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## Episode 4. 1 Timothy 2:8-10 Who Went Astray? by Bruce C. E. Fleming

### Intro:

Welcome to **The Eden Podcast** where we think again about the Bible on women and men and we start with a correct understanding of what happened in the Garden of Eden back in the beginning.

I'm Bruce C. E. Fleming, founder of the Tru316 Project and a former Academic Dean and Professor of Practical Theology.

### The focus of this episode is:

#### 1 Timothy 2:8-10 Who Went Astray?

**Alright! What's going on here?** When you were a kid did you ever have an adult shout something like that in your direction? Then the adult has to figure out who to blame. Often the one who *started* acting wrong *stops* just before the adult arrives. And the wrong ones get blamed.

In the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy, Paul has left Timothy in the city of Ephesus to correct certain overseers in the church who had gone astray. They were teaching the wrong *things* and they were teaching them in the wrong *way*. Centuries later, we arrive, reading 1 Timothy and we want to know who is to blame? Just *who* was teaching incorrectly? Just *what* were they doing that was off limits? And most people end up blaming the wrong ones.

How can we correct this? How can we identify who was being blamed by Paul? Who needed correcting?

It is always best to trust the Bible. When things seem foggy and unclear to us, a closer look is in order. I've found the *details* sort themselves out when we get the *facts* straight. The details become clear when we read them in the *context* of the teaching passage in which they are located.

This is true for the problems people *think* they have with Genesis 3:16. People hate to admit it, but when they read their modern translations of the Bible of Genesis 3:16 they end up with a sour taste in their mouth. Sour, because God seems unfair in the way the woman is treated in the Garden. God appears to curse her body in some way. God appears to place the rebellious man who sinned on purpose and incorrectly blamed the woman in charge of her.

But we can trust the Bible. The *apparent* injustice on two counts goes away when we get the facts straight. The details become clear when we read them in the context of the teaching passage in which they are located. In the original Hebrew words of Genesis 3:16, God *didn't* curse Eve or limit woman in any way.

God didn't curse her body. God didn't put the follower of the serpent, the man, in charge of her. The details of what happened in Genesis 3:16 are in our book, **The Book of Eden, Genesis 2-3**. It is a compilation of the first *eight episodes* of **The Eden Podcast**. So, whether you get the book, or listen to Season One of the podcast, you can find the details and get the refreshing clarity of God's words there.

What about the details in 1 Timothy 2? Chapter 2 verse 8 doesn't say what you think it says. At least not in the Greek text. And this becomes easy to recognize when we don't take verse 8 as part of the previous verses 1 through 7. Verse 8 is not about prayer for the persecutors-of-the-Christians like the previous verses are.

**Two kinds of disrupters (1 Timothy 2:8-3:16)**. So the subject becomes how to deal with the overseers who have gone astray in their teaching and have been disrupting the church.

*Some of the men* overseers were creating doubting and disputing by their error-filled praying and preaching in church. *Likewise, some of the women* overseers had gone astray. Both groups needed a period of retraining before resuming their service as overseers.

Like Paul, there was hope for these men and women. Apparently, many of them were second-degree sinners. They hadn't sinned on purpose. They had been deceived like Eve, and like Paul. Jesus, the faithful Word could restore them.

Some of the false teachers were first-degree rebels and liars. They just needed to be stopped.

**Correcting disrupters**. The twenty three verses in section three, 1 Timothy 2:8-3:16, are not about men praying in general, nor are they about women sinning somehow. Paul gives Timothy detailed instructions for correcting the wayward overseers, both men and women, described in 1 Timothy 1:3: "... command certain ones not to *teach* false doctrines ...."

The *Greek* of this verse early in 1 Timothy is *inclusive* of both men and women teachers in the church. Because Paul's introductory words about the false teachers in the church are not *exclusive* to men only, when we get to 1 Timothy chapter 2 and we encounter the details about the false teachers in the church we should be looking inclusively too. We should be expecting both men and women teachers to be involved.

Using a rainbow pattern, or a large chiasm, Paul addresses the *men* in 1 Timothy 2:8. He addresses the *women* starting in 2:9. The turning point of the pattern is located in 3:1. Then Paul speaks about *both* the men and women at the same time in 1 Timothy 3:1-10. He winds down the rainbow pattern speaking about *women* in 3:11 and then the *men* in 3:12-13.

Thus the pattern is a mirror parallel:

A-men, B-women, C-both men and women, B'-women and A'-men

**2:8 - Correcting the group of men overseers who taught errors**

**2:9-15 - Correcting the group of women overseers who taught errors**  
**3:1-10 - First the key idea and then advice for both women and men in ministry**  
**3:11 - About faithful women deacons**  
**3:12-13 - About faithful men deacons**

Had you noticed this pattern before? It is a pattern typical of Paul's writing and it helps us to understand the development of his thoughts and to focus on the main points of the whole passage.

