

Romans 16:1-16

Paul and women in ministry

1. Paul's view of women in ministry has been one of the biggest sources of controversy in Paul's letters.

- He is generally viewed as being the champion of patriarchy with little real respect for women.
- But some would suggest that Paul had a deep and abiding respect for women in ministry as noted by the frequent flattering references to them.

2. The last chapter in Romans is a case in point.

- There are no less than ten references to specific women who were deemed special in Paul's ministry.

“¹ I commend to you our sister **Phoebe**, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; ² that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.

³ Greet **Prisca** and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; ⁵ also {greet} the church that is in their house. Greet Epaphroditus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia. ⁶ Greet **Mary**, who has worked hard for you. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and **Junias**, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. ⁸ Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹ Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. ¹⁰ Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the {household} of Aristobulus. ¹¹ Greet Herodion, my kinsman. Greet those of the {household} of Narcissus, who are in the Lord. ¹² Greet **Tryphaena** and **Tryphosa**, workers in the Lord. Greet **Persis** the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also **his mother** and mine. ¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them. ¹⁵ Greet Philologus and **Julia**, Nereus and **his sister**, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. ¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.”

A. Some observations on the names in this list.

- Most historical scholars recognize that the names mentioned are names normally given to **slaves or freedman and women**. These were not people of high class in Roman society.
- **Junias** (vs.6) is ambiguous in the Greek text. It could refer to a man (Junias) or a woman (Junia). Before the 13th century nearly all references translated it Junia.

- The phrase **"among the apostles"** can have two different meanings.
 1. It could have the sense of "in the eyes of the apostles."
 2. It could also have the sense of "as one of the apostles." If this view is adopted, it is not at all clear that the reference to the "apostles" is to the authoritative leaders of the early church or to "a messenger or missionary" in a general sense.

B. The fact that Paul would single out individual women for recognition suggests a number of things to us.

- He sees the value in personal encouragement and is willing to take the risk of leaving someone's name out in order to encourage others.
- He does not seem to feel that by recognizing individuals he is in any way detracting from the Lordship of Christ. Quite the contrary, it is his commitment to the edification of the Body of Christ that no doubt encourages him to encourage others by name.
- He recognized the contribution of women along with men.
- The fact that several women are mentioned suggests that their ministry was common. Paul was not alone in recognizing women.
- It was not only husband and wife teams that were recognized.

C. There are three views of Paul's attitude toward women in ministry.

- **Paul the Pharisee** - Paul followed the patriarchal pattern of ancient Jewish law.
- **Complementarian** - Paul felt that men and women were equal but had distinct complementary roles in ministry.
- **Egalitarian** - Paul saw no distinction between men and women in ministry. The texts of the NT that seem to teach such a distinction are misunderstood or occasional.

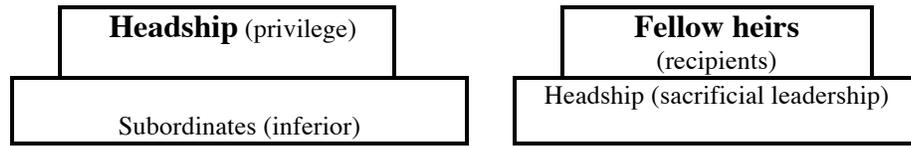
D. Paul's teaching on gender roles in marriage seem to reflect a gender role distinction without subordination of worth.

1. **Basic principle #1 - "EQUALITY"** (Gal.3:28 "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."):
 - a. This principle is an affirmation of **Gen.1:27** "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."
 - b. The term *"joint-heirs"* is used in I Peter 3:7.
 - c. In Gal.3:28 Paul clearly affirms the unity & equality of male and female.
 1. This is a statement that seems to be directed at a common Pharisaic prayer - "Thank you God for not creating me a gentile, a slave, or a woman."
 2. This text is not speaking of homogeneous roles because:
 - a) The context in Gal. 3 is dealing with "justification" not responsibility in ministry.

