
Jesus and Women: The Suffering Daughter

Review and Introduction

We saw in the last study how Jesus freed us from the effects of the Fall, including many anxieties, by reversing the Curse on the ground. This study is the first of a series that explores how Jesus specifically redeemed us from the tyranny of gender.

In Jesus' day, women were largely confined to the role of wife and mother. It was expected that all girls would marry, as they had no other means of support or role in life. Childbearing was a woman's most important function. Women were not considered competent witnesses and were not permitted to testify in court. Women were also considered to be temptresses and moral temptations to men. Worries about a woman's virtue or her reputation greatly hampered her participation in community life and interactions with men. Finally, while the Old Testament laws about ritual cleanliness specified that both men and women were "unclean" when they had a discharge of fluid from their bodies, because a woman's menstrual period occurred regularly, she was always suspect as a source of impurity. This ritual uncleanliness restricted women's participation in religious worship as well as in community life.

The Suffering Daughter

Read Mark 5:25-34 or Luke 8:43-48

1. Briefly summarize the story

Read Leviticus 15:25-27 and Numbers 19:20

- 2. What was the social and religious significance of the woman's illness?**

The woman was "unclean." Anything or anyone she touched became unclean as well. She could not participate in any kind of religious or public activity.

- 3. What do you think this woman's life has been like for the last 12 years?**

This woman had a moral duty to warn people that she was a source of contamination. No one would willingly touch her, and most people would avoid her. The extent of her despair can be seen in the fact that she has spent everything she had seeking a cure.

- 4. Why might the woman have tried to touch Jesus without his knowledge?**

She wanted desperately to be healed, but she knew that no rabbi would let her touch him.

Read Leviticus 15:19

- 5. What were the consequences for Jesus of being touched by someone who was ritually unclean?**

Jesus was now unclean as well.

- 6. Why did Jesus insist on a public acknowledgment of the healing?**

He was defying the law that made women victims of their bodies. More than any other attitude or rule, it was the laws about ritual purity that limited women's participation in the community.

The woman could not be fully cured from the most damaging aspect of her illness unless the healing, and Jesus' denial of the social significance of her affliction, were publicly understood.

Everett Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity*:

"The Jewish woman was the mistress of the home, but was not qualified to appear as a witness in court and was exempt from fulfilling religious duties that had to be performed at stated times (because her first duties were to her children and the home and she might not be in the required state of ritual purity). The prayer from the Jewish prayer book often cited as evidence of Jewish misogyny, 'Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, who has not made me a woman,' must be understood in this context as referring to woman's inability to fulfill all the commands of the law, which was the highest privilege recognized by rabbinic Judaism."

Evelyn and Frank Stagg, *Woman in the World of Jesus*:

"Jesus did nothing to change a woman's period or its related physical problems, but he did remove the 'stigma' or 'curse' imposed upon it by religion in the ancient world."

Leonard Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Woman*:

"It seems clear that Jesus wanted to call attention to the fact that he did not shrink from the ritual uncleanness incurred by being touched by the 'unclean' woman, and by immediate implication that he rejected the concept of the 'uncleanness' of a woman who had a flow of blood. Jesus apparently placed a greater importance on the dramatic making of this point, both to the afflicted woman herself and to the crowd, than he did on avoiding the temporary psychological discomfort of the embarrassed woman, which in the light of Jesus' extraordinary concern to alleviate the pain of the afflicted meant he placed a great weight on the teaching of this lesson about the dignity of women."

7. What does it mean that Jesus calls the woman "daughter" (Luke 8:48)? What does the way Jesus treated this woman mean for women in general?

Leonard Swidler:

"Jesus apparently violates...two basic regulations of ritual purity in order to cure women. First, he touched what everyone thought was a ritually unclean object, a corpse, Jairus' twelve-year-old daughter; and second, he commended the ritually unclean hemorrhaging woman for having touched him in faith. Jesus' championing of children and women within the context of making light of ritual purity is reflected in...Luke, where Jesus is accused of leading astray children and women with the result that the latter do not observe the ritual purifications."

