

## **Saved in Childbearing**

### **I Timothy 2:8-15 and the Artemis Cult**

I desire therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel with propriety and moderation - not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. **Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless, she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control** (I Timothy 2:8-15).

I Timothy 2:8-15 has been misapplied as a universal law for the church. However, the main purpose of Paul's first letter to Timothy was to correct false doctrines that pervaded Ephesus: **Just as I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, to remain on at Ephesus so that you would instruct certain people not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to useless speculation rather than advance the plan of God, which is by faith, so I urge you now** (I Timothy 1:3-4). This is the mandate of Paul's first letter to Timothy.

Why does Paul mention women being saved in childbirth? The Greek word for *saved* here is *sozo* (STRONG'S G4982). It is translated in the New Testament as *saved, healed, delivered, made whole, or preserved*. Do women get saved by childbirth? Is there a separate gospel for women? Isn't salvation by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9)? Isn't it by repentance of sin and faith in Jesus (Mark 1:15)? The cultural background in Ephesus holds the answer.

Ephesus was dominated by the cult of the Greek goddess Artemis<sup>1</sup>. The goddess was honored at almost one hundred cultic sites throughout the Mediterranean, but Ephesus was the center of Artemis worship. She was the protector and leader of Ephesus, and one of her names was "savior". The imposing monument of the city's devotion was the colossal Artemis temple, a massive marble structure built on a foundation of 98,000 square feet. The temple is one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

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1) Primary credit for the historic background of the Artemis cult goes to Dr. Frank Ames' "Interpreting Paul's Instructions in I Timothy" (see references).

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At the time of Paul, Artemis was the goddess of midwifery and childbirth<sup>2</sup>. Her primary supposed benefit was protection in childbirth, which was the number one cause of death for women at the time. Artemis worship dominated Ephesus and brought in a major part of the city's business and money (Acts 19:24-25). It also had a large Jewish colony and housed a Jewish synagogue (Acts 19:17).

When Paul was in Ephesus for two years, he strongly collided with the Artemis cult as reported in Acts 19:23-41. Some Bibles, such as the KJV and the NKJV, translate the goddess Artemis as Diana, which is the Latin name for Artemis. Other translations, such as the NIV and the NASB, render the goddess by her Greek name, Artemis. No matter the translation, the goddess Diana is Artemis.

Because of Paul's ministry, a large number of Ephesians had left the Artemis cult and become Christians. The Ephesian businessmen were losing substantial money. Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought the related trades together and started an uproar: **Not only is there danger that this trade of ours will fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be regarded as worthless, and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence. When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"** Soon, the whole city was in an uproar. (Acts 19:27-29)

The upheaval turned into a riot, which led the city clerk to become involved: **The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Fellow Ephesians, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess."** (Acts 19:35-37) This event shows the magnitude and influence of Artemis worship in Ephesus and its major impact on commerce. After this incident, Paul left Ephesus and traveled to Macedonia.

Artemis was a confirmed virgin, and her female priestesses were committed to virginity. Marriage ended their time of service in the temple. Consequently, there were many

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2) According to Dr. Sandra Glahn, the goddess Artemis at the time of Paul was neither a mother goddess nor a fertility goddess. There is also no reference to ritual temple prostitution in that period, differing from earlier and later periods. Dr. Glahn analyzed literary sources, inscriptions, coins, and the local architecture between 100 BC and 100 AD to identify who Artemis was in Paul's time (see references).

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virgins in Ephesus. The Greek word for widow could be an actual widow or refer to a virgin<sup>3</sup>. This is why Paul keeps speaking about **widows who are actually widows** (I Timothy 5:3; I Timothy 5:5; I Timothy 5:16). It is also the reason why Paul instructs the younger widows to get married, have children, and manage their households (I Timothy 5:14). These were not genuine widows but virgins who had previously pledged virginity in the Artemis cult (I Timothy 5:12).

Numerous men and women came to Jesus out of the Artemis cult. The Ephesian Christians had either previously worshipped Artemis themselves or were heavily influenced by the cult. They were drenched in false doctrine and idolatrous practices, including the superiority and dominance of women over men. The spiritual battle between Christianity and the Artemis cult was so severe that Paul said, "I fought wild beasts in Ephesus" (I Corinthians 15:32). Given this local scenario, Paul writes a personal letter to Timothy. His letter is almost a line-by-line refutation of false Artemis doctrine.

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3) One church father referred to "the widows who are virgins" (Artemis, Ephesus, and the Background to I Timothy 2, Dr. Sandra Glahn).