- b) The phrase “you are all one” does not mean “you are all equal (in function or role)” Examples are found in I Cor.3:8, Rom.12:5, Jn.10:30, Mk.10:8, etc.
- c) The parallel text (Col.3:11-19) which speaks of both equality of spiritual standing and distinctiveness in male/female roles indicates that the two concepts were not inconsistent in the mind of God.
2. **Basic principle #2 - “HEADSHIP”** (I Cor.11:3 “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.”).
- a. This principle is an affirmation of *Genesis 2:18-25*.
Genesis 2 draws our attention (not to the significance of mankind in God's creation) but rather to the dynamics of the relationship between man and his environment including woman.
- d. **“HEAD”** (kefalh KEPHALE) is used, in the case of living beings, to denote superior rank. Note The word often implies “authority” as in Eph.5:22-24 where Paul relates the wife's subjection to the husband's headship. In Col.1:18 Paul links Christ's “first born from the dead” status with headship and supremacy. “And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”
- 1) ILLUSTRATION: **Eph.5:21-32** In this passage Paul is drawing attention to the relationship between Christ and the church vs.32. He has in mind the well known teaching concerning the Lordship of Christ over all creation including the church (Col.1:15-23) and the subjection of the church to Christ. He is arguing that marriage is designed to illustrate this important relationship. It is husband and wife together that bear the image of God. He exhorts Christians to live out this drama in their relationships and thus bear God's image through their union. While we are concerned about our rights God is concerned about our opportunity as image bearers. While we are concerned about our welfare because of abuses God is concerned about our neglect of our calling to mirror God's character.
- 2) ILLUSTRATION: **I Cor.11:3** “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and that man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.” The relationship of unity subordination that exists between Christ and God the Father is a picture of “headship”. While Christ is always subject to God, He is not inferior to God. The ideas of mutual subordination seems inappropriate in describing the relationship between Christ and the Father. The Father is never pictured as subject to Christ.
- 3) Jesus' view of leadership stands in contrast to the assumptions of His day.
Matt.20:20-28, Mk.10:35-45, Jn.13:1-17

Gentile model
“Lording it over”
Mark 10:42-43

Jesus' model
“Footwashing”
John 13:1-17



E. Paul's teaching concerning gender and ministry reflects sensitivity to both individual giftedness and creation order.

1. **Basic principle #1 - "WITNESS"** (Acts 1:8 "but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses")
2. **Basic principle #2 - "GIFTS"** (I Cor.12:7 "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.")
 - a. There are two different emphasis with respect to the relationship between personal gifts and official offices in the church.

Charismatic model

Gifts not related to office
 Gifts not gender specific
 Informal ministry
 Low church

Clergy model

Gifts related to office
 Gifts linked to ordination
 Ordained ministry
 High church

- b. The Biblical writers assumed a more charismatic emphasis than did the later church. This means that gifts are freely and often used outside ordained offices.
3. **Basic principle #3 - "MINISTRY"** (I Cor.12:5 "And there are varieties of ministries and the same Lord.").
 - a. The proper use of spiritual gifts is subject to God's order in ministry.
 - b. The special responsibilities of oversight and doctrinal instruction for the local assembly fall to the men.
 - 1) The principle text on this subject is **I Tim.2:11-15**.
 - a) Vs. 12a is the key passage: *"I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man."*
 - b) Vs. 11 & 12b are the antithesis:
 - (1) *"Let a woman quietly receive instruction."*
 - (2) *"but to remain quiet."*
 - c) The Greek word *augentein* "AUTHENTEIN", translated *"to exercise authority,"* is used only here in the New Testament and means "to pull rank." The normal word for "authority" is *exousia* "EXOUSIA", and is not used here. This would suggest that women are not to avoid any and all roles of authority but rather to maintain "a spirit of submission" in their ministry.
 - d) The Greek word *didaskein* "DIDASKEIN", translated here *"to teach,"* is the common word for "giving instruction" used in Col. 3:16 of all believers. Paul is probably using it here in the restricted sense of 1) interpreting

prophecy or 2) doctrinal instruction before the local assembly, that is, to take the role of "the teacher or elder".

NOTE: In Judaism and the Greco-Roman world the teacher occupied a unique and highly visible place distinct from the prophet. Women were accepted as prophets but not as teachers. It also must be realized that teaching takes place on several levels: 1) informal mutual instruction among believers, 2) the instruction contained in prophesying, 3) doctrinal instruction, 4) Apostolic instruction. Paul probably has the last two categories in mind.

