

1 Timothy 2:12–15—When Gender and Pronouns Matter

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Text¹

¹¹ Let a woman learn in silence, in all submission. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach nor to exercise authority over a man, rather to be in silence. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived came into transgression; ¹⁵ but she will be saved through the Childbirth, [and they will be saved] if they remain in faith, love, holiness, with self-control.

Introduction

Covering 1 Timothy 2:11–15 at an LCMS circuit Winkel could be seen as a prime example of a misogyny echo chamber in action and the ultimate act of self-service. There is certainly a correlation between this text and the Preaching Office: who is to preach, who is to hear. There is, of course, the currently unpopular biblical position about gender roles and vocations, which is contrary to the prevailing worldview of gender nihilism. While some of these issues will be discussed in the following paper, the lion’s share of the paper will revolve around 1 Timothy 2:13–15 in general and 1 Timothy 2:15 in particular. This will drive us to see how the New Testament authors use the Old Testament, which alleviates some of the pressure that puts this passage into the “Bible Difficulties” category. Doing this, however, as shall be pondered but not solved, may open the door to some “Confessional Difficulties” when considering *quia*

¹ Author’s translation.

subscription to the Book of Concord while, at the same time, faithfully maintaining the *sola Scriptura* principle.

Context

Preceding

Paul begins his letter by warning about false teachers (1 Tim 1:2–7) and those for whom God’s Word of Law is intended (1 Tim 1:8–11). Paul continues by speaking about his being a chosen minister, though former blasphemer (1 Tim 1:12–17), and he exhorts Timothy (1 Tim 1:18–20) to remain faithful, citing unfaithful Hymenaeus and Alexander who “made shipwreck of their faith.” (1 Tim 1:19 ESV) Paul continues by talking about prayer (1 Tim 2:1–3) and preaching of the Gospel (1 Tim 2:3–7). He continues with directions about prayer for men and women and the latter’s conduct (1 Tim 2:8–10).

Succeeding

Following our text in question, Paul discusses the qualifications for preachers: for bishops (1 Tim 3:1–7) and for deacons (1 Tim 3:8–13) respectively.² In 1 Timothy 3:14–16, Paul concludes with the confession of “the great...mystery of godliness.” (1 Tim 3:16 ESV) In 1 Timothy 4:1–5, Paul warns about those ministers who depart from this confession, and he exhorts Timothy (1 Tim 4:6–16) to stand firm in its confession and teaching, for “by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” (1 Tim 4:16 ESV)

Conclusions

The general themes of 1 Timothy 2:12–15 fit well within this greater context. The topics about proper preachers and faithful preachers is prevalent throughout the preceding and

² More ink could definitely be spilled on this topic.

succeeding context. The topic about the role of women is actually a minor one in Paul's overall thought. If we were to do theology by number of verses, the following calculation results: 1 Timothy 2:9–15 (seven verses) within all of 1 Timothy 1—4 (sixty-seven verses). As it stands, however, the tectonic shifts of our modern theological landscape has converted a molehill into a mountain.

Commentary

2:11—Let a woman learn in silence, in all submission.
2:12—I do not permit a woman to teach nor to exercise authority over a man, rather to be in silence.

1 Timothy 2:11–12 ought to be considered together. This passage, along with its meaning, is abundantly clear. There is no equivocation here, and there is no way of escape that allows for side-stepping what Paul says. Paul gets to his point positively (“let a woman learn...”) and negatively (“I do not permit...”) in these verses. He does not want to be misunderstood, thus he inspired to speak both what should be believed, taught, and confessed and what should be rejected—both revolve around who should do the teaching. It is clear that women ought not assume the office of preaching (Predigamt, AC V, German text) or “teaching” (AC V, Latin text) the Gospel. “If the present prohibition is restricted to public teaching (as seems most probable) it accords perfectly with [1 Corinthians 14:34–35].”³ Paul is best understood as his own interpreter.

These two verses, as the church has now classified them, clearly parallel one another. “διδάσκειν, ‘to teach’ (v12a), contrasts specifically with μανθανέτω, ‘should learn’ (v 11a); the woman is to learn, not to teach.”⁴ The parallel nature is also emphasized by Paul’s use of “in

³ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary* in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 84.

⁴ William D. Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 46: Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 117.

quietness” ($\text{ἐν } \eta\sigma\upsilon\chi\eta\eta$) as an *inclusio* to emphasize the manner of the woman’s learning and not teaching.⁵ Quietness and submission are not bad qualities. In fact, Christ and the Apostles often emphasize humility.⁶ “While this way of learning may not characterize much of current American education, it has done so in the past and was characteristic of ancient rabbinic instruction.”⁷ “For a woman to teach in church, he suggests, is tantamount to her wielding authority over a man, i.e. domineering, or laying down the law to him; and this, he implies, is contrary to the natural order.”⁸ Verse 12 “backs up the positive injunction of v. 11 (‘a woman [wife] should learn’) by issuing a clarifying prohibition.”⁹

Modern commentators are quick in their attempts to soften Paul’s apostolic injunction by citing examples of his commending women in his letters (e.g., Rom 16:1–3) or the cryptic example of Junia (Rom 16:7) or Priscilla privately correcting Apollos (Acts 18:26).¹⁰ Mounce and Towner—the former much more than that latter—slog through many arguments that attempt to take Paul out at the knees. Some of the arguments Mounce and Towner address get into some deep weeds, but touching on them is helpful.

We do hold to the historical-grammatical method of interpretation, and that means we must take up the grammar. When we do we are not merely getting a refresher in English or Greek grammar, depending on our own individual gifts and abilities (1 Cor 12), but we are instead

⁵ Mounce., 117–118.

⁶ e.g., Mt 18:4, 20:2; Eph 4:2; Phil 2; Col 3:12; 1 Pet 5:6

⁷ Mounce, 118.

