, apostle, and teacher to the gentiles. His claim to divine authentication from God and Christ is implied by vv. 3–6 where the subject of the discourse in these verses refers to God and Christ. Verse 7 simply carries on the discussion, which may be inferred from the use of the preposition εἰς and serves to link Paul’s ministry to that of God’s purpose of universal salvation through the mediator Christ Jesus (vv. 4–6). That the text claims divine authentication for Paul being an apostle is clearly demonstrated in v. 1, which states: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope.” This claim to divine authority by Paul enables him to instruct the community as he sees fit.

Paul employs what Thompson refers to as the ideological mode of legitimation,¹⁶ by making use of the ideological strategy of rationalisation. According to Thompson, this strategy occurs when “the producer of a symbolic form constructs a chain of reasoning which seeks to defend or justify a set of social relations or institutions, and thereby to

15 I am aware of the complex arguments pertaining to the authorship of 1 Timothy and am inclined to agree with L. T. Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) that the letter is Pauline in origin, but from a socio-rhetorical perspective Paul is the author according to the text. Also see Rob van Houwelingen, “Power Play in the Church? The Case of 1 Timothy 2:8–15,” in *Power in the New Testament*, eds. Annette Merz and Pieter de Villiers (Leuven: Peeters, 2021), 195–222 for further elaboration around authorship.

16 Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, 61.

persuade an audience that it is worthy of support.”¹⁷ The discourse of v. 7 states, “and for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.” In this verse Paul claims delegated authority from God and Christ.¹⁸ His work as preacher (herald), apostle (specially empowered delegate), and teacher authorised by Christ operates as a discursive mechanism that rationalises his authority and power over the Ephesians, but also over Timothy, the elders, and deacons. In the ecclesial hierarchy he is positioned one level below God. And, because he was ordained into this position, according to his rationalisation in 2:7, his pronouncements, commands, and prohibitions must be respected by Timothy and the Ephesians as ultimately coming from God. This is how ideological legitimation functions; it is the setting up and maintaining of asymmetries of power by representations of legitimation.¹⁹

“The Transformed Wife” also makes use of this key rhetorical mode of legitimation, as her blog reveals:

My ministry is based upon Titus 2:3–5 in which God commands that older women teach younger women to be sober, love and obey their husbands, love their children, be chaste, discreet, good, and keepers at home. If you would love to learn and grow in these areas and allow God’s Word and His ways to transform your marriage and your life, please join me as I teach you what I have learned from His Word, my own experience and mentoring many women, and most importantly, allowing the Holy Spirit to convict and transform you into the image of Christ.²⁰

Drawing on Max Weber, Thompson describes three types of grounds on which claims to legitimacy may be based: “rational grounds (appealing to the legality of enacted rules), traditional grounds (appealing to the sanctity of immemorial traditions) and charismatic grounds (appealing to the exceptional character of an individual person who exercises authority).”²¹

All three aspects of this claim to legitimacy are made in Alexander’s description of her authority. While she does not claim to have apostolic authority like Paul, she adopts the biblical role of mentorship authority. The legality of the enacted rules can be detected in “My ministry is based upon Titus 2:3–5 in which God commands that older women teach younger women.” The sanctity of immemorial traditions are to be found in “teach

17 Thompson, 61.

18 He does this by linking his ministry to God’s will of universal salvation through the mediator Christ Jesus (2:3–6) which strategically places him in a privileged position as an agent of God to affect universal salvation. See C. A. Wanamaker, “Metaphor and Morality: Examples of Paul’s Moral Thinking in 1 Corinthians 1–5,” *Neotestamentica* 39, no. 2 (2005): 409–33.

19 Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, 61.

20 Lori Alexander, “About me,” *The Transformed Wife* (blog), October 2016, <https://thetransformedwife.com/about-2/>.

21 Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, 61.

younger women to be sober, love and obey their husbands, love their children, be chaste, discreet, good, and keepers at home,” and finally she appeals to her own exceptional character as an example: “If you would love to learn and grow in these areas and allow God’s Word and His ways to transform your marriage and your life, please join me as I teach you what I have learned from His Word [and] my own experience and mentoring many women.”

It is intriguing to see the function of the rhetorical device of legitimation in both this Pauline text and contemporary interpretations of that text. Having established how this rhetorical device works to set the scene for the legitimacy of the instructions to wo/men in the text, we now turn our attention to these varied instructions in 1 Timothy 2:8–15.