"...very early pro-woman traditions turn up in Luke's Gospel....They support the notion that Jesus was a feminist, was widely known to be a feminist, was despised by many for being a feminist, and was politically denounced as a feminist....Jesus' lesson of the relative unimportance of regular female ritual impurity...as taught in the episode of the woman with the twelve-year hemorrhage was widely learned and applied....This so infuriated the men that they publicly denounced Jesus for it to the Roman governor and demanded that he be executed. These extremely early traditions attached to Luke...reflect the notion that Jesus' feminism was perceived as a capital crime!"

A variant reading of Luke 23:2, 5 from 4th century church father Epiphanius:

"They began their accusation by saying, 'We found this man inciting our people to a revolt, opposing payment of the tribute to Caesar, leading astray the women and the children, and claiming to be Christ, a king:...and he has turned our children and wives away from us for they are not bathed as we are, nor do they purify themselves.'"

Personal Application

8. Is there anything in your life or in the life of someone close to you that makes you (or them) feel "unclean," outcast, or unworthy? What would be necessary in order for you (or them) to be cured?

References

- Everett Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993.
- Evelyn and Frank Stagg, *Woman in the World of Jesus*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1978.
- Leonard Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Woman*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1979.

Jesus and Woman as Domestic Goddess

Review and introduction

One of the consequences of living in a world of thorns and thistles is that woman is valued mostly for her ability to bear children and run a household. In this study we explore how Jesus further releases us from the obligations that resulted from the Fall. He redirects attention away from false expectations to point out what is really important.

Mary the Mother of Jesus

1. Historically, for what characteristics has Mary the mother of Jesus been honored?

(1) Her motherhood. In Catholic traditions, God and Jesus were seen as remote and demanding authority figures. In contrast, Mary was the approachable mother. (2) Her purity and virginity. Some traditions held that, in being conceived without sin and by remaining eternally virgin, Mary became the second (righteous) Eve in the same sense that Jesus is the second Adam.

Read Luke 1:26-38 and Deuteronomy 22:20-21

2. What risk was Mary taking in agreeing to bear a child without being married?

According to Old Testament law, Mary could have been stoned to death when her pregnancy was discovered. Matt 1:18-19 tells how Joseph, being a just man, planned only to "put away" (divorce) Mary upon learning of her pregnancy.

Read Luke 11:27-28

3. What does the woman say is important about Jesus' mother?

That she was fortunate to bear an important son. Jesus' mother is praised only for having a female body. This was a point in time where neither men nor women counted for anything until they had had a son. Women, especially, lived through the accomplishments of their sons.

4. What does Jesus say is important about his mother?

Not that she was a woman, nor that she was a lucky woman who had fulfilled her social or biological role. What was important about Jesus' mother was that she "hear(d) the word of God, and obey(ed) it." If Mary is the second Eve, it is not because of her virginity, but because she was willing to trust and obey God even at tremendous personal risk. Jesus honors her for this, not for her ability to bear children.

Mary of Bethany

Read Luke 10:38-41

5. Briefly summarize this story.
6. The expression, "to sit at the feet" of someone meant that one was a student/disciple of a rabbi. This was not a typical role for women. What does Jesus' acceptance of Mary in this role tell us about his attitude toward women?

Jesus makes no comment at all about Mary being out of role. He not only completely accepts her as a disciple, he praises her for it.

7. Jesus compares Martha's concerns about her role as hostess with Mary's choice of learning God's word. It is unlikely that anyone would have gone hungry if not for Martha – Jesus could feed thousands of people with little effort. What is Jesus telling her about her anxieties?

Martha is concerned about fulfilling her role as a woman. Jesus says, Don't worry about it. "Only one thing is needed." You might ask the participants if they know people for whom some aspect of their social role is more important than anything else. My mother's generation comes to mind – keeping their houses clean was their highest goal in life. For many men, making a lot of money or winning at sport is the most important thing in their lives.