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### Analysis of I Timothy 2:5-18

Scripture	Bible Verse (NIV)	False Artemis Doctrine
<b>I Timothy 2:5</b>	For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.	Artemis is the goddess and the only savior.
<b>I Timothy 2:13</b>	For Adam was formed first, then Eve.	The Artemis cult taught that women were created first. Supposedly, Zeus and Leto had twins, and Artemis was born first before Apollos.
<b>I Timothy 2:14</b>	And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.	The Artemis religion claimed that women were superior to men.
<b>I Timothy 2:12</b>	I do not permit a woman ... to assume authority over a man.	The Artemis religion was a female-centered cult used to dominating men.
<b>I Timothy 2:15</b>	But women will be saved through childbearing - if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with propriety.	Artemis was the goddess of midwifery and childbirth. Women throughout the ancient world turned to Artemis for protection during childbirth, which was the number one cause of death for women.
<b>I Timothy 2:9-10</b>	I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.	It was common practice for women to braid their hair with gold and pearls when they prayed to Artemis. They also wore elaborate, expensive clothes.
<b>I Timothy 2:8</b>	I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.	When praying to Artemis, the men raised their hands only slightly above waist level and turned their palms up.

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In essence, Paul is instructing Timothy to correct the false Artemis doctrines and practices and gives him all the arguments. Rather than preaching male preeminence, he corrects a false creation story (1 Timothy 2:13), a false view of woman's superiority (1 Timothy 2:14), and a false hope in Artemis as a protector in childbirth (1 Timothy 2:15).

The average woman in Ephesus was terrified of childbirth. Artemis was the goddess of midwifery and promised protection in childbirth. This was one of her greatest supposed benefits for her followers. Turning away from Artemis was taking away the comfort they placed in the goddess. That is why Paul reassures women that they will be preserved through childbirth by faith in Jesus. The best translation for *sozo* (saved) here is *preserved* (in the natural), not saved (in the spiritual). Paul was targeting the greatest fear ancient women had.

At least one woman who had come out of the Artemis cult was teaching false doctrines in the Ephesian church (1 Timothy 2:12). Not only was she teaching falsely, she was also trying to dominate men (1 Timothy 2:12). The Greek word translated as *to exercise authority over* here is *authentein* (STRONGS G831). *Authentein* is derived from the Greek word *authenteo*. It is a word found only once in the Greek New Testament, namely here in 1 Timothy 2:12. This word means much more than to rule or to exercise authority over someone. Rather, the sense is *to control, to restrain, and to dominate*. According to STRONGS and other translators, it can mean *to exercise authority over; to govern, to dominate, to have mastery over; to act self-appointed, to have full power or authority over; or to commit a murder*. This attitude came from the Artemis cult that elevated women over men. Such women needed to stop teaching falsely, stop dominating men, and quietly learn the truth (1 Timothy 2:11-12), which is the proper attitude of anyone who wants to learn.

The problem was not that a woman was teaching. The problem was that the woman was teaching false Artemis doctrine and trying to dominate men. Paul imposed the same request for silence on men who taught falsely: *For there are many rebellious people, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of dishonest gain* (Titus 1:10-11, NASB).

However, Paul's command that this woman must not currently teach contains a revolutionary redemptive element. Paul's instruction to allow her to learn was contrary to first-century practices where women were regarded as inferior to men: women were generally uneducated, Jewish women were not allowed to study the scriptures in-depth,

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and a woman's testimony was not accepted in court.

His instruction to have the woman learn is in line with his command to Timothy to **teach reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2)**. The NKJV translates **people** as **men**, but the Greek word is **anthrōpos** (STRONG'S G444), which means human beings, not men only. Paul told Timothy to train faithful men and women who could, in turn, teach others. He did not exclude the **I Timothy 2:8-15** woman.

Artemis beliefs and practices are foreign to us, but they were familiar to those living in Ephesus at the time. Taking verses out of context is not accurately handling the word of truth (**2 Timothy 2:15**). Scripture must be understood as a whole and within its proper context. Restricting or even silencing women based on **I Timothy 2:8-15** is a misapplication of Paul's letter to Timothy. Paul is not issuing a universal command for the New Testament Church. He is correcting the false doctrines that pervaded Ephesus.

The Church today must affirm that men and women co-labor in the gospel. The normative verses concerning the New Testament say so, and New Testament practice proves it. However, this is only the start. The real issue is the discernment of whether a person brings the word of the Lord in the Spirit of the Lord or not - be it a man, a woman, or a child.

Dr. Annette Brians, June 2025

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