

1 TIMOTHY 2:12

Twisted Scripture/Difficult texts/Hard texts/Blue Parakeets – whatever name you call them, there are scriptures that are difficult to interpret that have either gotten twisted, in the general populous, or in the church or whatever, or misapplied in different ways, taken out of context

Just difficult to navigate - Bible Study – looked at Romans 9 and book of Job.

This morning, we're going to look at a passage that continues to be very controversial and to divide the church in significant ways.

In fact, it's a passage that is topic of hot debate in our own denominational world...

So, guess what the passage is...here it is - Timothy, chapter 2:12 Apostle Paul writes:

*“I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man;
She must be quiet.”*

So to quote some people – I just read that passage...”God said it, we are to believe it, I’ve been told I have to accept it, and that settles it...have a good day, women, stay quiet”

Alright, alright, we're going to delve into this thing, do some digging here:

It will either do one of a few things:

- 1 – Tick you off
- 2 – Call me a heretic
- 3 – Or liberate you in a new way

Change – in culture – a new normal...let’s affirm women...empower our girls to learn and expect to grow and be difference makers in the KOG

Will you pray with me here?

Here we go – friends...this passage is and has traditionally been taken and in many churches, is still taken to mean, that women are not supposed to be in any kind of leadership over a man.

They're not ever to be in a position where they're teaching a man...in some places, it's taken to mean that they can't serve on a leadership team (especially Elders)

In some places, it means they can't vote, in a church on any church matters.

Now, I speak to ladies all the time...around here and MANY other places – here’s the reality - some can’t talk theology if a man is present...some can’t lead bible studies...I train leaders – most churches won’t allow a trained woman leader to serve – except to serve cookies or tend babies/children

But what’s frustrating to me is that as clear as that passage seems to be in some people’s minds, it’s also clear to me after being around TONS of Christian women over the years that in fact there are multitudes who are gifted at teaching and leading and preaching and have a sense of calling, to teach, and to preach.

Same churches while they listen to men share the very subjective sense of being called, will dispute or even put down a woman who senses the same thing – they will tell her she’s wrong because God just wouldn’t call a woman

So...bottom line is that their gifts are squandered, they live with a certain amount of frustration, and, in my opinion, the church capital C suffers because of it.

In other words, half the population – more than that – taken out of the running of doing significant Kingdom work, from the word go.

So the question is, what do we do? Here are some realities:

We hold the Bible to be God's word, and here we have this verse that seems to prohibit this...so we either just leave well enough alone and let it sit there dictating our actions OR we review it carefully and really try to discern what it actually means in a fresh way

So what we are going to do is go over this carefully OK

First of all - Whenever you read in the Bible, you need to remember that, there are timeless teachings and truth but, and this is big, BUT it’s always acculturated

In other words, truth is always, always wrapped in cultural packaging.

In other words, when God speaks to the world and comes into the world as Jesus, God is essentially a missionary, and, as all missionaries know, you have to – you just can't overturn cultures with a snap of your finger.

Missionaries know this - You have to work with within the cultures, and bring your message into the culture, and while you are doing that...accept and acquiesce parts of the culture maybe that you don't even agree with.

And so, we need to make that distinction throughout the Bible.

So to put 1 Timothy 2 through that lens of interpretation - here’s the question - is 1 Timothy 2 part of the timeless teaching of the Bible, or is it part of the cultural packaging?

Or to put it another way...may be easier for you to understand...Is it more like, the teachings that God created the heavens and the earth, and that Jesus Christ is Lord and that He came and died for our salvation and He rose again on the third day and continues to empower us through His Spirit...

That stuff is timeless – we are supposed to adhere to that...

Or is it more like – for example – the teaching about slavery in the bible?

Let me break this down for you:

Even in the NT – you have 2 times where both Peter and Paul say, “Slaves obey your masters”

Now...everyone who looks at and studies the bible understands that that section of the bible was part of that ancient culture

Radical in its own – treat slaves with dignity...have a relationship of obedience and respect...fact is that the KOG was brought to the slave owners too

They were taught and challenged to regard their servants as brothers and sisters in Jesus...if the early followers of Jesus would have fully done that, the institution of slavery would have collapsed way before the 19th century

You see...slavery is NOT intended to be applied to the 21st century

Now...slavery big deal in the Roman Empire – some scholars suggest that up to 50% or more of the population of Rome at the time of Jesus were slaves...

