

Paul: Women Keep Silent
July 19, 2009
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(1 Timothy 2:8–15 NRSV) I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument; {9} also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, {10} but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God. {11} Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. {12} I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. {13} For Adam was formed first, then Eve; {14} and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. {15} Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

Before we can even talk about how Paul understood the role of women in the early Christian movement, we need to look at how women were expected to behave in the Jewish culture of the first century.

Joachim Jeremias in his classic work: *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* writes about the social position of women at that time.

Eastern women take no part in public life. This was true of Judaism in the time of Jesus . . . When the Jewess of Jerusalem left her house, her face was hidden by an arrangement of two head veils . . . so that her features could not be recognized. . . Any women who went out without this headdress, i.e. without her face being hidden, committed such an offence against good taste that her husband had the right --- and indeed the duty to put her away from him.

Rules of propriety forbade a man to be alone with a woman, to look at a married woman, or even to give her a greeting. It was disgraceful for a scholar to speak with a woman in the street.

There is no indication that the custom of wrapping up the head was observed as strictly in the country as in the town; rather there was in this respect a difference between town and country similar to what we see in present day Palestine. However, a woman must not be alone in the fields,

and it was not customary even in the country for a man to converse with a strange woman.

. . . In the liturgical service, women were there simply to listen.

According to the Jewish historian Josephus, women could go no further in the temple than the Courts of the Gentiles and of Women.

And during the time that they were menstruating, and also for a period of forty days after the birth of a son or eighty days following the birth of a daughter they were not even allowed into the Court of the Gentiles.

Jeremias concludes:

On the whole, the position of women in religious legislation is best expressed in this constantly repeated formula: "Women, (Gentile) slaves and children." Like a non-Jewish slave and a child under age, a woman has over her a man which is her master; and this likewise limits her participation in divine service, which is why from a religious point of view she is inferior to a man.

Think about this for a minute.

When Jesus comes on the scene he is offering a radical way of looking at the world.

Think about his ministry

- Women followers
- Talks to women at well
- Makes marriage and divorce equitable
- Jesus doesn't want to elevate women to a higher place than they had been before, Jesus wants them to be seen as on equal footing to men before God.

But something happens.

Jesus preaches equality → the Gospels tell us that the first to encounter the resurrected Jesus was not a man but Mary Magdalena.

But in a number of places, particularly in the pastoral letters we have a totally different view.

In the first letter to Timothy, the author writes:

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.

In the letter to Titus, that author suggests:

(Titus 1:6–8 NIV) An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife,

Or maybe my all time favorite:

(Colossians 3:18 NRSV) Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Over the years the church has worked hard to interpret just what those passages mean.

Let me give you some examples: Gotquestions.org offers this view.

the Scriptures give specific roles to each in marriage. The husband is to assume leadership in the home . . . Wives are to submit to the authority of their husbands.

In regard to the division of responsibilities in the home, the Bible instructs husbands to provide for their families. This means he works and makes enough money to sufficiently provide all the necessities of life for his wife and children. . . . Proverbs 31 also makes it clear that the home is to be the woman's primary area of influence and responsibility. Even if she must stay up late and rise up early, her family is well cared for.

Once again from Gotquestions.org

God has ordained that only men are to serve in positions of spiritual teaching authority in the church. This is not because men are necessarily better teachers, or because women are inferior or less intelligent (which is not the case). It is simply the way God designed the church to function. Men are to set the example in spiritual leadership—in their lives and through their words. Women are to take a less authoritative role. Women are encouraged to teach other women (Titus 2:3–5). The Bible also does not restrict women from teaching children. The only activity women are restricted from is teaching men or having spiritual authority over them.

This logically would preclude women from serving as pastors/preachers. This does not make women less important, by any means, but rather gives them a ministry focus more in agreement with God's plan and His gifting of them.

When I experience that kind of discrimination within the body of Christ, and I study the words of Jesus and the Authentic Paul I am a bit put out.

Women played a huge role in the ministry of Jesus.

He didn't say to Mary, you can't follow me; you need to go home and stay barefoot and pregnant. Instead she is the one who tells the world - teaches the world that Jesus is Alive!

What has happened?

