

In 1 Timothy 2:12, is *authenteō* used in a negative sense?

THE CLAIM

‘Does *authentein* mean “have authority over”, or “dominate” in an undesirable manner?’¹

‘There is disagreement among scholars as to the meaning of the word *authentein* which occurs only here in the New Testament. Suggested translations are “have authority” in a good sense, or “dominate” in a bad sense.’²

‘Other writers continue to maintain the word has a negative meaning. I. H. Marshall, The Pastoral Epistles (1999), writes: “Ideas such as autocratic or domineering abuses of power and authority appear to be more naturally linked with the verb in view of the cognate nouns *authentēs* and *authenteia*”.

Bruce W. Winter (2003)⁶⁷ concludes his discussion on *authentein*: “... it seems that here the term carries not only the connotation of authority but also an inappropriate misuse of it.”⁶⁸ In view of the authority which Paul elsewhere considers acceptable for sisters such as his fellow workers (1 Corinthians 16:16), it seems reasonable to think that the word

authentein bears the meaning of exercising a dominating and therefore undesirable influence or authority.’³

THE FACTS

English Bible translations over the years have been generally in agreement when rendering the word *authenteō* in 1 Timothy 2:12:

- CEV: ‘tell men **what to do**’
- GNB: ‘**have authority over** men’
- KV: ‘**usurp authority over** the man’
- NASB: ‘**exercise authority over** a man’
- NET: ‘**exercise authority over** a man’
- NIV: ‘**have authority over** a man’
- NLT: ‘**have authority over** them’
- RSV: ‘**have authority over** men’

Given the substantial agreement among these representative translations (from archaic to modern, formal equivalence to paraphrase), the average Bible student would wonder why such a disagreement exists over this word within the scholarly world.

In fact, the meaning of the word was not seriously disputed until 1979, when Catherine Kroeger (then a university classics student), asserted the meaning ‘to engage in fertility practices’. Although the claim was rejected by the scholarly consensus, debate over the meaning of the word had been opened, and Christians affirming an egalitarian view of the role of women in the church continued to contest the meaning of the word *authenteō*.

LEXICON ENTRIES

Over 30 years of dispute over the meaning of *authenteō* has had little to no effect on the scholarly consensus. Within the lexical community there is no controversy over the lexical range of this word, and none of the standard lexicons have accepted the novel definitions suggested by egalitarians such as Catherine Kroeger, though the well recognized sense ‘domineer’ has been proposed as appropriate to 1 Timothy 2:12.

‘αὐθεντέω strictly, of one who acts on his own authority; hence have control over, domineer, lord it over (1T 2.12).’⁴

‘...to assume a stance of independent authority, give orders to, dictate to w. gen. of pers. (Ptolem., Apotel. 3, 14, 10 Boll-B.; Cat. Cod. Astr. VIII/1 p. 177, 7; B-D-F §177) ἀνδρός, w. διδάσκειν, 1 Ti 2:12 (practically = ‘tell a man what to do’ [Jerusalem Bible]).’⁵

‘αὐθεντέω *authenteō* rule (vb.)* 1 Tim 2:12: women should not rule over men (gen.).’⁶

‘37.21 αὐθεντέω: to control in a domineering manner—to control, to

⁴ Friberg, Friberg, & Miller ‘Analytical lexicon of the Greek New Testament’, volume 4, p. 81 (2000).

⁵ Arndt, Danker, & Bauer, ‘A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature’, p. 150 (3rd ed., 2000).

⁶ Balz & Schneider, ‘Exegetical dictionary of the New Testament. Translation of: Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testamen’, volume 1, p. 178 (1990-c1993).

¹ ‘All One’, p. 85 (March 2009).

² Ibid., p. 95.