⁸ J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* in *Harper’s New Testament Commentaries* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), 68.

⁹ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 216.

¹⁰ Towner, *Letters*, 218ff; Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles*, 86ff.

learning the grammar of Holy Spirit who uses Paul to deliver the truth of Christ to us. Words matter; tenses matter—not as some academic flex, but as a Spirit-used tool “to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” (Titus 1:9) For the sake of brevity, we will briefly consider the arguments that revolve around Paul saying “I” in his command, his use of “I permit” ($\dot{\epsilon}\pi\iota\tau\rho\acute{e}\pi\omega$), and using that verb in the present tense rather than another.

When Paul says, “I,” it does carry full apostolic authority. This is not his personal opinion about things. When he wishes to make his opinion known, Paul does so (e.g., 1 Cor 7). “Paul uses ‘I’ throughout his writings, often speaking with absolute authority.”¹¹ Of Mounce’s examples, Romans 8:38ff.¹² and 1 Corinthians 13:1–3¹³ are the most striking. Who would contend that it is only Paul’s opinion that “nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ” (Rom 8:39), or that “I am nothing, if I have not love” (1 Cor 13:2)? Without a Spirit-inspired caveat from Paul (e.g., 1 Cor 7:40), the one deciding Paul’s opinion is not Paul but the modern interpreter.

To see an opinion in the term “I permit” ($\dot{\epsilon}\pi\iota\tau\rho\acute{e}\pi\omega$) rather than a command, falls into that same trap of eisegesis. Mounce offers evidence to the contrary:

The word $\dot{\epsilon}\pi\iota\tau\rho\acute{e}\pi\omega$, “to permit,” can be a strong term (MM¹⁴, 249, cite its use in a legal context). It occurs elsewhere in Paul in 1 Cor 14:34 (women are not permitted to speak in church) and 16:7 (Paul wishes to spend time with the Corinthians if the Lord permits; cf.

¹¹ Mounce, 121.

¹² For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38–39 ESV)

¹³ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1 Cor 13:1–3)

¹⁴ i.e., J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*.

Heb 6:3)....ἐπιτρέπειν can be an authoritative demand bordering on the legal (cf. also 1 Cor 7:17; 11:16; Phil 3:15). Spicq¹⁵ says it is a rabbinic formula for prohibition (1:379).¹⁶

Coupled with an “I” of apostolic authority, “I do not permit” is just as weighty as “I command.”

Moreover, “It can also be argued that the shift from βούλομαι, ‘I desire’ (v 8; itself a strong term), to the stronger ἐπιτρέπω, ‘I permit,’ signals an increasing sense of authority.”¹⁷

Concerning the tense of ἐπιτρέπω, Towner says, “The present tense verbal phrase ‘I do not permit’ falls within the register of apostolic authority.”¹⁸ Thus there is no way to restrict Paul’s command to his own cultural, temporal context, since, as Towner notes, “Other commands that are binding in nature or universal are expressed in the present tense (1 Cor 7:10; 1 Thess 4:1, 10; 5:14)...Nor is it the case that ἐπιτρέπω was used only in situations of limited scope (Heb 6:3; 1 Clement 1.3; Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.267).”¹⁹ Mounce marshals Wallace’s *Greek Grammar* twice to show that the present tense only referring to Paul’s own time is grammatically false:

Wallace points out that the generic γυνή, “woman,” indicates that ἐπιτρέπω, “I permit,” is gnomic and concludes that “the normal use of the present tense in didactic literature, especially when introducing an exhortation, is not descriptive, but a general precept that has gnomic implications” (Greek Grammar, 525, citing forty-one passages).²⁰

Wallace argues that there is no instance in Paul that the combination “first person singular present tense with an infinitive ever means ‘right now, but not later’” (Greek Grammar, 526 n. 30; see Comment on 1 Tim 2:1 regarding the same construction).²¹

¹⁵ i.e., C. Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*.

¹⁶ Mounce, 121.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Towner, *Letters*, 216.

¹⁹ Ibid., 217n72.

²⁰ Mounce, 121.

²¹ Ibid., 122.

Thus Paul's apostolic permission or lack thereof is universally binding, not just in Paul's day or context but for all time and in all places. The silence of women, i.e., them not being ministers is true "in all the churches of the saints." (1 Cor 14:33b–34) Moreover, if such grammar ("right now, but not later") is true, then Paul's "we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law" is also in jeopardy!

When it comes to those who marshal examples from the Old Testament for women clergy, Lenski is insightful:

In the entire Old Testament but five women are called "prophetess": Miriam, Exod. 15:20, etc., only because she led the women of Israel in great hymn of praise; Deborah, Judges 4:4, etc., only because she delivered a direct revelation to Barak; Huldah, II Kings 22:14, etc., II Chron. 24:22, etc., only because she, too, had a direct revelation to convey; Noadiah, Neh. 6:14, a false prophetess; Isaiah's wife in Isa. 8:3, only because she was his wife. There is little material here for the advocates of woman preachers in the Christian Church.²²

Lenski forgets to mention that Miriam incited Aaron against Moses and was thus struck with leprosy (Num 12:1–10). He also does not mention in regards to Deborah that YAHWEH worked through women to the shame of men, which was the direct message she gave. (Judges 4:9) Moreover, in the time of Huldah, the theretofore lost Book of the Law had been found (2 Ki 22:8). Thus, the people had forsaken YAHWEH to such an extent in both Deborah and Huldah's time, and it is this reality that could account for YAHWEH choosing them.

Similar work could be done, of course, with the New Testament examples cited above. Priscilla and Aquila privately correcting Apollos (Acts 18:26) is a far cry away from holding the office of pastor. Besides, they do not teach ($\delta\imath\delta\acute{a}\sigma\kappa\epsilon\iota\mathbf{v}$) Apollos but rather explain ($\dot{\epsilon}\kappa\tau\iota\theta\acute{e}\iota\mathbf{v}$).²³

²² R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, and to Philemon* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1946), 571–2.