8. What does this incident tell us about what Jesus finds important in women?

According to Jesus, fulfilling social expectations is not important. What is important is "sitting at his feet" and becoming his disciple. Just as being a woman did not prevent Mary from doing what is "needed," her story challenges men as well as women to confront their own false sense of obligation.

9. What do these two stories have in common? What can men as well as women learn from them?

Personal Application

10. Do you ever feel valued (or not valued) for the wrong things? Does this affect your behavior?
11. What do these stories mean for what God finds important in us? How can we escape being "worried and upset" in order to devote ourselves to what is truly important?

Jesus and Woman as Temptress

Introduction

As we saw in the last two studies, women in the time of Jesus were constrained by expectations about their domestic roles and by requirements of ritual purity. Another set of limitations imposed on women came from fears about their sexual behavior. A Jewish man could divorce his wife for speaking to a man on the street. One group of rabbis went so far as to vow never even to look at a woman. They quickly earned the nickname of the “bruised and bleeding” rabbis, as their dedication and closed eyes got them into accidents. Jesus upheld biblical standards of sexual conduct, but shocked observers many times when he ignored rules that would have kept him from ministering to women.

“If he knew who touched him...”

Read Luke 7: 36-39

1. What about this incident disturbed the Pharisee? (verse 39)

Jesus allowed a sinful woman to touch him. If he were really a prophet, the Pharisee reasoned, God would warn him away from her. This implies that the Pharisee believed that it was so wrong for a righteous man to allow himself to be touched by a sinful woman that God would stop it.

Read the rest of the story, Luke 7:40-50

2. How did Jesus react to the woman touching him?

He considers it an indication of her great love.

3. Is there any hint that Jesus thought he should protect himself from women?

The Woman at the Well

Read John 4:4-9

Underlying this encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is a deep hatred that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews regarded Samaritan women as “menstruants from the womb,”(that is, always unclean. Massy, 1989.) Moreover, one of the most important things that ritually unclean women were not to touch were drinking vessels – and Jesus asked the woman for a drink! No wonder the woman was surprised. A long passage follows in which the woman challenges Jewish attitudes toward Samaritans.

Read John 4: 16-26

4. The woman’s “sexual history” was suspect, a fact with which Jesus was well aware. In fact, as with the woman with the issue of blood, he made a point of bringing it up. Did his knowledge of her living conditions affect his willingness to teach her?

Read John 4: 27

5. What is it that surprised the disciples when they returned to where Jesus was waiting for them?

That Jesus was talking to a woman. In this culture, men and women did not talk in public, and even in private did not have much to do with each other. Some men would ignore their own wives and daughters in public so that no one would suspect they were behaving improperly.

The Samaritan woman returned to her village and became the first witness to Christ. Read John 4:39-42 to see what happened as the result of Jesus’ conversation with the woman at the well.

The Double Standard

The Woman Taken in Adultery – Read John 8:3-11

6. What do you suppose Jesus wrote in the dust?

Perhaps the sins of the men, as each of them quietly left as Jesus wrote. Or perhaps, as Scott Bartchy suggests, it was, "Where's the man?" It does take two to commit adultery.

7. Jesus challenges the men: "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." How does this response challenge the traditional double standard? (The double standard is the notion that extramarital sex is a crime for women but acceptable for men.)

"Lust in the Heart"

Read Matthew 5:27-28

8. What is Jesus urging men to stop doing?

To stop looking at women only as sexual objects.

9. What would women gain if all men followed this admonition?

Women's freedom is greatly curtailed by fear of men's lust. Even young girls feel the impact of females being always considered as sex objects. In some parts of the world, these restrictions are severe and mandated by law (i.e., rules about veiling in Moslem countries).

In each of these passages, Jesus is reminded of the fears that would have limited his ministry to women. He steadfastly ignores these limitations, even going so far as to tell the men of his day that considering women only as sexual objects was as much of a sin as actually committing the act they so feared.

Personal Applications

10. How would your relationships at work, school, church or family, improve if you were free from concerns about the sexual element?