Writing from the perspective of a post-colonial feminist optic, Sharon Jacob notes that “much of the scholarly attention, when it comes to the discussion of this text, has been focused on the issue of women’s authority with respect to teaching in the church ... As a result, other themes concerning childbirth and the modesty of women have for the most part been overlooked.”²² By ignoring the focus on childbirth and modesty codes for women, we overlook the ways in which “women’s bodies are sites/sights upon which national and cultural identity is inscribed.”²³

While Jacob identifies the uneven scholarly attention that the themes of modesty and childbearing receive when compared with the theme of teaching and authority, the former themes are given much attention in popular faith-based readings, as exemplified by the social media posts of Lori Alexander. In what follows, I will isolate these three areas for further examination in text and context: modesty, teaching authority, and childbearing.

22 S. Jacob, “Imagined Nations, Real Women: Politics of Culture and Women’s Bodies. A Postcolonial, Feminist and Indo-Western Interpretation of 1 Tim.2:8–15,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics*, eds. U. Y. Kim and S. A. Yang (New York: T&T Clark, 2019), 412.

23 Jacob, 414.

3.1 Modesty

1 Timothy 2:8–10	The Transformed Wife ²⁴
<p>⁸I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument, ⁹also that the women should dress themselves in moderate clothing with reverence and self-control, not with their hair braided or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, ¹⁰but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God.</p>	<p>The only reason women dress immodestly is because they know that this is men’s weakness. They use their bodies to attract men’s attention. There can be no other reason except to make women jealous. Godly women, dress modestly and discreetly. Draw others to Christ in you, not your body.</p>

The directives regarding modesty in both the text and The Transformed Wife’s social media post are transmitted via the ideological mode of fragmentation. According to Thompson, ideological fragmentation occurs when “relations of domination” are “maintained, not by unifying individuals in a collective, but by fragmenting those individuals and groups that might be capable of mounting an effective challenge to the dominant group.”²⁵ Men and women in the discourse of 1 Timothy 2:8–10 are clearly fragmented. Men can directly access God through prayer (v. 8), but women only demonstrate reverence through dress and good works (vv. 9–10). Women are not even given space for direct communication with God in this passage.

The Transformed Wife takes the mode of fragmentation beyond the matter of “inward modesty,” or even the matter of reverence for God, which the text focuses on. Instead, Alexander suggests that the issue of immodest dress has to do with women’s desire to attract men’s attention, because they know this is men’s weakness. “The only reason women dress immodestly is because they know this is men’s weakness.” So, while men are separated/fragmented from women for their apparent holiness, they are also seemingly fragmented from women because they are sexually weak, and women use that to attract their attention.

The post circles back to legitimise the reason for modest dress: because it is Godly—“Godly women, dress modestly and discreetly”—the comma after godly suggests an instruction directly to women who consider themselves godly, rather than a statement about godly women.

24 Lori Alexander (The Transformed Wife), “The only reason women dress immodestly is because they know that this is men’s weakness,” Facebook, July 25, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/thetransformedwife>.

25 Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, 65.

The final directive from *The Transformed Wife* (“Draw others to Christ in you, not your body”) is reminiscent of the classical fragmentary ideology—the separation between the spiritual and the physical—between women’s bodies which are supposedly physically impure compared with the spiritual purity that Christ offers.

According to Johnson²⁶ and Winter,²⁷ σωφροσύνη (vv. 9, 15), translated as propriety or discretion, was regarded as one of the cardinal moral virtues for women in first century Graeco-Roman society. It was considered a normative cultural motif common among philosophers and rhetoricians alike to contrast the outward adornment of women with that of their inward modesty, and thus provides logical cultural legitimation as asserted above.²⁸

In vv. 9–10, but also throughout the discourse of 1 Timothy 2:8–15, it appears that Paul co-opts normative cultural motifs from the broader Graeco-Roman society of the day and transposes them in different ways for the Christian community at Ephesus as an expected and legitimate Christian norm. Sometimes he uses scriptural texts as authentication of those cultural motifs, such as in vv.13–15, and on other occasions he transforms or recontextualises a standard cultural *topos* and “Christianises” it by placing it into a primarily Christian context and claiming divine validity for it, as he does here in vv. 9–10.