- e) Paul bases his statement on the order of creation and Eve's role in the Fall (I Tim.2:13-14).
 - f) Six characteristics of a godly woman from I Tim.2:9-15
 1. **Godly women cultivate beauty from the inside out.**

"9 Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discretely, not with braided hair and gold or pearls of costly garments; 10 but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness."
 2. **Godly women model the church's relationship with Christ.**

"11 Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness."
 3. **Godly women do not displace male headship.**

"12 But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet."
 4. **Godly women do not feel inferior to men.**

"13 For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve."
NOTE: The rationale for Paul's instruction is God's created ordering of things not culture, ability, giftedness, or spirituality.
 5. **Godly women are aware of their vulnerability.**

"14 And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression."
 6. **Godly women bring dignity to the bearing of children.**

"15 But women shall be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint."
- 2) A parallel passage is found in **I Cor. 14:33-38** "33 for God is not {a God} of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. 34 Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. 35 And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. 36 Was it from you that the word of God {first}

went forth? Or has it come to you only? ³⁷ If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. ³⁸ But if anyone does not recognize {this}, he is not recognized."

- a) Those who understand Paul's words in this passage as not involving any restriction on women in ministry do so on the following grounds.
1. THE DEMAND FOR SILENCE IS NOT ABSOLUTE. The reference to women who prophecy in the I Cor.11 passage refers to a general situation outside the formal assembly or it is a concession on Paul's part (not his preference).
 2. THE TEXTS CONTRADICT ONE ANOTHER. We must choose between - the authentic enlightened Paul of I Cor.11:2-16 and Gal.3:27-28 or the textual gloss in I Cor.14 & I Tim.2.
 3. PAUL IS SPEAKING OF THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN (NOT TO MEN) BUT TO HIS ORDER OF WORSHIP.
 4. PAUL IS REFERRING TO A LOCAL SITUATION ONLY. It has been suggested by some that the real reason for Paul's teaching in this text is that **the women were disorderly (noisy)**. But there is no evidence for this as a problem in the church in any text inside or outside the Bible. There is evidence of wild behavior in pagan religious rites at the time. But this behavior was not limited to women. In other situations where the problem was "disorder", Paul prescribes "order" (11:33-34; 14:27-31) not silence. If the problem was disorder among some women, why would Paul restrict all women?
 5. VS.34-35 IS THE FALSE POSITION OF THE CORINTHIANS THAT PAUL IS REFUTING.
 6. VS.34-35 WERE NOT A PART OF THE ORIGINAL TEXT AND SHOULD THEREFORE BE IGNORED.
 7. **Paul's instruction that women "keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak" may parallel I Tim.2:12** and refer to "headship" functions within the local assembly. Absolute silence is not mandated here. Note that he prescribes "silence" in a limited sense in I Cor.14:28 "*if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent*".
- b) Married women *only* may be in view here.
1. "submission" vs.34 elsewhere refers only to married women.
 2. "their own husbands" vs.35.
- c) Paul underscores the authority behind this instruction.

1. Most commentators link the last part of vs. 33 "as in all the churches of the saints" with vs. 34. This would indicate that Paul's concern is not just for a local situation at Corinth.
 2. "As the Law also says" (vs. 34) There is no OT text that is explicitly addressed to this subject but the general pattern of all of Scripture (the Law) is in this direction. Paul appeals to Gen.2 elsewhere and the order of creation as related to gender roles.
 3. "Disgraceful" (vs. 35) This suggests that the proscribed behavior is abnormal for the Christian community.
 4. "The Lord's commandment" (vs. 37) Again, we are not aware of any specific reference in the gospels that makes this point directly. It could be inferred by Jesus practice - choosing 12 men as disciples for example.
 5. "if any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized." (vs.38) Paul indicates that recognition of this issue is basic to being respected in the Christian community.
- 3) It is clear that women prophesied (spoke for edification, exhortation, and consolation--I Cor.14:3). I Cor.11:5; Acts 2:17, 21:9 and taught other women - Titus 2:3-5

F. Some guidelines

1. This is not a fundamental of the Christian faith.
2. One's beliefs in this area must be applied sensitively and sensibly.
3. This needs to be applied in a context that affirms women and men with their gifts in meaningful ways.
4. This issue should be open for continued discussion and insight.

For a more detailed set of notes on this subject see
Apttoteach.org theology file #407