References

Lesly F. Massey, *Women and the New Testament; An analysis of scripture in light of New Testament Era Culture*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 1989.

Jesus and Men:

Honor, Patriarchy, and Dominance

Introduction

The consequences of the Fall placed duties and restrictions on women – limitations from which Jesus freed them. In this study, we will examine Jesus' similar treatment of the duties and restrictions culture places on men.

Macho honor

Read Matthew 5:38-42.

1. In the time of Christ (and today), the Mediterranean world was an honor/shame society in which getting prestige and revenging insults were important parts of men's lives. What is the problem with insisting on revenge?

Revenge never ends. Your enemy won't let you win, you refuse to accept loss, and there is no getting even. In this passage, Jesus wasn't talking about refusing to defend yourself against violent attacks – he was talking about refusing to get into the honor/shame cycle. When you are insulted, Jesus said, stop it right there. Your opponent will be so surprised, he won't know what to do.

Competition

Read Luke 10:25-37, Matt. 5:43-48

2. What do these verses say about competition, another result of scarcity? What should we compete to do?

We must love our neighbor as ourselves, and not seek to build ourselves up at someone else's expense. If we compete, it is to compete in doing good.

Patriarchy

Read Luke 9:59-60

3. What is Jesus offering the young man?

Discipleship, if not apostleship.

4. What is the young man's response? For what is the young man asking?
5. Why does Jesus respond so harshly? What does he mean by, "Let the dead bury the dead"?

Judging from the way Jesus responds, New Testament historian S. Scott Bartchy suggests that the young man's father is not yet dead! The young man is probably saying that he has to go home to serve his father until he dies. In those days fathers ruled their families absolutely and men who wanted their inheritance had to obey their fathers as long as the fathers lived

Here Jesus criticized patriarchy (rule of fathers) and the dead, materialistic culture that creates it. In all likelihood, this young man probably thinks he can fulfill the role expected of him by society – i.e., "bury his father" and collect his inheritance – and still escape becoming what his father is in the end. But we can't cheat the devil – if we live by worldly rules, we will die by those rules. Jesus is telling the young man to let those who are already (spiritually) dead serve themselves.

Personal Applications

10. In what ways does our society expect men to gain power over other people? How are men limited and harmed by the expectations that they must get power over other people?

11. Men: Have you been under pressure to behave in any of these ways? How are you able to resist? When has it not been possible to resist? What is the solution to situations in which you are tempted to behave in these ways?

Women: How do you respond when the men close to you behave in any of these ways? Have you ever expected a man close to you to get power over other people or to take revenge? How might you change what you want him to do?

References

- S. Scott Bartchy, "Issues of Power and a Theology of the Family," *Mission Journal*, July-August, 1987, Vol. 21, No. 1.
- S. Scott Bartchy, audiotape, "Jesus, Power, and Gender Roles," and accompanying handout. Sunstone Symposium, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1993.

What Does it Mean to Be Lord?

Introduction

Jesus criticized many of the expectations of his time and ours about what it means to be a man. Being a man in Christ does not require prestige or money, nor does the New Man in Christ seek to exercise authority over others. This study further explores Jesus' teaching about servant hood.

"You are the Christ..."

Read Mark 8:27-33

1. What did the Jews of Jesus' day expect the Messiah to be and to do? Why did Peter rebuke Jesus?

The Messianic expectations centered largely on the belief that God was going to restore the earthly kingdom to Israel. The Jews hoped for a leader like David or Solomon, a righteous king who would free them from the oppression of Rome. When Jesus acknowledges that he is the Messiah, but then says he will be rejected and murdered, Peter is astonished.

2. Jesus' response, "Get behind me, Satan!" refers us to Matthew 4:8-10, which reads: "Once again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their glory. 'All these,' he said, 'I will give you, if you will only fall down and do me homage.' But Jesus said, 'Begone, Satan! Scriptures says, 'You shall do homage to the Lord your God and worship him alone.'" How is Peter's expectation related to the third temptation?

Jesus had already turned away from the temptation to use his power to become an earthly king.