²³ "We do know that Priscilla and Aquila 'expounded' ($\dot{\epsilon}\zeta\acute{e}\theta\acute{e}\nu\mathbf{t}\mathbf{o}$) the way of God to Apollos (Acts 18:26), but this reference can hardly bear the weight often placed on it." (Mounce, 126)

More work could be done to define the various terms (e.g., “fellow worker,” “servant,” etc.) that Paul uses of the men and women he greets and commends in his letters (e.g., Rom 16:1–16). A final example, for the sake of brevity, is when Paul says, “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are notable among the apostles (ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις), who also were in Christ before me.” (Rom 16:7)²⁴ Paul’s meaning is not necessarily that they were apostles. The ESV’s “well known to the apostles” seems probable. Even if they were apostles, Luther takes both as masculine names: “*den Andronikus und den Junias.*”²⁵

To conclude the inspired writer will have the final word and through him the Holy Spirit. What Paul says here in 1 Timothy, he also taught the same elsewhere with more words: “As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” (1 Cor 14:33b–35 ESV)

2:13—For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

Paul gives two rationales for his prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12, which could also serve as a rationale following 1 Corinthians 14:35 cited above. (Paul is best read in conversation with himself.) While separated by modern verse convention, both arguments work best in tandem. “There are two facts, and the greater is stated first although the second, too, is very decisive” is how Lenski puts it.²⁶ Here again Paul says what he has said elsewhere, as J.N.D. Kelly notes:

²⁴ Author’s translation.

²⁵ cf. Luther’s, “*die Priscilla und den Aquila*” in Rom 16:3.

²⁶ Lenski, 564–5.

“He had made the same point in I Cor. xi. 8, pointing out that ‘man did not come originally from woman, but woman from man’, and deducing from it her dependence on the male.”²⁷ This, of course, does not mean competition or domination, but rather “their relationship is...to be considered...as complementary.”²⁸

Paul’s use of Adam and Eve in 1 Timothy 2:13–14 cannot be passed by in our modern times without first considering its import for biblical historicity and unity. Lenksi hits this home:

But is this “rib-story” not just an ancient myth? The use of the word “myth” does not remove from the New Testament the use that Jesus and Paul have made of this record in Genesis. To wipe out the account in Genesis wipes out the truth of Jesus and of the New Testament. If these are mythical as to the very origin of man, can anything be true and trust worthy regarding the redemption and salvation of man? If Genesis is a “myth,” what was the original fact? An animal origin, an animal evolution? Does this hypothesis change the nature of man and a woman as we know see this nature? Does it destroy the natural relation of the two?²⁹

Lenksi answers his final two questions, the preceding ones being, of course, rhetorical, in the affirmative by citing Loy.³⁰ The twenty-first century has also answered Lenski with a resounding “Yes.” But Lenski’s point is true. We hold the view of Genesis and the Old Testament that Jesus and Paul did. This does not make us fundamentalist fanatics but simple followers of Jesus and Paul.

Paul’s argumentation here is not just an inspired version of proof texting. This opens up the broader topic regarding the use of the Old Testament within the New. Towner dives into this not only in his stand-alone commentary but also the section dedicated to 1 Timothy in the

²⁷ Kelly, 68.

²⁸ Guthrie, *Pastoral Epistles*, 87.

²⁹ Lenski, 566.

³⁰ “There are effeminate, long-haired men who claim the rights of women, and masculine short-haired women who claim the rights of men, and, in virtue of the good sense with which the Creator has endowed humanity, they become the laughingstock of the sober-minded in both sexes.” (Ibid.)

Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament, which he authored. Much of what he says is the same in both—each being published a year apart.

Following Paul, then, we see that he is clearly making a Spirit-inspired allusion to the creation account of Genesis 2. He does this by using the well known names of Adam and Eve. Both are used sparingly in the Old Testament, with the latter more so.³¹ Paul links his argument to Genesis 2 by using the verb *πλάσσω*, “to form”:

“Adam was formed [ἐπλάσθη] first, then Eve.” (1 Tim 2:13)

“God formed [ἔπλασεν] the man out of dust from the ground.” (Gen 2:7)

“And there [in Eden] He put the man, whom He formed [ἔπλασεν].” (Gen 2:8)

“The LORD God took the man, whom He formed [ἔπλασεν], and put him in the garden [παραδείσῳ].” (Gen 2:15)³²

Towner notes: “The verb *plassō* is not used in the Genesis account of the process by which Eve came into being, but in later retellings of this story it is typically applied to the creation of both man and woman (2 Macc. 7:23; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.32; *I Clem.* 33:4).”³³ Mounce also notes, “That Paul uses *πλάσσειν* elsewhere only in Rom 9:20, where he is quoting Isa 29:16, shows that *πλάσσειν* is not a usual word for him (he uses *κτίζειν* ten times), and its use here signals dependence on Gen 2.”³⁴

Paul here seems to be applying the argument “first is best.” This is the argument he employed in 1 Corinthians 11:8–9, though it is here absent but arguably assumed. When Paul

³¹ cf., Towner, *Letters*, 225; Philip Towner, “1 Timothy” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carlson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 894.

³² cf. Towner, *Letters*, 226; Towner, “1 Timothy,” 894.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Mounce, 130.

uses this line of reasoning, it appears that he is putting his rabbinic training (Acts 22:3) to use. Concerning this, Towner says, “He does not appear to cite a rabbinic formula that made use of Gen. 2. His literary indebtedness to rabbinic thought is limited to the method of argumentation, and for all we know, his application of it to men and women by way of Gen. 2 is novel (cf. 1 Cor. 11).”³⁵ To call such an application as novel is an academic disservice to the Holy Spirit who inspired Paul (cf., 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 3:16; Col 4:16).

