

# The Syntax of 1 Timothy 2:12: A Rejoinder to Philip B. Payne

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## Introduction

In a recent article, Philip Payne has reiterated his earlier contention that Paul in [1 Tim 2:12](#) forbids women only from assuming *improper* authority over men in the church.<sup>1</sup> Payne claims that Paul (or his amanuensis, or a pseudepigrapher) used the expression οὐδέ ("nor") in this verse essentially as a subordinating conjunction, subsuming the Greek verb αὐθενεῖν under the head word διδάσκειν, with the resultant meaning "to teach men *by assuming* independent authority."<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of his essay, Payne promises that he will identify "many instances" where οὐδέ "joins an *infinitive* with positive connotations to an infinitive with negative connotations."<sup>3</sup> However, strikingly, in none of the examples he cites on the following pages does οὐδέ link infinitives!<sup>4</sup>

At the very end of his piece, Payne claims that nine of the 102 extrabiblical parallels to [1 Tim 2:12](#) I cited in a previous publication involve the use of one word with a positive and another with a negative connotation (which, if true, might allow one to construe [1 Tim 2:12](#) as a positive word, διδάσκειν, being modified by a negative one, αὐθενεῖν, though still not necessarily with the second word subordinated to the first by way of *hendiadys*).

Even if this were the case, of course, this would still mean that the pattern of usage (positive-positive or negative-negative) I proposed would obtain over 91 percent of the time in the entire New Testament and extrabiblical Greek sources, a considerable weight of probability. What is more, even in these nine cases Payne's arguments demonstrably fall short.

## The Nine Alleged Problem Passages

(1) In [2 Cor 7:12](#), in the phrase neither "on account of the one who did the wrong *nor* on account of the one who was wronged," both perpetrating wrong and being victimized are viewed negatively by Paul as part of a wrong committed (two corresponding aspects of the "one single idea" Payne is affirming).

(2) In [2 Thess 3:7-8](#), both idleness and eating someone else's bread without paying for it are viewed negatively. Payne's discussion of this on pp. 242-43 is inadequate; clearly, in context, Paul implied that it would have been wrong for him and his associates to eat anyone's bread free of charge because doing so would have made them a "burden" to others, which clearly has a negative connotation.

(3) In [Sir 18.6](#) (LXX), neither diminishing nor increasing God's mercies is viewed as possible or desirable; while "diminish" and "increase" are conceptual opposites, from the writer's perspective the only proper approach is to represent God's mercies accurately; hence both diminishing or increasing them is discouraged.

(4) In Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. Hist.* 3.30.2.8, both surprise and distrust express skepticism over against outright acceptance (note the escalation from surprise to distrust here).

(5) In Josephus, *Ant.* 15.165.3-4, in context, both "meddling in state affairs" and "starting a revolution" are viewed negatively. While the first term, depending on the context, is capable of having both positive and negative connotations, a negative connotation is more likely in light of the clear and consistent pattern of usage of οὐδέ elsewhere as well as other considerations.

(6) In Plutarch, *Regum et imperatorum apophthegmata* 185.A.1, both sleeping and being indolent are viewed negatively (again, there is an escalation from sleep to indolence). In the present context, the trophy of Miltiades calls for a positive response; by comparison, both sleep and indolence fall short. To adduce a passage from another of Plutarch's work which evinces a "positive view of sleep" completely misses the point, because verbal meaning is contextual rather than merely a function of lexis.

(7) In Plutarch, *Aetia Romana et Graeca* 269.D, both exact and approximate reckoning are viewed negatively in the present context (the limited skill of mathematicians).

(8) In Plutarch, *Quaestiones convivales* 711.E.3, "harming" and "getting the best of us" are both viewed negatively; both are virtual synonyms, and, certainly, wine "getting the best" of someone is not viewed positively by the writer as Payne suggests!

(9) In Plutarch, *Bruta animalia ratione uti* 990.A.11, touching is viewed negatively because it results in pain; thus both actions are viewed negatively and related to each other in terms of one action (touching) resulting in the experience of another (experiencing pain).