Within the first century epoch, it was a common topic within Jewish, Christian, and pagan circles for rhetoricians and writers alike to unfavourably compare the outward ostentation of women in the form of expensive jewellery, clothing, and extravagant hairstyles to inward modesty, “σωφροσύνη.”²⁹ Paul’s instruction against elaborate hairstyles and ostentatious clothing thus seems unexceptionable in relation to his cultural milieu. Inward propriety/modesty was often portrayed in the first century in many stereotypical ways, such as being a good mother and a good household manager or homemaker.

26 Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 200.

27 B. W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 64, 73.

28 For other examples demonstrating the commonplace cultural motif of outward vs. inward modesty see Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 199; Winter, *Roman Wives*, 98, 100, 104.

29 Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 199. Many scholars, noting the wealth indicators of v. 9 (“braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes”), interpret this verse to be an indication that at least some women in the Ephesian community were relatively wealthy. See J. D. G. Dunn, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy and the Letter to Titus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 801.

The Transformed Wife thus makes this link as illustrated in Figure 1 below:³⁰

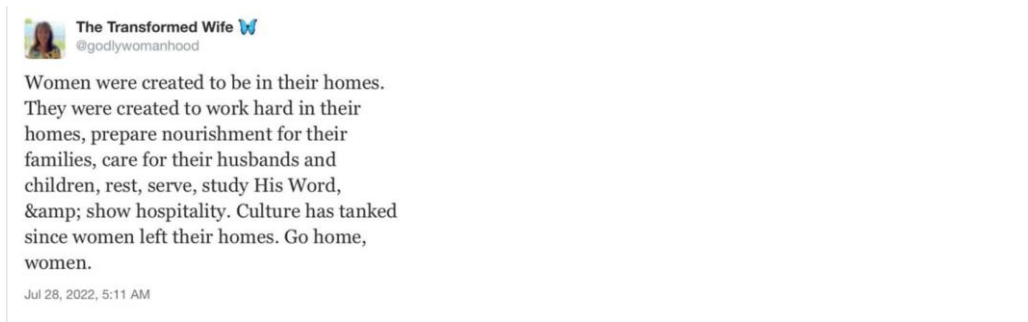


Figure 1

It is, however, peculiar that 1 Timothy does not make the same link. Instead of making this connection between modesty and the home, the next matter that is picked up is the issue of learning, teaching, and authority. Perhaps this is because the learning for women had to occur primarily within the confines of the household.

3.2 Teaching Authority

1 Timothy 2:11–14	The Transformed Wife³¹
<p>¹¹ Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man;^l she is to keep silent. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve, ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.</p>	<p>Attend a solid biblical church today, women, and “learn in all silence with all subjections” (1 Tim 2:11), as God commands. It's not difficult at all!</p>

The “silence and submission” aspects of this text have received much attention from those who support as well as those who challenge its underlying ideologies. It would not be an exaggeration to state that verses 11 and 12 have been the most contentious texts at the heart of the debate about women’s leadership in the church. When arguments against women’s leadership are made based on “biblical mandate,” it is these verses that are most likely being referenced. The Transformed Wife devotes an entire section to “Counter Arguments to Women Being Pastors and Preachers” and is keen to point out that churches which allow women to speak are not “biblical.” It is ironic, however, that

30 Lori Alexander (The Transformed Wife), “Women were created to be in their homes,” Facebook, July 28, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/thetransformedwife>.

31 Lori Alexander (The Transformed Wife), “Women pastors and women preachers are the most obvious rebellion against God,” Facebook, August 1, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/thetransformedwife>.

just as Alexander prescribes the biblical injunction to women to learn in private and not to teach, she herself teaches publicly on social media and to an online audience that consists of men and women. Thus, her very public teaching transgresses her own claims to a biblical gendered ethic.