But in that time and in that culture as the faith became something that was spreading like wildfire through the empire – Peter and Paul two main spokesmen at the time, acquiesced to the culture...because we know that they couldn't overturn that embedded reality right away

So ... the question again - is the teaching about women in ministry – the prohibition of women in ministry more like the teaching that Jesus is Lord OR is it more like the teaching of slavery that is something that we now have outgrown?

Now, when you're distinguishing between the timeless teachings and the cultural packaging, there are several questions that you need to ask in order to make that distinction:

And I tell you as someone who has wrestled with the text for year...it's not always unambiguous, and it is not always easy...sometimes it is actually pretty iffy

But, the first thing to ask is this:

1 - 'Were there things going on in the culture of that time that makes sense of this teaching?'

Were there things that we can understand, why, at that time, something would be allowed or prohibited, but wouldn't be applied today, because those things are no longer in place? Is there something going on in the culture at that time when he was writing to Timothy that makes sense of it's teaching? Why would that instruction be relevant THEN but not apply to all time?

Ok, so the question is this - Is 1 Timothy 2:12 with it's prohibition about women having authority over men, is that a timeless teaching, or is there a cultural condition that was prevalent at that time that inspired it?

And so, with this in mind, lets look at the context of Paul's letter.

Paul is writing a letter to Timothy, whom he had left in the city of Ephesus, for the sake of the followers of Jesus that were meeting there.

And one of the central issues in Paul's letter is false teaching, or false doctrine.

He opens his letter with it, in chapter 1:3 saying: “Stay there in Ephesus, so that you may command certain people not to teach False doctrines any longer.....”

And we can see in the actual letter the types of things Timothy was facing...1 Timothy 6

Paul writes, “Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and, in so doing, have departed from the faith.....”

Friends...this is huge.

Apparently, false teaching had become such an issue in the church of Ephesus

And the only way we can wrap our heads around what that means is to look at the culture of Ephesus at that time

- Ancient Ephesus was the largest city in Asia Minor, during this time.
- It housed one of the Seven Wonders of the World at that time, the Temple of Diana also known as Artemis, the goddess of fertility.
- This temple was huge and beautiful, it took up more space than a football field, and it was covered in silver and gold
- History tells us that 1000's of people would flock to the city and to the temple...prosperity reigned in Ephesus
- Temple of Ephesus was a highly unique place because women ran the temple (just like they did in Rome with the Temple of the Vestal Virgins) - men played no role in the temple at all, or if they did play a role, it was a subservient role.
- In this temple, the women were the high priestesses, and part of their religious duty, was to teach the Religion of Artemis or Diana, as well as engage in ritualistic prostitution.
- And this kind of prostitution was where one would pay to have sex with a high priest or priestess, which would raise money for the temple, in addition to the fact that it was also believed to be a reenactment of the fertility cycle of spring, when, the goddess of fertility, Artemis/Diana, blessed the earth.

So this is the unique cultural context in which the followers of Jesus were situated

And in this specific time and place, Ephesian women were inevitably associated with what Paul rightly calls false teaching, the religion of Diana and religious prostitution.

Now I must add –this verse is used NOW in some circles to hammer those who don't agree with doctrine – heterodox – that's just not the context – this isn't about people arguing about the rapture, infant baptism, communion practices, or even salvation by faith alone...false teaching in this context was about pagan teachings...associated with the temple of Artemis

So what Paul tells Timothy is this – because there are going to be newly converted pagan women in this growing Jesus following community – these women might assume that following Jesus was just like following Artemis – in other words, they should be responsible and teach everything associated with this new faith in Christ

They would assume that because they came from a religion and a temple where women ruled

And at that time and in that place, these women would be totally unequipped to do so, because they were uneducated about the things of God.