The difficulty with Payne's analysis of these references is his categorization of verbs as "positive" or "negative." Contrary to Payne's understanding, however, it is not the case that verbs are "positive" or "negative" by themselves.<sup>5</sup> Rather, verbs convey a positive or negative connotation *in context*. Thus, lexical meaning by itself is inadequate to discern a given term's connotation in context. A writer's use of a given verb is to a significant extent a matter of aspect or perception and, thus, subjective. As shown, therefore, properly understood none of the alleged nine "problem cases" of the pattern of the usage of οὐδέ I identified are problematic. To the contrary, they conform perfectly to this pattern, as do the other 93 of 102 instances not disputed by Payne. The pattern is always positive/positive or negative/negative, never positive/negative or vice versa.

### **Payne's Proposal that οὐδέ Joins Two Expressions Conveying a "Single Idea"**

Another difficulty pertains to Payne's contention that οὐδέ joins two expressions conveying a "single idea." This may indeed be the case (though this is an entirely different matter than whether οὐδέ joins concepts viewed positively and negatively by the writer), and I, for one, have never denied this possibility. It is important to keep in mind, however, that οὐδέ as a coordinating conjunction, does not necessarily join two concepts to such an extent that the two actions completely merge and become indistinguishable

from one another. Instead, while there may be an overlap, a certain amount of distinctness may be retained. For example, one action may result in the experience of another (e.g., touching an object leading to the experience of pain).

Therefore, to posit the presence of "one single idea" or two completely separate concepts as the only two possible alternatives is unduly disjunctive and fails to do justice to the way οὐδέ functions in *koine* Greek.<sup>6</sup> Applied to the present case, the interpretation of [1 Tim 2:12](#), then, the overarching "single idea" is that women ought not to serve in authoritative church positions, whether by teaching men or by ruling (both functions are reserved for male elders)—two functions that are distinct yet closely related. In other words, "exercising authority" is a larger term than "teaching," since a person may exercise authority in other ways besides teaching (such as by making decisions binding on the entire church or by exercising church discipline; see also [1 Tim 5:17](#)). Conversely, teaching is one major way in which authority is exercised in the church.

### **Exegetical and Background Matters**

Apart from these linguistic and syntactical difficulties, Payne fails also on the level of exegesis and background.<sup>7</sup> On an exegetical level, Payne's contention that Paul's statement in [1 Tim 2:13](#) ("Adam was formed first") "implies that woman should respect man as her source" misconstrues what is clearly a reference to Adam's prior creation, not him being the woman's source. Payne's discussion of affirmations of women teaching elsewhere in the Pastorals, likewise, contains assertions that fail to prove his point.<sup>8</sup> For example, Payne adduces the pronoun "anyone" in [1 Tim 3:1](#) as support for the claim that women as well as men should be allowed to serve as elders while failing to note the "faithful husband" requirement in the following verse. He proceeds to cite Timothy's instruction by his mother and grandmother, which is hardly relevant here, since no one disputes that mothers and grandmothers may instruct their sons or grandsons in the faith. Finally, Payne notes the injunction for older women to teach younger women in Titus 2, which again is not relevant in a discussion of women teaching *men*. None of this can properly be regarded as legitimate support for the notion that women should be appointed as elders or overseers in the local church.

With regard to background, Payne mounts an unconvincing argument that Paul sought to forbid women perpetrating false teaching in the Ephesian context. Yet this does not follow from a reading of [1 Tim 2:12](#) in the context of the immediately following verses. Specifically, Paul states that Adam was created first ([1 Tim 2:13](#)) and that it was not Adam who was deceived but the woman ([1 Tim 2:14](#)). This makes clear that Paul's concern is with the woman as the *victim of deception*, not as the *perpetrator of false teaching*. Nowhere in the context of [1 Tim 2:12](#) is Paul's point regarding Eve that she *taught Adam falsely*.