Many scholars have demonstrated that the logic behind the instruction given in vv. 11–12 was part of a mundane first century cultural motif whereby the subordination of women was not restricted to the household, but even the state sought to subordinate women to men.³² Any effort on the part of women to try and circumvent or jettison such basic cultural assumptions and strictures were vehemently resisted by most men.³³ It is perhaps for this reason that feminist scholars have pointed out that many of the pastoral epistles are a response to the more egalitarian and perhaps radical “Jesus movement” of the early centuries. Leading this thinking regarding the egalitarian ethos of the early Jesus movement within feminist biblical studies is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who portrays the ideology undergirding the pastoral epistles to the early church as moving distinctly away from the radical traditions of a “discipleship of equals.”³⁴

Whatever the reasons for the letter, it certainly seems plausible that 1 Timothy 2:8–15 could have been written to explicitly counter the apparent independence and autonomy that women may have gained through the early Jesus movement. The patriarchal ideology of the text in its final form is beyond dispute and has therefore led many scholars to the conclusion that it is an irredeemably patriarchal text of terror.³⁵ That the ideological assumptions undergirding the text has followed us into the twenty-first century perhaps points to the power of the fifth modus operandi of ideology as described by Thompson: reification. Thompson describes ideology *qua* reification as involving:

32 Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 207; Winter, *Roman Wives*, 91–94.

33 Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 207.

34 E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM, 1983); E. Schussler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

35 Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) coined the term “texts of terror” which specifically referenced four narratives from the Hebrew scriptures. More recently, however, texts such as 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, Ephesians 5:22–33, and 1 Timothy 2:8–15 have also been described by feminist biblical scholars as terror texts. These sacred texts engender hierarchies that create social scripts that render certain ways of putting bodies into place as natural and renders the text irredeemably patriarchal. For examples of this as it relates to 1 Timothy, see Gerald O. West, “Taming Texts of Terror: Reading (Against) the Gender Grain of 1 Timothy,” *Scriptura* 86 (2004): 160–73; Maretha Jacobs, “On 1 Timothy 2:9–15: Why Still Interpret ‘Irredeemable’ Biblical Texts?” *Scriptura* 88 (2005): 85–100; Mouton, “New Life from a Pastoral Text of Terror? Gender Perspectives on God and Humanity in 1 Timothy 2,” *Scriptura* 111 (2012): 583–601. The notion of irredeemable texts stems from Michell Desjardins, *Peace, Violence and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

relations of domination [that] may be established and sustained by representing a transitory, historical state of affairs as if it were permanent, natural, outside of time ... This mode may be expressed in symbolic forms by means of the strategy of naturalization. A state of affairs which is a social and historical creation may be treated as a natural event or as the inevitable outcome of natural characteristics, in the way, for example, that the socially instituted division of labour between men and women may be portrayed as the product of the physiological characteristics of and differences between the sexes.³⁶

The ideological strategy of naturalisation is laid bare in verses 13 and 14: “¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve,¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” By locating the reason for the injunctions for women to learn in silence, and to not have authority over men in the creation narratives, rather than in the cultural milieu of the time, or as a response to the Jesus movement, the oppressive character of the injunction is out forward as natural.

These ideological tools of domination find their ultimate expression in the twenty-first century within interpretations such as those offered by *The Transformed Wife* through the strategy of eternalisation. Thompson describes this strategy as what happens when:

social-historical phenomena are deprived of their historical character by being portrayed as permanent, unchanging and ever-recurring. Customs, traditions and institutions which seem to stretch indefinitely into the past, so that any trace of their origin is lost and any question of their end is unimaginable, acquire a rigidity which cannot be easily disrupted. They become embedded in social life and their apparently ahistorical character is re-affirmed by symbolic forms which, in their construction as well as their sheer repetition, eternalize the contingent.³⁷

This is how *The Transformed Wife* “eternalises” the injunction:

God is a patriarchal God. He chose men to be leaders. Jesus was a patriarchal Messiah. He chose men to be His Apostles. Women want to blame many things on our supposed patriarchal culture. The finger points back to God and Jesus. It’s them who they disagree with & rebel against.³⁸

36 Thompson, *Ideology and Culture*, 60.

37 Thompson, 66.

38 Lori Alexander (*The Transformed Wife*), “God is a patriarchal God,” Facebook, July 31, 2002, <https://web.facebook.com/thetransformedwife>.