So...follow me here...so putting these women into leadership positions, in this local setting, would not only have been unwise, but most likely would have been detrimental to the integrity and growth of the Jesus movement

2 - There is also second contextual question to ask as we get to the bottom line about 1 Timothy 2 - Is this teaching or prohibition, or whatever it might be, is it something that you find consistent throughout the whole bible? Or WOULD YOU find variations on it? OR Different teachings on it?

Here's this question spelled out for you - If you find that it is a throughout the entire Bible teaching, then that's a good indication that you're then dealing with a timeless teaching, and then if it doesn't vary, since there's a number of different cultural settings, in all the books in the Bible, it should be something that is applied to our time

However the reverse is also true, because if you find that there are different teachings on that same topic, well that's a good indication that that teaching's application depends on the culture you're in, or the circumstances you face in your time

So, for example, one of the churches I attended when I was in high school, it was what some might call...a tee--totaling church, in other words, they were totally against any kind of alcohol (which was a safe thing for me at the time because my dad had been struggling with that issue)

These peeps always quoted a verse out of Proverbs, I think it's Proverbs 23 it says:

“Don't ever touch or even look at red wine...because it leads to debauchery.” (Very discouraging verse for many people here – ONE reason for Lutheranism)

So, they always quoted that verse to rationalize their stance on that issue and they really thought that was the Bible's definitive word

And that word guided my life for a while until I was reading Psalms, and I found in my bible and underlined a verse from Psalms 104, verse 15, where David says:

“Let's give thanks to the Lord, who gives us wine to make our hearts happy.”

There you go....apparently DAVID hadn't read Proverbs, I don't know....

But there's more ... then in the NT, Paul is writing again and he recommends this to his young friend, Timothy – he says, 'Timothy, have a little bit of wine, it will help your stomach...after reading that – I felt sick to my stomach very quickly!

And then...there's more - Jesus turns water into wine...good wine...what's up with that?

You see...that's an indication, that, there are going to be circumstances where, it is wise, to have nothing to do with alcohol...a word to you who have debauchery as a middle name...but there are going to be other circumstances where it's ok to have alcohol, as long as it's in drank in a manner where God is honored...most people would say, drank in moderation

Now friends...that's the timeless teaching...you see, one text that looks convincing standing up against a preponderance of biblical material

SO...bottom-line...it all depends on the context.

So bottom line...you can't just quote one verse because you like it and it supports your methodology or strategy or way of doing things...you can't just do that and make that verse a timeless teaching because it has to stand next to and play off of other passages in the bible

So now that you have an idea of the context, in which Paul is writing to Timothy, we can now dive into the text, and we're actually going to start with verse 11, because I find that just as controversial as verse 12.

1 Timothy 2:11 “A woman should learn in quietness and Full submission.”

Some people when they are interpreting this section of the bible...what most people often miss here, is what Paul is doing right here...LOOK...he actually affirming a woman's need to learn.

You see in the ancient world...that wasn't the norm...it wasn't normative for girls or women to be educated at all...remember that...it wasn't what normally happened so for Paul to encourage LEARNING is huge!

The idea here though is this - when Paul says '**quietness**', some translations even use the word 'silence', that's not what Paul is saying.

The idea Paul is trying to get at is this – learn with calmness and self---control.

And this is actually something Paul desires for both men and women.

Because, just nine verses earlier, Chapter 2:2, Paul writes: “That we (both men and women) may live peaceful and quiet lives.”

Friends, it is the same word Greek word as “quietness/silence”...it means we should all learn and grown in a spirit of godliness and holiness.

So Paul here is warning these specific Ephesian women to understand what the proper position, or posture or attitude was for learning and growing...it was One of calmness and teach---ability.

Now lets look at the words **full submission**.

Some interpreters assume that means full submission as in Ephesians 5 – submission unto a husband, but this verse is just nothing of the sort.

The idea here is that Paul's trying to get at - is that women need to be submissive as unto a teacher.

It's important to remember Ephesians 5:21 – “submit to each other in Christ”

Philippians 2:4: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition, or vane conceit, rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others.”