Read Mark 8:34-38

3. Why does Jesus say that his followers will be ashamed of him?

What Jesus was trying to teach his followers about how God uses power was very difficult for them to understand, although he affirmed it many times. Even after the crucifixion, the disciples continued to hold the expectation that Jesus would be an earthly king (Acts. 1:6).

Dirty Feet

Read John 13:3-17.

4. What is the meaning of foot washing in this culture? Who usually washed feet?

Unlike some of the Jewish cleanliness rituals, foot washing had a practical basis. People wore sandals, and their feet got dirty. Jesus says as much in verse 10. Since people ate lying down, anyone with dirty feet would be noticed by everyone. It was an act of hospitality to have a servant at the door to wash the feet of guests.

5. Why is Peter so upset? When Jesus takes on the houseboy or housemaid's job, what does this mean for Peter?

This was a servant's job, and Peter's Lord was doing it. Foot washing was considered so degrading a task that Jewish servants were not asked to do it – it was left to Gentile slaves instead. Jesus' washing of feet certainly lowered Peter's own status. But worse than this, however, was the fact that if Jesus could wash feet, then Peter would be expected to wash feet also.

6. Why does Peter ask Jesus to wash all of him?

He knows that he needs to be completely changed in order to accept this new order of things. Perhaps he was also trying to "spiritualize" the incident, so that it became an act of spiritual significance rather than a dirty task that Peter will now be expected to perform.

7. Locate other occasions when Jesus showed, by word or example, that worldly notions of authority, honor, and power have no place in the kingdom of God.

The New Testament is full of them. Statements about letting the little children come to Jesus, that one had to come as a little child, that the first would be last and the last would be first, that it would be difficult for the rich (who didn't need anything) to enter the Kingdom – there are everywhere. Jesus never forced anyone to do anything. He didn't even heal people against their will (John 5:2-9). Moreover, his statements were shocking in this culture, so these were not idle comments. Encourage class members to go back and read the New Testament from this perspective so that they will appreciate how central Jesus' teachings about power were to his ministry.

8. Is Christian humility a mere symbol or a test? Was Jesus humble during his lifetime so that he could win the right to forever after "lord" it over everyone else?

*"The earliest Christian confession, that Jesus is Lord, cuts two ways. First of all, you say that **Jesus** is Lord. What this means then is that anybody else is out as lord. That means the emperor can't be lord, that means that my daddy can't be lord, that means that a husband can't be lord. **Jesus** is Lord. That's the first thing to get straight. The second thing to get straight is that Jesus is **Lord**. Now the only way in which lordship can be defined properly... within the Christian community is the way in which Jesus carries it out....Jesus fills up the entire lordship space, doesn't allow anybody else in there, and then comes down and operates out of the servant space. He invites all of the rest of us to join him there, male and female. If the Lord is Jesus, legitimate power seeks not to control others and things but to empower the powerless, to lift up the fallen, to reconcile, to create healing opportunities, to encourage maturity and responsibility, and to restore community. Note: In contrast to dominating power, this kind of power exists in unlimited supply." (Bartchy, 1993)*

9. What does this mean for the idea of Christians holding "authority" over each other? For the "roles" of men and women within the church and family?

There is no one between us and Christ. No one.

10. In light of the above scriptures, why do you suppose that the Messiah came as a human male?

Virginia Wolfe wrote that the first time the Messiah came, she came as a woman – but no one paid any attention to her. Only a powerful man like Jesus could speak to other men about giving up power. Women had no authority to give up.

Personal Application

11. What does Christ's humility mean for those of us who are able to achieve positions of authority in this life?
12. What implication does this have for the way we live now?

References

- S. Scott Bartchy, audiotape, "Jesus, Power, and Gender Roles," and accompanying handout. Sunstone Symposium, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1993.

Becoming Transparent to Christ

Introduction

Jesus told us that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him (Matthew 28:18), but at the same time said that Christians were not to “lord it over” or have authority over other people. This study examines the nature and source of Jesus’ authority – and how we share in it.