**Overseers.** There were disrupters among the overseers in the church. These were the pastors, the leaders, the teachers in the churches in and around Ephesus! Paul doesn't use their *title* or *name* their role in the church from 2:8 all the way down till 3:1. *Then* he refers to them by the general title of *overseers*.

This delay in using the word "overseers" until farther into the passage is not an unusual practice. It follows a pattern from the Old Testament where additional details are only revealed as a passage unfolds.

Take for example what happens just as the people of Israel finish crossing the Red Sea and step safely on shore on the other side of the land of Egypt away from her remaining armies. At first, the focus is on Moses alone. Then it becomes clear that Moses is not alone but is with his sister. Miriam is right there with her brother leading the people in their worship of God who just saved them in a mighty way (Exodus 15).

In 1 Timothy 3:1, Paul speaks of "anyone," the Greek pronoun is *tis*, anyone who aspires to oversight. "Anyone" does not mean "everyone." It refers above all to the men and women of 2:8-15. They are the immediate antecedent to the pronoun in 3:1.

Paul then describes the characteristics of acceptable overseers in 1 Timothy 3:2-7. Those who serve as overseers in the church must be above reproach and be able to teach, among other things.

Now, let's look at Paul's advice in 1 Timothy 2:8. Paul divides his thoughts to focus on *some men* in verse 8 and on *some women* in verses 9 and following.

**About those men.** 1 Timothy 2:8 is not a nice little verse about people in general praying around the world. What should tip us off are the comments at the end of the verse about "anger" and "disputing."

How often are people angry and how often do disputes break out after *prayer* meetings where you are? Not often? Never? Is this verse not applicable in your situation? No. It likely is not. It applied to the situation in Ephesus. And would apply in similar situations down through time.

What was the situation? For one thing it didn't apply to prayer meetings in scattered locations. Paul was thinking of the worship and preaching service in the local church on Sunday.

There are key words in the verse that describe the situation. These are the Greek words for "I wish," "in every place," the verb "to pray" and the issue of "holy hands."

**In church.** Paul begins verse 8 with a command. He says, "I want" or "I wish." For Timothy, Paul's wish was his command. Paul tells Timothy what he wants done in church. He uses three words in Greek to say this. They are "in every place." With this three-word Greek phrase he is not referring to "everywhere" nor to "all over the world."

To the Jews in Paul's day, the Holy "place" was the Temple in Jerusalem. Each local synagogue was the "place" where Jews gathered to worship and to learn. To the Christian Jews and to all believers in the early church, "the place" meant "the place where the church worships." "In every *place*" meant "every *place* a local church worships."

C. K. Barrett explains this in his commentary (Oxford, p. 54), in this way, "... in *Jewish* usage 'place' meant 'meeting-place,' 'place of prayer,' and there is evidence (especially in 1 Corinthians 1:2 and 1 Thessalonians 1:8) that it became Christian usage too. The author means 'in every Christian meeting-place.'"

The three Greek words "in every place" means "in church." "In every place" means in every local church, in every house church in the great city of Ephesus. These men were among the overseers in every church.

**To pray.** These two words from 1 Timothy 2:8 are a condensed way to describe the activity of an overseer during worship. Naming this one activity is way to indicate two activities engaged in by overseers. The complete phrase as spelled out elsewhere is "leading in prayer and in preaching" (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:4-5).

When I was in seminary, I learned that a *sermon* was only worthy of its name *if*, when I was speaking before the assembly, I prophesied and *spoke forth* the words of God as they were found in the Bible. Any stringing together of mere human opinions-and-anecdotes counted for nothing more than an "after-dinner speech"!

When the church in Ephesus gathered together, the believers worshipped, prayed and preached the Word of God. This "praying" "in every place" in verse 8 could be paraphrased as follows:

"When you are worshipping-and-teaching in church..."

**Holy hands.** In verse 2:8 Paul states he wants these men to have "*holy* hands." Apparently *this* was not the case. This implied they lifted up unholy hands. Perhaps this was the unholy result of immorality.

Now let's put together these three elements for the men targeted by Paul for Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:8: (1) in every place, (2) praying and (3) with holy hands.

Obviously not all, but some of the men among the overseers have been *teaching* the congregation *false* doctrines and have been incorrectly leading worship. Their actions are disrupting the church. Their false and controversial teaching has been provoking angry disputes. Paul wants this to stop!

Whatever the precise nature of their sins the *result* of their preaching, teaching and leading worship has been anger and disputes. With this being the case, there is to be no more preaching and teaching of disruptive doctrines by these disreputable men in open worship. Paul will give further instructions to Timothy about how to restore these men to service later in 1 Timothy 3.