3.3 Childbearing

1 Timothy 2:12–15	The Transformed Wife ³⁹
<p>12 I do not permit a woman[b] to teach or to have authority over a man;[c] she is to keep silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve, 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 15 Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.</p>	<p>We are told in 1 Timothy 2:15 that women will be saved in childbearing IF they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety. What does this mean?</p> <p>Let’s look at 1 Timothy 5. In this chapter widows are discussed. When young widows are discussed, we learn that there’s a danger that young widows will “wax wanton against Christ.” What does this mean? (Remember, Scripture interprets Scripture.) We are told what this means in verse 13: 1) learn to be idle; 2) wandering about from house to house; 3) tattlers and busybodies; 4) speaking things which they ought not.</p> <p>What is God’s remedy for this? They are to marry, bear children, and guide the home and “give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully” (1 Tim. 5:14).</p> <p>God’s will for young women is to marry, bear children and work hard in their homes as the Proverbs 31 woman did, who was known for “looking well to the ways of her household.” Our bodies were created to bear and nurse children. The act of nursing alone should be enough to convince women that babies need and want their mothers with them fulltime. When women are sacrificially giving their time, energy, and talents to being godly wives, mothers and homemakers, they are fulfilling God’s will for them. Does this alone save them? No!</p>

39 Lori Alexander (The Transformed Wife), “We are told in 1 Timothy 2:15 that women will be saved in childbearing IF they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety,” Facebook, August 16, 2022, <https://web.facebook.com/thetransformedwife>.

	<p>The verse goes on to say “IF they continue in faith...” They must believe in Jesus Christ; for He alone saves us. But our faith must produce fruit or it is a dead faith. This is why charity and sobriety with holiness are added to the verse. If we do not love sacrificially, how can anyone know we’re believers? They know us by our love! Out of our love for and faith in Jesus Christ should flow charity towards others and a life that lives to please our Savior. We are to live sober-minded, holy lives. This is a natural consequence of our love for Christ, what He has done for us, and His transforming power working in and through us!</p> <p><i>Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.</i></p> <p>1 Timothy 2:15</p>
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Verses 13–15 operate through several ideological strategies—it is the culmination of the unit, and moves between rationalisation, legitimation, dissimulation, and unification in both the biblical text and Alexander’s text. In both texts, the legitimacy comes from the authority of Scripture. In the biblical text the Genesis creation narrative is used to legitimate the silencing and subordination of women to men in vv. 11–12. In Alexander’s interpretation, she uses two texts, 1 Timothy 5 and Proverbs 31, to provide an intertextual legitimacy, when she reminds her reader, albeit in parenthesis “Remember, Scripture interprets Scripture.”

Verse 13–14 may be construed through the ideological mode of “dissimulation” by means of the strategy of “displacement.”⁴⁰ According to Thompson:

Ideology *qua* dissimulation may be expressed in symbolic forms by means of a variety of different strategies. One such strategy is *displacement*: a term customarily used to refer to one object or individual is used to refer to another, and thereby the positive or negative connotations of the term are transferred to the other object or individual.⁴¹

40 Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, 62.

41 Thompson, 62.

In this particular instance, the discourse represents Adam (the representative of men) as being created first and thus superior, whereas Eve (the representative of women) is presented as created second and is thus inferior to Adam (v. 13). The text also asserts that Adam was not the one deceived, but rather Eve was deceived and became a sinner and thus was the first person to overstep the boundary of propriety. More important, however, from an ideological perspective using the strategy of “displacement,” is the transfer of positive and negative connotations from one individual to another as previously mentioned. In this instance, the positive connotations of Adam’s priority in the order of creation and thus his superiority over Eve (and all women representatively) as well as the fact that he was not deceived is in a sense ideologically transferred to all men in the Ephesian congregation. And the negative connotations for Eve, that she was created second and is thus inferior to Adam (and all men representatively) and was deceived, is ideologically transferred to all women in the Ephesian congregation, thus creating and sustaining a direct and “systematically asymmetrical” power relation,⁴² comprising male domination and female subordination, between men and women in the Christian community at Ephesus.

Verse 15 may imply a form of “unification”⁴³ in which women are re-integrated into the community (i.e., “But women will be saved”), albeit on disadvantageous terms, because the fragmentation may otherwise have gone too far, leading to the question of why women would be involved in the church if there is no benefit for them. But even so the terms of the benefit are not particularly favourable to women. Clearly, v. 15 offers them a second-class membership.