“...as one having authority...”

1. In each of the following verses, what is it that Jesus has authority to do?

Matthew 7:29 and Mark 1:27:

Matthew 9:6:

Mark 3:15:

Luke 9:1:

Luke 10:19:

John 5:27:

Matthew 28:18-20

Read Matthew 23:1-12

2. Jesus said that “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat” – they had earthly authority – and therefore the Jewish people had to obey them. Then he said, “But do not do as they do.” What does Jesus tell us about the nature of unrighteous authority in this passage?

3. What is it that Jesus tells his followers to do, in contrast to what is done by the scribes and Pharisees (verses 8-12)?

Christians should not accept the authority of anyone but God. They should not seek to make disciples for themselves (don't be called "rabbi", instructor, master, or teacher), nor should they become disciples of men ("Call no one your father on earth, for you have one father, and he is in heaven.")

Read John 5:19-23, 26-27, 30-32

4. Where did Jesus get his authority?

Read Philippians 2:5-11

5. What does this passage tell us about the nature and source of Jesus' authority?

Jesus was given all authority in heaven and on earth because he emptied himself of his own will and became completely transparent to God. One could see right through Jesus and see God! Jesus had authority because he understood and taught God's will correctly.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

6. What is wrong with the wisdom of the "wise"? Why does foolishness shame them?

The wise are self-willed and proud and insist on their own wisdom. Only those who are humble ("the foolish") will set aside their self-will in order to seek God's.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:12-13, 11:1, and 3:5-7

7. In letters written by the apostle Paul, he often alludes to his own authority. What is the source of Paul's authority?

His authority comes from being transparent to Christ. His authority with other Christians is that of demonstrating that transparency ("be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.") Paul refuses to become the "rabbi" himself ("were you baptized into Paul?")

8. How does this understanding of the source and meaning of Christian authority differ from conventional ideas about authority in the church? In this understanding, can there be any such thing as a "position of authority"?

Applications

9. Why do we sometimes resist becoming more "transparent" to Christ?
10. In what areas do you need to set aside your own will in order to be more fully an "imitator of Christ"?

St. Paul and Women

A Second Look

Introduction

The Bible's reputation for being against women lies in traditional interpretations of the writings of the apostle Paul. Virtually all of the passages used to restrict the role of women in the church and family comes from his letters. Many people in the U.S. and Europe think that Paul hated women and was unable to rise above the prejudices of his time. The danger with throwing out Paul, however, lies in the fact that he was probably second only to Jesus as the author of Christianity. Paul was a central author of God's Word, having written nearly half of the books of the New Testament (13 out of 28 books). Moreover, about 75% of the book of Acts, which describes the most important events in the early church after Jesus' resurrection, is about Paul. Paul also developed and captured for us much of the important theology of the Church: Salvation by faith, the resurrection, the Eucharist, the meaning of baptism, Christian freedom, the relationship of Christ to God the Father, Christian (agape) love, the Church as a body, and gifts of the spirit. Paul's teachings about women cannot be dismissed without endangering our faith in other of his teachings.

WARNING: The Pauline writings, more than any other part of the New Testament, are difficult to understand because of our presumptions about hierarchy and power. It is almost impossible to make sense of some of the more difficult passages in Paul with some modern translations.

This study begins to raise questions about traditional interpretation of Paul's writings as restricting the role of women, and invites us to consider evidence to the contrary, evidence that Paul's teachings was as thoroughly egalitarian as Jesus' was.

Paul's Encouragement of Women Leaders

Read Romans 16:1-3

1. In the translation of the Bible you are using, what is Phoebe called?

The Greek word here (Greek is the language in which Paul wrote), usually translated as “servant” to refer to Phoebe, is *deacon* (*diaconis*), plain and simple – the same word that is translated as “deacon” throughout I Timothy and elsewhere. Moreover, Phoebe is described as a ruler, overseer, or patron (*prostatis*) over many – not a helper as it is often translated. For the same word, see I Tim 5:17 (also I Tim 3:4, 5, also in reference to elders/overseers). Therefore Phoebe, a woman, was a deacon and an “overseer” of her congregation. And rather than criticizing Phoebe for stealing men’s authority, Paul praised her and asked the Romans to help in her current mission to Rome.