For some examples of “best is first” argumentation, Towner cites two. The first is *Exodus Rabbah* 21.6: “Moses...went to divide the sea, but the sea refused to comply, exclaiming, ‘What, before you shall I divide? Am I not greater than you? For I was created on the third day and you on the sixth.’”³⁶ There is also *Sipre Deuteronomy* §37: “This is also true concerning God’s actions—whatever is most precious comes first.”³⁷ Luther argues this way concerning the order and primacy of the Commandments in the Large Catechism.³⁸ Moreover, the argument in Hebrews regarding Tabernacle/Temple worship is actually an inversion of this principle—“best was not first.”³⁹

2:14—And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived, came into transgression;

Lenski’s insight, quoted above, is informative: “There are two facts, and the greater is stated first although the second, too, is very decisive.”⁴⁰ Paul’s first argument, order of creation, is backed up by a corollary argument rooted in Genesis 3. Moreover, “V 14 is parallel to v 13. In

³⁵ Towner, “1 Timothy,” 895.

³⁶ Towner, *Letters*, 226–7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

³⁸ The Fourth Commandment is “the first and greatest” among the other seven. (cf., LC I.103).

³⁹ cf., Hebrews 9.

⁴⁰ Lenski, 564–5.

both, Adam is the subject of the verb and is emphatically listed at the beginning of the sentence.

In both, Adam plays the dominant role: he was created first; he was not deceived (contra Oberlinner, 99, who says the only interest of v 14 is in Eve's seduction).⁴¹ Here the allusion is again clear by the names employed and the summary of the content, but its import is also clear by means of the verb.

Paul summarizes both Genesis 3:12 and 3:13 with 1 Timothy 2:14:

1 Tim 2:14: And Adam was not deceived (ὴπατήθη), but the woman, being deceived (ἐξαπατηθεῖσα), came into transgression.

Gen 3:12: Adam (אָדָם / ὁ Αδαμ) said, "The woman that You gave to be with me, she gave to me from the tree, and I ate."

Gen 3:13: And the God Yahweh (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים) said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived (ὴπάτησέν) me, and I ate."

The sequence and emphasis of 1 Timothy 2:14 is important. Paul preserves the order of the names (Adam first, then Eve), but the emphasis is clearly on the woman's initial deception and transgression, with Paul reversing things by means of the negative ("Adam was not deceived").

The woman's deception is further set apart by use of the compound verb (ἐξαπατάω).⁴²

Moreover, Paul also preserves the use of "Adam" and "woman" from Genesis 3:12–13.⁴³ This being the basis for a prohibition of female preachers is logical from what follows in the Genesis

⁴¹ Mounce, 135.

⁴² Towner further notes, "Intensification is not the likely force of the change; the compound had already found its way into the traditional account of this scene (2 Cor 11:3) without any specific added nuance to the deception (i.e., in the sense of sexual deceit)" (Towner, *Letters*, 229). In 2 Corinthians 11:3 Paul says, "I am afraid lest somehow, like the serpent deceived (ἐξηπάτησεν) Eve with his craftiness, your thoughts be corrupted from the sincerity and purity that is in Christ."

⁴³ Towner, *Letters*, 228–9.

account. J. N. D. Kelly notes, “The prophecy of Gen. iii. 16 that Eve’s desire would be to her husband and that ‘he shall rule over you’ was clearly in [Paul’s] mind, and equally clearly he regards it as applying to the entire female sex.”⁴⁴ Another portion of Genesis 3 that was probably in Paul’s mind was YAHWEH’s condemnation of Adam, “Because you listened to the voice of your wife, and you ate from the tree that I commanded you, “You shall not eat from it” (Gen 3:17)—a shame Adam shares with Abraham.⁴⁵

This is not some sort of ontological distinction, viz., that women are inferior to men intellectually. “This cannot be or Paul would never have encouraged women to teach children (2 Tim 3:15) and younger women (Titus 2:3–4).”⁴⁶ “Paul’s reflection on Gen 3 teaches that God intended male leadership in the church, and just as the serpent and Eve usurped that order so also the Ephesian women were trying to change their roles. V 14 sees the Garden sin as an example of what happens when roles are changed.”⁴⁷ We must keep in mind what verse 14 is saying and what it is not saying. Paul in “V 14 does not say that Adam was sinless. Paul lays the transmission of sin at Adam’s feet (cf. Rom 5:12–21) and not at Eve’s even though she was the first to sin (in the stated chronology of Gen 3; yet if Adam was present, as the text probably implies, and said nothing, his sin of omission occurred at the same time as Eve’s sin of commission).”⁴⁸ Paul’s argument from Genesis 3 fits to limit women from the preaching office, but this is not a reflection that they are inferior to men or farther away from salvation than men.

⁴⁴ Kelly, 68–9.

⁴⁵ cf., Genesis 16:2

⁴⁶ Mounce, 136.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 137.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 142.

This is further clarified by Paul, if one understands that Paul's allusion to Genesis 3 continues into the next verse.

2:15—but she will be saved through the Childbirth, [and they will be saved] if they remain in faith, love, holiness, with self-control.

Now we come to the most difficult part of the passage. There are several traditional ways to handle this passage. None of them are completely satisfying because all in some way try to run away from the clearest and simplest meaning of Paul's words. Kelly comes closest, getting the import of 1 Timothy 2:15 but forgetting other clearer parts of Scripture regarding salvation, when he says, "Her path to salvation, in other words, consists in accepting the role which was plainly laid down for her in Gen. iii. 16 ('in pain you shall bring forth children'). Even this, however, demands further qualification, since motherhood is the common lot of all women, and in any case salvation is not procured by mere works."⁴⁹ Kelly seems to dislike the direction of his own gloss or maybe Paul's words.

