



## HAVE WHAT IT TAKES

In September 2022, a suicide bomber with links to the Taliban detonated a device in the Kaaj education centre in Kabul, Afghanistan, killing 50 students and injuring hundreds more. Most of the victims were teenage girls, who were sitting a practice exam at the time.

What had they done to warrant such an attack?

Nothing more than 1) being women, and 2) receiving an education.

Many people interpret the Bible as having a similar attitude – specifically, Paul. To quote Ralph Fiennes in an interview for the movie *Conclave*, “St Paul preaches love, but his strictures on women are horrendous.”

Today we’re going to look at what is arguably the most ‘horrendous’ of all. Though as is so often the case where Paul is concerned ... we may have misread him!

### 1 Timothy 2:8-15

There are 2 main takes on this passage and subject:

- Complementarian (the sexes have different roles, even in church).
- Egalitarian (the sexes can share roles, generally speaking).

Both tend to zero in on the most controversial part of this passage – vs11-15 – and overlook the fact this is merely no.3 on Paul’s wish-list. So, let’s tackle

them one by one, taking context into account, work out whether there's any continuity, and heed the message, to each of us.

**1) Be prayerful, not hurtful** (vs8). "I want men everywhere to lift up holy (*hosious*, dedicated) hands in prayer, without anger and disputing." I.e. "Offer your disagreements to God, rather than going nuclear on each other." Think outrage culture. Or toxic masculinity (if you can use the word 'think' in the same sentence as 'toxic masculinity').

We all get angry at some point. But some of us have shorter fuses than others, and some of us, if we're honest, are capable of driving even the calmest person to break the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment. But what's interesting here is that Paul has to address this to men; in his letter to the Philippians (4:2-3), he has to address it to women, Euodia and Syntyche, who had once served alongside him – but were now at such loggerheads they were jeopardising the stability of the church. I.e. this is not gender exclusive.

The point, however, is that true authority is not about muscle or mouth. It's about a humble, prayerful, spirit.

**2) Be respectful, not boastful** (vs9-10). "I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety," Paul says next. I checked a thesaurus for this one, trying to sum up the word 'modestly' in an easy-to-remember way, and I got a whole lot of words that do *not* apply:

- Shy (not what Paul is saying).
- Unsure (not what Paul is saying).
- Unassertive (not what Paul is saying).
- Unexceptional (not what Paul is saying).
- Limited (not what Paul is saying).
- Plain (not what Paul is saying).

Which begs the question, what *is* Paul saying? The word *kosmios* literally means 'properly ordered.' The point being: "Women, if you want to be looked up to, remember: it's not about looks first-and-foremost, or fashion, wealth, status. It's about respecting God and others, particularly those with less than you. That's what matters most."

How important is this to our *Love Island*, surface-level, image-obsessed, photo-shop approach to beauty? To celebrity? To authority? Well, I guess I've kind of said it. But again, this isn't just an issue for women (even if it was in Ephesus).

Remember God's words in 1 Samuel 16:7!

**3) Be teachable, not impeachable** (vs11-15). Most assume this to be about gender. In reality, I think it's about education, maturity, and again, authority. Here's why:

- Paul recommends that a woman should learn / study, in quietness and full submission. So, if nothing else, he's encouraging female education –

a rare thing in the 1<sup>st</sup> century eastern-Mediterranean world. And note: the submission is to God and His word, not to men – or even husbands (the emphasis is on study).

- Paul refuses women the opportunity to teach men or 'exercise authority' (*authentein*. This is its only NT occurrence; elsewhere, it suggests taking control of something that isn't yours). Instead, they are to be silent, or better, 'quiet' (note: in other places women prayed, prophesied, taught – so this is not a universal).
- Paul then uses a biblical story as a *midrash*, a rabbinic lesson. Adam was formed first and was therefore more mature than Eve; as a consequence, Eve was deceived and fell into sin. The church in Ephesus was facing a similar scenario, with women assuming more influence than their present maturity-level allowed for.
- Vs15 is the trickiest bit to interpret, but I think it gives us a clue as to the kind of false teaching the women in Ephesus had been suckered into believing. Paul is assuring them of God's protection during pregnancy, which suggests that someone else had been doing the opposite (probably as part of Gnostic ideology).

Put it all together, and the point here is not to prevent women from teaching or leading – it's to prep them for it. To help them become the new Marys and Lydias and Priscillas and Junias and Euodias and Syntyches and Phoebe and the 4 daughters of Philip who were prophesying to Paul in Acts 21:9. I.e. leadership is about calling, gifting – and training.

*That's* the principle here.

### **People Are People**

Complementarians will often cite this passage and read all other references to women leading and teaching in light of it, rather than the other way around. This is potentially hazardous. We wouldn't do that with another doctrine or practice. We shouldn't do it with this one.

They can also make it sound as though their approach is the most literal, word-for-word one. In reality, *everyone* has to use some guesswork in their interpretation and application of this passage. And that includes them.

But they also miss the point – as do most Paul-bashers, ironically. Which is? That true authority requires us to live lives worthy of the One who called us. To be prayerful, not hurtful; respectful, not boastful; teachable, not impeachable. And those principles apply to all of us.

Whether we're men, or women.

Sisters, or brothers.