Read Acts 18:24-26

2. What function does Priscilla fulfill in this account?

That of a teacher.

Read Romans 16:3-5

3. What does Paul call Priscilla and Aquila?

His fellow workers and leaders of a church.

Note the order of names. Most of the time when this impressive missionary couple is mentioned, Priscilla is named first. It was unusual to mention the wife of a leader at all in this time period, let alone list her first. This implies that Priscilla was an active participant in their joint ministry, perhaps even the more important member of it. For more on this couple, see Acts 18:1-3, 8-21, 24-26, and I Cor 16:19.

Read Romans 16:7

4. What does Paul call “Junias”?

An outstanding apostle.

The Greek word used here is not the masculine *Junias* but the feminine *Junia*. Modern Bibles obscure the facts, but Paul calls Junia an “outstanding apostle” (*apostolos*). Virtually all the early church fathers – including St. Chrysostom, St. Jerome and Peter Abelard – understood the name to be feminine and linked to the word apostle. Not until about 1300 did anyone suggest that the name might refer to a man, and it wasn’t until Martin Luther that Bibles began to print “Junias” instead of “Junia.” Bernadette Brooten’s extensive research has demonstrated that there was no such name as “Junias” in the ancient Greek and Roman world. Note also that some modern translations also changed Paul’s references to his relationship with Junia and Andronicus to “kinsmen” to further obscure Junia’s gender. A more accurate translation reads:

“Greeting...to those outstanding apostles Andronicus and Junia, my compatriots and fellow prisoners who became Christians before me.”

Read 2 Timothy 1:1-2, 3-5

5. Timothy was Paul’s son in Christ. At the end of Paul’s life, as he languished in prison, deserted by everyone else, he turned to Timothy for help and consolation. To whom does Paul attribute Timothy’s devotion to Christ?

To his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois.

Paul and the Source of Sin

Read 1 Cor. 15:21-22

Consider the following Jewish rabbinic sayings from Paul’s era:

“Sin began with a woman, and thanks to her we all must die.”

“Eve, what have you wrought in us? You have brought upon us great wrath which is death.”

6. Contrast Paul's version in 1 Cor. 15:22 and consider the possibility that Paul was deliberately turning around a well-established practice of blaming woman for sin (the Hebrew word "Adam" meant both the man's name and was the generic word for "human.")

Paul's Magna Charta

A Rabbinic prayer recited daily went as follows:

"Praised be God that he has not created me a Gentile! Praised be God that he has not created me a woman! Praised be God that he has not created me a slave!"

7. Compare this prayer with Paul's statement in Galatians 3:26-28:

"You are all sons [children] of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

8. It has been suggested that this statement by Paul in Galatians 3:26-28 was a baptismal prayer. As such, it would have been recited whenever someone "put on Christ." What would the impact be of having such a statement read at each baptism?
9. **Contrast Paul's statement with any other classical, pre-modern statement regarding men and women.**

For nearly 2000 years, Paul's statement held the record as the most powerfully statement about equality in Christianity, Western literature and (probably) world culture. In this verse, Paul directly countered the notion that race, class, or gender had any meaning before God.

Do we owe Paul an apology?

10. If these passages considered above were all you knew about Paul's attitude toward women, would you think he hated women?

Applications

11. Are we prepared to accept *all* of what Paul has to tell us in Gal. 3:28?
12. How should we lead our lives if we *really* believe that in Christ, race (Jew/Greek), social class (rich or poor, slave/free), and gender (male/female) are irrelevant?
13. What are the practical implications of Paul's behavior toward women – for yourself, for your congregation, for Christians and Christian denominations, for society?

References

- Bernadette Brooten, “ ‘Junia...Outstanding among the apostles’ (Romans 16:&)” in Swidler and Swidler, *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration*, p. 141.