Kelly's take on the first part of 1 Timothy 2:15 is the traditional one, namely, that women are to rear children according to their vocation but are saved by faith. This is the interpretation of Lenski.⁵⁰ Luther states, "It is a very great comfort that a woman can be saved by bearing children, etc. that is, she has an honorable and salutary status in life if she keeps busy having children. We want to recommend this passage to them, etc. she is described as 'saved' not for freedom, for license, but for bearing and rearing children."⁵¹ John Calvin comments similarly.⁵²

⁴⁹ Kelly, 69.

⁵⁰ Lenski 572ff.

⁵¹ Martin Luther, "Lectures on 1 Timothy," in *Luther's Works: American Edition*, vol. 28, trans. Richard J. Dinda (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 279.

⁵² John Calvin, "Commentaries on the First Epistle to Timothy," in *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. XXI, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 70–2.

Luther is, of course, the primary teacher of the Lutheran confession (SD VII), but even he is subject to Holy Writ (SD, Rule and Norm). The issues with the traditional understanding revolve around (1) the meaning of “saved through,” (2) the interplay of singular and plural, (3) the definition of “childbearing” (*τεκνογονία*), and (4) the definite article (*τῆς*) attached to “childbearing.”

(1) *σώζω* + *διά*

When it comes to how one translates and understands the verb “to save” (*σώζω*), that task is, as far as Lutheran theology is concerned, of the utmost importance. We must above all seek to preserve its root meaning (“save”), the ESV’s proclivity for “healed” in the Gospels notwithstanding.⁵³ In regards to this verb, Lenski puts it best: “This verb has its full soteriological meaning.”⁵⁴ There is no reason to propose that it should be translated as “preserved through childbearing,” which is preposterous for “Godly women die in childbirth and ungodly women pass through safely.”⁵⁵

Lenksi is correct not just lexically but by way of both the context of 1 Timothy 2:15 and also the entire Pauline corpus. First, “transgression” (*παραβάσει*) and “she will be saved” (*σωθήσεται*) “have only one word between them; one term defines the other.”⁵⁶ Second, “nowhere does Paul use *σώζειν* to refer to salvation from anything other than sin.”⁵⁷ For physical

⁵³ e.g., Mt 9:22, Mk 5:32, Lk 8:48, etc.

⁵⁴ Lenksi, 572.

⁵⁵ Mounce, 143.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 144.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

deliverance Paul says that the Lord will rescue (ρύσεται) him (e.g., 2 Cor 1:10; 2 Tim 3:11; 4:17–18).⁵⁸

What about the preposition “through”? This is where Lenski tries to soften Paul’s words. He says, “διὰ with the genitive does not invariably denote means. Here and elsewhere it denotes *Art und Weise* (B.-P. 281), which is often called the accompanying circumstance.”⁵⁹ Towner, in his stand alone commentary notes the same thing.⁶⁰ Neither Lenski nor Towner offer biblical/NT examples, though the latter does point to the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*.

Lenski’s rationale comes from the second edition of *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments* by Walter Bauer. This standard lexicon comes down to us in the present in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* by Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich (BDAG). While the second edition (1928) Bauer is hard to come by, the fifth edition (1958) includes 1 Timothy 2:15 not under the definition for “accompanying circumstance” but under “efficient cause.”⁶¹ BDAG includes it as a possibility under both but leans toward “accompanying circumstance,” stating, “Here prob. belongs σωθήσεται διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας **1 Ti 2:15** (opp. of the negative them in Gen. 3:16), but s. d next.”⁶²

⁵⁸ Mounce, 144.

⁵⁹ Lenski, 573.

⁶⁰ Towner, *Letters*, 233.

⁶¹ Walter Bauer, *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur, Fünfte* (Berlin, 1958), 358.

⁶² BDAG, 3rd Edition, 224, emphasis original.

Daniel Wallace does not include any “accompanying circumstance” when it comes to διά with the genitive, including only agency, means, spatial, and temporal.⁶³ While BDAG leans toward “accompanying circumstance” for 2 Timothy, Wallace says, “Some of the more significant texts involving διά, to which the aspiring exegete can practice some of his/her analytical skill, are...1 Tim 2:15.”⁶⁴ Here he also adds in a footnote, “For a discussion of some of these texts, see ‘Voice: Passive Constructions (with Agency Expressed).’”⁶⁵ Thus Wallace wants to see “through” (διά) in 1 Timothy 2:15 as being used in its more natural meaning. Of this usage Towner states, “Means would probably correspond more closely to a spiritual sense of salvation (cf. 1 Cor 15:2), but the sense in which ‘childbearing’ could serve as a means is open to question.”⁶⁶ “Spiritual sense” means, as noted above, that “nowhere does Paul use σώζειν to refer to salvation from anything other than sin.”⁶⁷

What about when “saved” (σώζω) and “through” (διά) are used together? Here we enter into shakier ground for Lenski and those who would want to take διά in a looser manner, especially when tied to the verb “to save.” Mounce says, “Knight (147) points out that σώζειν, ‘to save,’ occurs with διά six other times in the NT (Acts 15:11; Rom 5:9; 1 Cor 1:21; 15:2), and in all but two (1 Cor 3:15; 1 Pet 3:20) διά indicates the means of salvation (Moule, *Idiom-Book*, 56). Context shows that διά indicates the efficient, not the ultimate, means, albeit a rare use of the preposition (cf. Gal 5:6; M. J. Harris, NIDNTT 3:1182).” There are three other verses (Jn

⁶³ Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 368–69.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 369.

⁶⁵ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 369n38.

⁶⁶ Towner, *Letters*, 233–4.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

3:17, Tit 3:5, 1 Pet 3:21) that are not noted here, but they too indicate the means of salvation with διά. In fact, as Lutherans, we might argue that 1 Peter 3:20 does use διά to mark the means of salvation,⁶⁸ but that is for another paper.