Alexander, however, reminds her readers in another post that, while the terms may seem disadvantageous, they really are not. She asserts:

Many women have been misled to believe that they only have value if they can have positions of leadership and authority. We’ve been given the privilege of bearing, nursing, and raising children. Their values are misplaced. Nothing is more important than raising the next generation.⁴⁴

Another mode of ideology can be detected in Alexander’s interpretation above. In v. 15, the mode of “dissimulation,”⁴⁵ which is expressed using the ideological strategy of “euphemisation,” is apparent here. This strategy, Thompson explains, is evident when “actions, institutions or social relations are described or redescribed in terms which elicit a positive valuation.”⁴⁶ The relegation and subordination of women to the private,

42 Thompson, 151.

43 Thompson, 64.

44 Lori Alexander (The Transformed Wife), “Many women have been misled to believe that they only have value if they can have positions of leadership and authority,” Facebook, July 31, 2022, <https://web.facebook.com/thetransformedwife>.

45 Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, 62.

46 Thompson, 62.

household sphere of life, to fulfil normative domestic roles such as childbearing, in both the biblical text and Alexander's interpretation, is ideologically euphemised as a positive valuation, namely, a means of piety, and more specifically salvation for women. Alexander emphasises that women who perceive authority and leadership as their goals in life have misunderstood God's will for them.

The rationalisation for women's subordinate roles can also be seen in the unexpected shift from the singular σωθήσεται (she will be saved) to the plural ἐὰν μείνωσιν (if they continue) in v. 15. A variety of opinions have been offered by New Testament scholars to solve this enigmatic shift.⁴⁷ From my survey of the many explanations given by scholars to explain the shifts from plural to singular tenses in reference to both men and women and man and woman, as well as the shifts from past, present, and future tenses throughout the discourse of 1 Timothy 2:8–15, the explanation given by Mounce⁴⁸ seems the most convincing. His position may be summarised as follows.⁴⁹ First, Paul begins by addressing the men and women in Ephesus concerning how they are to pray (v. 8) and dress (vv. 9–10). Second, he states a general principle changing into the singular for woman and man (vv. 11–12). In order to verify this principle with Scripture, Paul shifts to talking about the singular Adam and Eve (vv. 13–14). Finally, in order that his last assertion not be misconstrued, he shifts back to the present tense in making the required qualifications (v. 15). This final shift, however, takes place in two steps. In the first part of the verse, Paul is discussing the singular Eve, σωθήσεται (she will be saved). He is, however, discussing Eve not in isolation but as the representative of the Ephesian women. In the clause ἐὰν μείνωσιν (if they continue), Paul moves to the plural in order to clarify his assertion.⁵⁰ The “they” of Paul's text moved all the way from the Ephesian church into the twenty-first century, as can be seen from Alexander's interpretation offered in Figures 2 to 5 below:

47 Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, 202; W. D. Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc, 2000), 143.

48 Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles*, 143.

49 Mounce, 143.

50. Mounce, 143.



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

4. Conclusion

In this article, I have shown how the discourse of 1 Timothy 2:8–15 has tendentiously been appropriated in contemporary contexts (such as the “Transformed Wife” franchise) to justify the subordination of women to men. While this contemporary appropriation is promoted via several ideological strategies, including claims to divine legitimacy, reading for ideological texture within the text itself unearths similar, if not the same, strategies. The method of (con)texturing that I proposed in this article, which juxtaposes the ideological strategies of ancient and contemporary gendered narratives, helps expose the subtle manipulation involved in promoting misogyny.

The three aspects of modesty, authority, and childbearing examined in the article show up in various contemporary settings, not least of all the backlash on reproductive freedoms most recently felt in the overturning of the landmark *Roe v. Wade* case in the United States. The fact that the constitutional right to terminate pregnancy was taken away from women in many states shows the extent and reach of pernicious interpretations of biblical theology. This backlash has been gaining momentum for some time both in the United States and in South Africa, through organisations such as the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, the Worthy Women's Movement, and the Mighty Men's Conference. These movements assert that 1 Tim 2 implies that the directive for gendered hierarchy is not subject to historical or narrative context—it is a divine mandate for all generations. The health and economic impacts of these beliefs are felt most acutely by Black women who are disproportionately disadvantaged.

Unravelling the rhetorical strategies of the text and context through (con)texturing lays bare the ideological posturing founded on cultural and (racial) gender norms. This unravelling and revelation provides one way of productively confronting the patriarchal intentions of those who seek to lay claim to divine authority, derived from cunning ideological manoeuvrings of the text and context.

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