So, why is Paul telling women this? Why is he telling them to learn in quietness and to be teachable and to be submissive as unto a teacher?

NOT because of the fact that they are female, but because they are in a culture where education was not an opportunity for them, like the men had.

And because these women came from a culture where women were the leading priests and leading teachers, it could have possibly made them a little more unruly, and not as teachable as they could be, especially if they were being taught by a man.

So when Paul tells these women to submit, as unto a teacher, it's with the understanding that, they are going to learn...in fact, he's encouraging them to learn, in a peaceful and teachable manner.

So, in this light, we can now better understand verse 12

I really believe friends...that If we knew and know the character and life of Paul, we would understand this statement, or this command, as an anomaly for him, because Paul greatly esteemed women in leadership....you can see that there his other letters...all the time

So here's the breakdown - given the cultural context of that time, we can gather a few reasons why Paul is telling Timothy to not put these Ephesian women in teaching positions, or in positions of authority over men.

1 – they are not educated enough given the cultural restraints

2 - They just did not have the same opportunities as men.

Therefore: They'd be more inclined to get some things wrong...to give false teachings.

Like spreading or mixing up the Artemis cult with knowing and following Jesus

3 - in these two verses, Paul is encouraging women to learn, and explaining to them what a proper learning posture or heart looks like.

4 – So...until they're educated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul says that he doesn't want them to be in positions of authority...HE IS NOT making a blanket statement for all women, for all time

He was dealing with women from a cult who did not know the teachings of Jesus

A totally different situation from where women in America are today, in regards to education and access to biblical knowledge.

And one more thing...remember, Paul is writing this letter to Timothy and Timothy had worked with Paul for years.

So I believe, Timothy knew Paul's heart, and he had heard Paul countless times esteem women in leadership.

And so, when Timothy receives this letter from Paul, that had this restriction for women to not teach, not be in positions of authority, I believe he would have understood it as a temporary restriction due to their specific situation, because he knew Paul, and he knew his love for women in the faith and in leadership

I could give you a litany of women...Romans 16, Philippians 4

Paul commends Pheobe the deacon to the church in Corinth. He calls Priscilla his co---worker in Christ Jesus. He praises Andronicus and Junia for being outstanding among the apostles. He praises Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis for working very hard in the Lord.

Paul goes on to talk about: Euodia and Syntyche who contended at his side in the cause of the gospel....Paul consistently describes women as co---laborers, making no reference to subordinate positions due to gender.

So this is good news, whether you're male or female. There's no pressure to figure out how much authority you're supposed to have, or how submissive you're supposed to be, for we are all free and equal and united in Jesus, we are one and if you are a woman and you feel called into ministry, Paul does not restrict you.

So that means ladies...you don't have to hate Paul for the rest of your life...

Poor guy, I know he's a good man and I can't wait to see the line of ladies who want to talk with him in eternity...whatever his intention, his words have been used to degrade and keep women in a place where they could not fulfill their call in Jesus

Let me close with this - beautiful piece, written by Kate Wallace, who has noticed this significant disconnect between the life of Jesus and widespread church Practice

“Jesus told a woman to spread the good news of His resurrection, but we won't let a woman preach it from the pulpit. Jesus engaged in cross gender discipleship, but we teach this as somehow dangerous or overly tempting. Jesus depended on the financial provision of women, for the welfare of His ministry, but we teach that men are to be the sole providers in Christian communities. Jesus used female examples in His teachings and spoke about women in His stories. But we teach that Christianity is supposed to have a masculine feel. A young woman carried the body and blood of Jesus in her for nine months. But we teach that a woman can't serve communion. Jesus denied that there is hierarchy in His kingdom, but we teach that there is hierarchy between men and women.” And she wraps it up with this: “I know that Paul wrote some things that have caused us to be overly concerned with a woman's place, but if we are teaching something that is inconsistent with Jesus' life, perhaps we've gotten it wrong.”

“For in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor Free, nor is there male and Female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus.” Amen.

Close in prayer – especially you women who have been squashed by this...personally feeling guilt or inadequate...let's pray for release and healing