(2) Singular versus Plural

It is quite evident that Paul switches from the singular “she will be saved” to the assumed “they will be saved,” which was dropped by reason of *brachylogy*. It is true that “the transition to the plural **they** is awkward, and has led interpreters to postulate either ‘the husband and wife’ or ‘their children’ as the missing subject of **continue**.⁶⁹ However, “the plural does not indicate both wife and husband (*contra* Brox, 137) since the husband has no necessary connection with his wife’s salvation and because the previous σωθήσεται, “she will be saved,” is singular. The plural also is not a reference to children (*contra* Jeremias, 22; Houlden, 72–73; L. T. Johnson, 133) since they are not an issue here and have no necessary effect on their mother’s salvation. A switch of subject to either of these would also be disruptive of the flow of thought.”⁷⁰ Lenski proffers another out, glossing, “The plural ‘if they remain’ is used *ad sensum*.” The *constructio ad sensum* is “any construction in which the requirements of a grammatical form are overridden by those of a word-meaning: *e.g.*, the construction of a collective noun in the singular with the plural form of a verb because the noun denotes a plurality.”⁷¹ An example would be: “One hundred dollars **is** the cost of rent.”

⁶⁸ Formerly they disbelieved, when God’s patience waited in Noah’s days, while the ark was being constructed, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved (διεσώθησαν) through water (δι’ ὕδατος).

⁶⁹ Kelly, 69, emphasis original.

⁷⁰ Mounce, 147.

⁷¹ Oxford English Dictionary (1989).

Paul often turns on a dime. The brachylogy of this verse is matched by one earlier in 1 Timothy 2:12, “‘But to be in quietness’ after ‘I permit’ is an instance of brachylogy.”⁷² What can be made of this? The “she” in “she will be saved” is assumed by the Greek (σωθήσεται), and is thus most likely a reference to the woman of vv 12–13, namely, Eve. It is the closest preceding referent. Kelly opines that this does not refer to Eve: “as the future indicates.”⁷³ (Comment on this will be made below.) Yet, “by extending the allusion to this clause, which retains the singular as in the Genesis 3 account, we may be helped to explain why the shift to the plural (from ‘she’ to ‘they’) is delayed until the subsequent clause.”⁷⁴

We are left with two options then. The shift to “they” could mean Paul is turning Eve paradigmatically for all women in their vocation of “childbearing,” motherhood, and the life of faith in Christ. The shift to “they” later in the clause could also mean Paul is shifting to other ground altogether. Which option is more likely to this author will only be seen once the other pieces of our puzzle are put on the table.

(3) *τεκνογονία*

The Greek word for “childbearing” is an odd one. As a noun, it is a hapax legomenon in the entire Greek Scriptures here in 1 Timothy 2:15, since it is not used in the Septuagint. The verb “to bear children” (τεκνογονέω) is only used in 1 Timothy 5:14. It also is not used in the Septuagint, though “to make babies” (τεκνοποιέω) is (Gen 11:30, 16:2, 30:3; Is 65:23; Jer 12:2, 36:5, 38:8). Chrysostom, according to Guthrie, “understood the word ‘child-bearing’ as

⁷² Lenski, 564.

⁷³ Kelly, 69.

⁷⁴ Towner, *Letters*, 233.

equivalent to child-nurture.”⁷⁵ Lenksi also states that the word “includes the rearing of the children.”⁷⁶ There is, however, a verb, used in 1 Timothy 5:10, that means “to bring up children”: *τεκνοτροφέω*.

As noted above, the assumed subject of “she will be saved” is Eve of the preceding verse, but the connection back to Genesis is also included in the noun “childbearing.” Towner argues, “The main reason for suggesting this possibility is the term *teknogonia* (“childbearing”), which may well be a refashioning of the idea expressed in the verb-object combination *texē tekna* (‘you shall give birth to children’) in Genesis 3:16.”⁷⁷

(4) The Definite Article

The insight about the definite article in 1 Timothy 2:15, and really this entire paper, first came by reading an article by Rev. Dr. Thomas Winger. In his article “Textual Preaching,” a broad article about diving into the pericopes, word by word, if necessary, in order to create vivid preaching, Winger says:

The phrase translated “through bearing children” in the RSV is *διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας* in Greek. This is one instance when it is important to translate the definite article and to maintain the singular number of the noun. Literally it says, “through the child-bearing”, or “the bearing of the Child”. Thus, in context, it is probably a reference to the *protevangelium* (Gen. 3:15), the promise made to Eve that a messianic Child will one day issue from her offspring to reverse the curse. This, then, is purest Gospel. And it helps to explain why the next verb is in the plural: “if they abide in faith and love and holiness”, for the birth of the child redeems not woman alone, but men and women together.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Guthrie, 89.

⁷⁶ Lenski, 573.

⁷⁷ Towner, *Letters*, 233.

⁷⁸ Thomas Winger, “Textual Preaching,” *Lutheran Theological Review* 21 (2008–09), 70.

Now, there are some issues with Winger's take on the referent of "they." The question about this translation is this: does this work grammatically? If the understanding of this word is already difficult due to its scant usage, then the use of the definite article may offer some assistance.