³ Ibid., pp. 96-97.

domineer. γυναικὶ οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω ... αὐθεντεῖν ἄνδρος **‘I do not allow women ... to dominate men’ 1 Tm 2.12.**⁷

‘authent-eō , A. **to have full power or authority over**, tinos **I Ep.Ti.2.12...**’⁸

‘αὐθεντέω domineer, **have authority over.**’⁹

‘883 αὐθεντέω (authenteō): vb.; ≡ Str 831—LN 37.21 **control, have authority over** (1Ti 2:12+).’¹⁰

‘... **one acting by his own authority or power.** Governing a gen., **to use or exercise authority or power over as an autocrat, to domineer** (1 Tim. 2:12).’¹¹

PAPYRI

Two early papyri using the word *authenteō*, Papyrus BGU 1208 (c.27 BC), and Papyrus Tebtunis 15 (c.100AD), are significant not only because they are close in time to Paul’s own

⁷ Louw & Nida, ‘*Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains*’, volume 1, p. 473 (2nd ed. 1989).

⁸ Liddell, Scott, & Jones, ‘*A Greek-English Lexicon*’, p.275 (rev. and augm. throughout, electronic ed., 9th ed. with supplement, 1996); note reference to the meaning ‘murder’, which was obsolete by the 1st century AD.

⁹ Newman, ‘*Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*’, p. 28 (1993).

¹⁰ Swanson, ‘*Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*’, DBLG 883 (2nd ed. 2001).

¹¹ Zodhiates, ‘*The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*’, G831 (electronic ed., 2000).

usage of *authenteō*, but also because they both use *authenteō* with a sense which is in agreement with recent studies by Baldwin,¹² and Wolters.¹³ The Tebtunis papyrus in particular indicates a usage which cannot mean ‘usurp authority’, ‘domineer’, or any negative connotation, as it refers to bookkeepers having authority over their accounts, and it makes no sense to speak of them ‘dominating’ accounting records.

CONTEXTUAL SYNTAX STUDY

The lexical data was later supplemented by a large scale contextual syntax study of the passage by Andreas Köstenberger in 1995,¹⁴ who argued that the neither/nor construction used in ***ouk** didaskein **oude** authentein* (‘**neither** teach **nor** have/exercise authority’), requires that both *didaskein* and *authentein* have a positive or negative sense. Köstenberger concluded that like the verbs in Luke 12:24 (‘neither sow nor harvest’), and Acts 4:18 (‘neither speak nor teach’), teaching has a positive meaning in such passages as 1 Timothy 4:11; 6:2, and 2 Timothy 2:2.¹⁵

¹² Köstenberger, Schreiner, and Baldwin, eds., ‘*Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*’, (1995).

¹³ Wolters, ‘A Semantic Study of αὐθεντης and its Derivatives’, *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (11.1.54), 2006; originally published in *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* (1.145-175), 2000.

¹⁴ Köstenberger, ‘*Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*’, (1995).

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 315.

This would therefore mean that *authenteo* has a positive meaning, and does not refer to domineering but the positive exercise of authority. The majority of both complementarian and egalitarian scholars agreed with Köstenberger’s study. Many consider that the contextual meaning of *authenteō* in 1 Timothy 2:12 has been decided conclusively by Köstenberger.

Among the egalitarians supporting Köstenberger’s study, Kevin Giles ‘finds himself in essential agreement with the present syntactical analysis of 1 Tim 2:12’.¹⁶

Craig Blomberg, ‘**Decisively supporting the more positive sense** of assuming appropriate authority is Andreas Köstenberger’s study’.¹⁷

Esther Ng, ‘However, since a negative connotation of didaskein is unlikely in this verse (see below), the neutral meaning for authentein (to have authority over) seems to **fit the oude construction better**’.¹⁸

Judith Hartenstein, ‘Köstenberger shows through a syntactical study that 1 Tim 2:12 **forbids women to teach and to have authority over men, not only to abuse authority**’.¹⁹

(Jonathan Burke, 2009)

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 48-49; Giles suggests however that Paul may have broken this grammatical rule in 1 Timothy 2:12.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 49.