We need to go back to the second sermon that I preached in this series in which we talked about the letters attributed to Paul. In case you have forgotten, let me refresh your memory

13 are attributed to Paul

Scholars do not believe that all of those were written by Paul

Those 13 books can be divided into three categories

We know that 7 of the letters could be called "genuine", by that I mean written by Paul himself:

- Romans
- 1 Corinthians
- 2 Corinthians
- 1 Thessalonians
- Galatians
- Philippians
- Philemon

These were all written in the 50's of the first century and are the earliest new Testament writings - earlier than even the Gospels - Mark the earliest Gospel was probably written around 70 CE.

Three Letters are understood not to have been written by Paul - Most scholars believe that they were written around the year 100 (maybe even a little later).

There are a number of reasons why these are not considered to have been written by Paul, including what appears to be a later historical setting and the style of the writing. These letters, often called “the Pastorals” include:

- 1 Timothy
- 2 Timothy
- Titus

The final group is a group of 3 more letters that there is not scholarly consensus on – so they are called the “disputed letters” – however, a majority of scholars would argue that they too are not from Paul.

- Ephesians
- Colossians
- 2 Thessalonians

Most scholars see these as written in between the authentic letters and the Pastoral letters.

If you will bear with me, I think this is going to make sense as we walk through the letters of Paul – starting with his genuine letters – going to the disputed letters and ending with the letters clearly written by someone else.

These three groupings of Paul’s letters have been called:

Radical Paul

Conservative Paul

Post Pauline or maybe even Anti-Pauline

Let’s follow the development of the role of women through these three groups of Paul’s letters

The Radical Paul believed that in Christ we are all one and that there was equality in the apostolate

In Corinthians it is clear that Paul is taking for granted that both men and women pray in the Christian assembly:

(1 Corinthians 11:4–5 NRSV) Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, {5} but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head--it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved.

Paul assumes that both men and women are praying in the assembly

But if that is not enough evidence that Paul saw men and women equal in Christ he spells it out further.

In the last chapter of Romans, Paul reminds us that it is Phoebe, a deacon, who has brought the letter from Corinth to Rome and that she is the one who reads it and explains it to those there.

In that chapter, Paul singles out 27 individuals for praise – ten of them are women. Eleven of those 27 are singled out for special attention and of those eleven, five are women.

Paul writes:

(Romans 16:7 NRSV) Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are **prominent among the apostles**, and they were in Christ before I was.

I bring this last one up because it shows clearly how we have misunderstood Paul.

For the first millennium of Christianity, commentators recognized correctly that Junia was a female name. She was the wife of Andronicus. But for some strange reason, about one thousand years ago Junia was turned into a male. If you have an NIV bible it calls him? Junias.

Why this change?

Because if Junia were allowed to remain a female, then, since she was “prominent among the apostles,” it was obviously possible for a women to be an apostle.

One final passage from the authentic or radical Paul that clearly shows his understanding.

(Galatians 3:28 NRSV) There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Paul had no problem with gender and function. For him women as well as men were called by God to be apostles of Christ.

But by the time we get to the conservative Paul, 30 – 50 years later, we see the role of women being redefined.

I have already quoted from Colossians; the letter to the Ephesians says basically the same thing

(Ephesians 5:22–29 NRSV) Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.

The conservative movement today stops right there with that passage but it goes on to say:

{23} For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. {24} Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. {25} Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, {26} in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, {27} so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind--yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. {28} In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. {29} For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church,

It is sad that we have demanded subjugation from wives and then, rather than demanding self-sacrifice from husbands and have transferred that expectation to the wives as well.

But you can clearly see how we have moved from the radical notion of the radical Paul to a much more conservative viewpoint.

If we go a little further we see that the radical Paul is ultimately replaced by the anti-Pauline tradition.

This is seen clearly in our text this morning from 1 Timothy.

This silencing of women in the church not only contradicts the general attitude of the historical Paul, but it also explicitly contradicts what he said in 1 Corinthians.

Paul insists, in 1 Corinthians, that:

(1 Corinthians 11:4-5 NRSV) Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, {5} but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head--it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved.

Whatever the problem was with veils at Corinth, it is clear that both men and women publicly ministered in the Christian community.

Regardless of all of this fussing over Paul's letters, I am amazed that we still have such a long way to go.

The United Methodist Church ordained our first female clergy person in 1880, but there are still many roadblocks to women in the church and in society.

While we are part of a tradition that has welcomed women clergy, Ridge has never had one - are we ready?

And if not --- why not?

Jesus and Paul offer to us a radical vision of equality under God - it is time that we start embracing that equality in our own lives.