The definite article is not so straight forward in Greek as it is in English. There is some nuance with relation to its noun. For example, there are many times in the Gospels where proper nouns, including "Jesus," do include the definite article. Its use or disuse in those cases is unclear.⁷⁹ There is also the use of the definite article in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. The Publican, translated most literally, says, "God make atonement for me, the sinner." (Lk 18:13) Here is the definite article *par excellence*. He is in effect "declaring that he is the worst of all sinners (from his perspective)."⁸⁰

The definitive article in 1 Timothy 2:15 ("the Childbirth," $\tau\tilde{\eta}\varsigma\ \tau\acute{e}k\acute{v}\o\gamma\o\acute{v}\i\acute{a}\varsigma$), following Winger's lead, is a definite article *par excellence*, i.e., the best of a class. Another option could be the monadic sense, i.e., "one of a kind" or "unique" article.⁸¹ The difference between the two makes the *par excellence* the better option. Wallace explains:

The difference between the monadic article in the article *par excellence* is that the monadic article points out a *unique* object, while the article *par excellence* points out the extreme of a certain category, thus, the one deserving the name more than any other. The article *par excellence*, therefore, has a superlative idea. For example, "the sun" is monadic because there is only one sun. It is not the best of many suns, but is the only one. In *reality*, it is in a class by itself. But "the Lord" is *par excellence* because there are many lords. However, the article is used with the word to convey the idea that, according to the speaker is presented viewpoint, there is only one Lord.⁸²

⁷⁹ cf., Daniel B. Wallace, "How do you explain the high number of variants found in the New Testament? (Part 1)," 3:08–3:50, January 16, 2011, <https://youtu.be/8yjoVTUp1Ow?t=188>.

⁸⁰ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 223.

⁸¹ cf., *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 223–4.

Thus, since there are many childbirths or bearing of children, the idea that article conveys is not the only childbearing (monadic) but the most important childbearing there ever was (*par excellence*), namely, the promised Seed, the Christ child.

There is, also, another option. This use of the definite article leans more towards the traditional interpretation of the passage. This use does not make its noun specific, but, to use Wallace's term, it is the individualizing article, i.e., the article that makes the noun general or a class. Wallace explains, "While the *individualizing* article distinguishes or identifies a particular object belonging to a larger class, the *generic* article distinguishes one class from another. This is somewhat less frequent than the individualizing article (though it still occurs hundreds of times in the NT). It categorizes rather than particularizes."⁸³ Thus, Lenski argues against taking this as an allusion to Genesis 3:15 stating, "'the' refers to the well-known childbearing, common motherhood by way of common fatherhood."⁸⁴ This use of the definite article has the weight of antiquity behind it, but it does necessitate a broadening of the definition of *τεκνογονία* as discussed above and a not straightforward use of *διά* ("through").

Putting the Pieces Together

In the foregoing, we divided 1 Timothy 2:15 by looking at (1) the meaning of "saved through," (2) the interplay of singular and plural, (3) the definition of "childbearing" (*τεκνογονία*), and (4) the definite article (*της*) attached to "childbearing." Let us now summarize these four pieces while also putting them back together as best we can. (Though it will be done

⁸³ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 227.

⁸⁴ Lenski, 574.

in slightly different order to make the argument clear.) For, when they are taken together, the result is “a more serious suggestion”⁸⁵ at interpretation.

(1) When it comes to “saved through,” “nowhere does Paul use $\sigma\omega\zeta\epsilon i\tau$ to refer to salvation from anything other than sin.”⁸⁶ Moreover, as noted above, “to save” ($\sigma\omega\zeta\omega$) when paired with “through” ($\delta i\alpha$) is used to indicate salvation and the means of that salvation in all cases, save one (1 Cor 3:15).⁸⁷ This is the more natural use of “through.” (4) In fact, taking “the Childbirth” as the childbirth *par excellence* has this added benefit: “This interpretation assigns $\delta i\alpha$, “through,” its normal meaning.”⁸⁸ Moreover, this interpretation also “would recognize the presence of the definite article $\tau\tilde{\eta}\zeta$, ‘the,’ before $\tau\epsilon\kappa\nu\o\gamma\o\iota\alpha\zeta$. It also builds on the context of Gen 3.”⁸⁹ (3) This also keeps from broadening the range of meaning of $\tau\epsilon\kappa\nu\o\gamma\o\iota\alpha$ to include childrearing. (1) This allusion to Genesis 3:15 specifically would also explain Paul’s use of the “future tense,” “she will be saved” ($\sigma\omega\theta\hbar\sigma\tau\alpha\iota$), for the promise in Genesis is future tense! (2) This allusion would also explain Paul’s shift from singular to plural later in the verse.

The obscurity of this interpretation must also be addressed. Concerning this obscurity, Mounce flatly states, “If this is what Paul meant, he chose an extremely obscure way of saying it.”⁹⁰ Guthrie dives a bit more:

If the birth of the Messiah was intended by the words “child-bearing” it is strange that Paul did not add some further explanation. The Greek article could be generic, referring to child-birth in general, rather than definitive, referring to one particular instance.

⁸⁵ Mounce, 144.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ The proof that it is not is distinguished by the addition of “as” ($\omega\zeta$).

⁸⁸ Mounce, 145.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Nevertheless, if the whole passage is concentrating on Eve, it is possible that there is here an allusion to the promise of Genesis 3:15, to the promise of the one who would crush the serpent's head. If this were so, it would explain the reference to salvation in this verse. This suggestion is attractive in spite of the obscurity involved.⁹¹

Here we must keep context in mind. That is not just the immediate context of 1 Timothy 2:12–14, but also the broader context of the book itself. The book is a personal letter from Paul to Timothy. Timothy was not a congregation made up of diverse members, nor was he a laymen like Philemon. Not only was Timothy a pastor, hence the book being one of the Pastoral Epistles, but Timothy was arguably Paul's closest associate. Timothy is a signatory with Paul, sends greetings through Paul, or is commended by Paul to the recipients in all of Paul's letters save Galatians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles, though he is the addressee for two of the three. More than that, Paul indicates that Timothy was well acquainted with Paul's preaching and teaching (e.g., 1 Tim 1:3, 4:6, 6:3; 2 Tim 1:3, 2:2, 8).