Instead, in Timothy's Ephesus there seem to have been those who told women that true spirituality consisted in refraining from engaging in their natural functions of marriage and childbearing (see, e.g., [1 Tim 2:15](#); [4:3](#); [5:14](#)).<sup>9</sup> Paul's concern for women in this context was for them not to fall prey to such deception by engaging in teaching or assuming a ruling function, or by aspiring to the pastoral office (see

1 Tim 3:1-2). Instead, he wanted them to be devoted to fulfilling their domestic and familial roles. Also, if Paul's injunction in 1 Tim 2:12 was merely for women not to "assert independent authority over men," as Payne claims, why would it be the case, as he also asserts, that the present tense form of "I do not permit" in 1 Tim 2:12 "fits a *current* prohibition better than a *permanent* one"?<sup>10</sup> Is there ever a time when it is biblically appropriate for women to "assume independent authority over men"? It is hard to conceive of such a circumstance.

## Conclusion

For these reasons, there continues to be every reason to believe that Scripture teaches that men should serve as heads of households (e.g., Eph 5:23-24; 1 Tim 3:4-5) and as elders in the churches (1 Tim 2:12; 3:2; see also 5:17). In this way, the Bible links the authority structure in the natural family and the authority structure in the spiritual family, "God's household" (1 Tim 3:15), the church. This does not mean that women are denied significant participation in the ministry of the church, nor is their role as wives and mothers to be disparaged or diminished in any way (see, e.g., 1 Tim 2:15). In this life, God so chose to order male-female relations in the family and the church that wives submit to husbands and the church to male elders. This neither reflects any merit on the man's part nor demerit on the woman's part; such is the will of God according to Scripture.



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## Endnotes

1 Philip B. Payne, "1 Tim 2.12 and the Use of *οὐδε*, to Combine Two Elements to Express a Single Idea," *New Testament Studies* 54 (2008): 235-53. See the critique of Payne's earlier version of this thesis in A. J. Köstenberger, "A Complex Sentence: The Syntax of 1 Timothy 2:12," in *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (2d ed.; ed. A. J. Köstenberger and T. R. Schreiner; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 55-56 (retained from the first edition). Payne originally argued that the two infinitives form a *hendiadys* (P. B. Payne, "Οὐδε in 1 Timothy 2.12" [unpublished paper presented at the 1988 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society]), though he no longer uses this term in his later article because of unspecified "disputes over its definition" ("1 Tim 2.12 and the Use of οὐδέ" 235, n. 2). The present article was first submitted to *New Testament Studies*, the journal that carried Payne's article. The editor declined to publish the article, however, on the grounds that it failed to meet the criteria for responses set by the journal.

2 See Payne, "1 Tim 2.12 and the Use of οὐδέ" 243-44. Note in this regard that Payne proposed that Paul used οὐδέ differently from Luke (see *ibid.*, 241-42). However, it is hard to see how it is meaningful to speak of "Paul's use of οὐδέ" (see, e.g., 244: "Paul's typical use of οὐδέ") if the Pastorals were written by someone other than Paul (especially a pseudepigrapher), as Payne suggests as a possibility.

3 *Ibid.*, 236 (emphasis added).

4 Ibid., 236-41.

5 Ibid., 251-52.

6 Sometimes Payne's language is less precise than might be desired, such as when he speaks of οὐδέ joining "expressions that reinforce or make more specific a single idea" (236). What Payne fails to note here is that in those cases this may involve the introduction of a second, related (yet nonetheless distinct) idea. See further the discussion below.

7 See especially Payne's discussion on 247, which contains a large number of questionable assertions and logical *non sequiturs*. See further the discussion below.

8 Ibid., 248.

9 See Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Ascertaining Women's God- Ordained Roles: An Interpretation of [1 Timothy 2:15](#)," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 7 (1997): 104-11.

10 Payne, "[1 Tim 2.12](#) and the Use of οὐδέ" 243, n. 23 (emphasis added). Payne does not support this assertion.