**Some women.** What about some of the women overseers? In his next sentence, in verse 9, Paul begins with the Greek word "likewise." And then he uses no verb. When this happens in Greek we are to look back to the verb in the previous sentence and use it in this one. What is the verb we are to use in verse 9? It is the verb "I wish."

Regarding the men, Paul gave an authoritative command to Timothy, I wish for the men to pray and prophesy correctly. He does the same *likewise* for the women. Timothy, I wish for the women to pray and prophesy correctly.

Verse 8 is aimed not at all *men*, nor all the men *overseers*. It applies to the men overseers who are praying and preaching incorrectly. Because it starts with the word "*Likewise*," we can assume verse 9 *is aimed not* at all *women*, nor at *all* the women overseers. It applies to the women overseers who are praying and preaching incorrectly.

**Right, wrong, right.** Paul describes the characteristics of faithful women overseers in the first half of verse 9 and in verse 10. He contrasts these with the improper behavior of the wayward women overseers in the second half of verse 9, or 9b.

Paul's well-known co-worker Priscilla, a founder and teacher in the church at Ephesus, would have been a woman among the faithful overseers (Acts 18). Paul lists five positive characteristics of the *faithful* women overseers in the church in Ephesus. These five characteristics would have applied to her. According to verse 9a these women wore orderly clothing, were modest and were serious. According to verse 10 they were professing godliness and good works.

The Greek action listed in 2:10 is "professing" godliness with good works. I remember observing how in French, our professors were described as "professing" their lessons to us. In Ephesus, the *faithful women overseers professed* godliness with good works. The word "godliness" used here is related to the word used in 2:2. *But* some of them had wandered away from good teaching and good works.

If you were a translator, and a translator is also an interpreter of the Bible, what would you think of this verb “professing?”

After I had seen professors in France *professing* their lectures to us, I leaned more toward the idea that these women were professing what we today would call their Sunday messages in church. Isn't that who Timothy was to correct in Ephesus? Wasn't that the job he was given to do with all the false *teachers* back in verse 3 of chapter 1?

People with certain presuppositions assume that 1 Timothy 1:3 is for men only. But the pronoun used is inclusive of men and women. These same people come to verse 10 and assume that the women can not be preaching *like* the men of verse 8.

Now compare what we have just seen in verse 10 in Greek with popular English versions today. Somehow extraneous elements sneak in, as you will notice.

New International Version:

... with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

New Living Translation:

... women who *claim* to be *devoted* to God should *make themselves attractive* by the good things they do.

New American Standard Bible:

... by means of good works, as is proper for women *making a claim* to godliness.

Holman Christian Standard Bible:

... with good works, as is proper for women who *affirm* that they *worship* God.

Contemporary English Version:

Women who *claim* to *love* God should do helpful things for others,

We're in a passage that is torn here and there by presuppositions that the words must mean one thing, even though they clearly say another thing.

And it gets worse in the verses yet to come. If we keep clearly in mind Paul's reason for writing to Timothy and the step by step of Paul's march through the people who had committed the same or similar ones to his own three sins we can keep on track. We can arrive at a true understanding of this portion of the Bible just as we arrived at a true reading of Genesis 3:16, back in the beginning.

**Tendencies toward clericalism.** In many churches, throughout the centuries and down to the present day, people have felt it necessary to reserve a *special chair* in the meeting room for the overseers. They refer to overseers with a *special title*, such as “the Reverend,” “Bishop” or even “Senior Pastor.” And most overseers have accepted the special chairs and titles offered them!

Following this mindset, a person might logically expect the discussion on correcting the wayward overseers in Ephesus in 2:8-15 to stand out more clearly than it does. It has been wrongly assumed that these verses can't really be a discussion about male and female overseers in the church, but somehow are about *all* men and *all* women.

However, in 3:1, Paul uses the generic Greek pronoun "anyone" (*tis*) to stand for *those who aspire to oversight*. Those referred to by this pronoun are the *women* of 2:9-15 and the *men* of 2:8.

So why doesn't Paul refer to the men and the women of 1 Timothy 2 as "overseers"? He does. Paul says it in a perfectly acceptable way. Using a typically Jewish way of storytelling, he does not refer to all the elements under consideration until he gets to the heart of his argument.

In the Old Testament each and every detail in a story or a lesson is not given at the first mention of a subject. Various elements are introduced along the way until all are mentioned in the grand summation.

Paul's identification of the injurious ones Timothy is correcting and his word of encouragement for those who successfully pass their discipline is saved until 3:1. Then Paul says that "*anyone (tis) who aspires to oversight desires a good work.*"

As he describes them in 1 Timothy 3:2-7, those who oversee the church must be above reproach and must be able to teach, among other things. From this group of overseers came the *false* teachers whom Timothy was to correct.