When it comes to the subtlety of the interpretation, such a move is not out of bounds for Paul. He argues from the subtleties of singular “seed” (Gal 3:16), the nature of the Rock that “followed” the Israelites (1 Cor 10:4), and profoundly saying that Genesis 2:24 refers to Christ and the Church (Eph 5:31–32). These were letters written to congregations that Paul had taught and formed on his missionary journeys. How much more is that method possible and probable for him to do in a letter to a pastor he trained in “rightly dividing the word of truth”! We must keep Timothy in mind as the first intended audience of Paul's letter. Clergy write and speak differently one to another than they do with a layman. (This is also an argument for why the pastoral epistles differ in style to his congregational letters.) To use a reformation example: Luther's *Bondage of the Will* is of a different caliber than his explanation to the 3rd Article in the

⁹¹ Guthrie, 89.

Small Catechism, but they both teach the same theology. The subtlety of 1 Timothy 2:15 seems strange to us some 2,000 years later who are not as steeped as Timothy was not only in the Sacred Scriptures, i.e., the Old Testament (2 Tim 3:15) but also in Paul's apostolic theological method of preaching and teaching them.

Finally, Towner's concluding remarks in his 1 Timothy commentary included in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* are a good way to finish off putting the pieces together:

There is no reason why the reference to "salvation" in the promise—"But she will be saved through childbearing"—cannot strike two (or more) chords at once. In fact, with the tape of Gen. 3 already playing, it is hard to imagine that the attentive hearer or reader⁹² would escape reflecting on the Protoevangelion (the promised defeat of the serpent in Gen. 3) or indeed on the pronouncement that the woman was to be under the lordship of the man. But Paul did not bring these things out. Instead, the final fleeting allusion to the Genesis account develops into the instruction to women (plural) generally to "work out their salvation" in the domestic sphere by ensuring that they manifest the marks of authentic Christian existence.⁹³

Implications

There are some serious implications for translating this text anew with "She will be saved through the Childbirth." The translation, of course, offers some clarity to a difficult passage. While, at first, the translation does seem avant-garde, it is not out of line within the context. It is also grammatically acceptable. The biggest issue is not that it disagrees with Luther. The issue comes with the Lutheran Confessions, and this is where we come to the issue that we may ponder but to which there is no proffered solution.

⁹² Like Timothy, to whom the letter is addressed.

⁹³ Philip Towner, "1 Timothy," 898.

1 Timothy 2:15 is used in the Lutheran Confessions, but if the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15 from above is correct, namely, that 2:15a is an allusion back to Genesis 3:15, then therein lies the problem. Especially for those of us who confess *quia* subscription to the Book of Concord. When Melanchthon confesses “The Marriage of Priests” (Apology, XXIII (XI)), he, of course, shows that the Scriptures praise marriage and the family, viz., that both are holy estates created and commended by God. While accomplishing this task, he marshals 1 Timothy 2:15 to his service:

Likewise, “She will be saved through childbearing,” and so on (1 Timothy 2:15). If the adversaries could produce such a passage about celibacy, then certainly they would celebrate a wonderful triumph. Paul says that woman is saved by childbearing. What more honorable thing could be said against the hypocrisy of celibacy than that woman is saved by the conjugal works themselves, by conjugal intercourse, by bearing children and the other duties? But what does St. Paul mean? Let the reader observe that faith is added, and that domestic duties without faith are not praised. “If they continue,” he says, “in faith.” For he speaks of the whole class of mothers. Therefore, he requires especially faith, through which a woman receives the forgiveness of sins and justification. Then he adds a particular work of the calling, just as in every person a good work of a particular calling should follow faith. This work pleases God because of faith. So the duties of the woman please God because of faith, and the believing woman is saved who devoutly serves her calling in such duties.⁹⁴

The argument that they knew Greek better than we do certainly does have some merit, though it is not particularly satisfying. Is that not an appeal to authority outside of the Sacred Scriptures? Jerome arguably knew Greek better than all of us combined and yet translated “repent” (μετανοέω) in Matthew 3:2 with “do penance” (*poenitentiam facere*).

It is also not satisfying to say, “We hold *quia* subscription to the doctrinal conclusions of the Confessions but not the exegetical conclusions of Confessions.” How can we hold to doctrines while rejecting their exegetical foundation? “The exegetical arguments that determine

⁹⁴ AP XXIII.32.

the Confessions...give exclusive authority to the Confessions and make of them a weapon in the battle,”⁹⁵ says Schlink. Yet, Schlink thinks parallel to that aforementioned idea, which is sometimes mentioned at seminary. Schlink says that the Lutheran Confessions are primarily a Confession of the Gospel rather than a unified theological system.⁹⁶ Is that not Gospel reductionism? “The Confession does not in the first instance determine what is *to be* taught, but sums up what *is* taught in the church. It does not determine what kind of statements the Bible contains, but which statements are made on the basis of the Bible.”⁹⁷ Is that not similar to *quatenus* subscription? Finally, Schlink at length:

Holy Scripture is not the norm because of agreement with the Gospel is witnessed in the confessions, but the Confessions are authoritative only because of their agreement with the Gospel as witnessed in the *Holy Scripture*. This relation may not at all be inverted... *Holy Scripture* is the norm as the eternal Word; the Confessions, however, only witness of “how at various times the *Holy Scriptures* were understood in the church of God by contemporaries.” *Holy Scripture* as the Word of God teaches the Gospel, but the Confessions are *doctrina evangelii* only as exposition of Scripture. The Word of God is “eternal truth”; the Confessions are a “witness of the truth” (S.D. Sumn. Form., 13).⁹⁸

Does this mean in every instance the Confession’s interpretation must then be followed?

What does this mean for 1 Timothy 2:15? That decision, whatever it might be, would most likely have import for how we should receive Luther’s writings that are quoted and referenced in the Confessions. It would possibly necessitate a shift to a more historical-grammatical approach to the Confessions. But the danger here, as it always is in the Church of God, is “everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes.” (Deut 12:8)

⁹⁵ Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul Koehneke and Herbert Bouman (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 22.

⁹⁶ Ibid., xv–xxix *passim*, 1–36 *passim*.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁹⁸ Schlink, 25–26.

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