

Sunday School 2007

To the women of this class,

I would like to offer some direction with regard to Paul's teachings on women. First of all, I fear that this topic is so charged for some of you that you may not be enjoying your walk with the Lord. When we focus on one thing that bothers us, we have only two choices.

1. We let it consume us, control how we live and affect how we respond to everyone, which usually results in us being alone and bitter because people just get tired of it and avoid us.
2. We get over it and move on knowing that everyone in the class knows this is an issue for women and frankly I totally understand the concerns. However, I do not appreciate the inability to see or try to accept another view of what is being said by Paul. It really will benefit you to let this go. We are reading God's Word and if you take offense to it you are not alone. The Bible says that the Bible is offensive. However, let it be for a good reason. Jesus and not Paul was the one that said that we set our rights to life aside to obtain real life.

So I would like to present some information and a logical treatise of Paul's situation in the context of the world he wrote from. For this to be of any help you will have to lay down your biases and listen carefully and don't take offense.

Secondly, the verses we have trouble with were written almost 2000 years ago to people that we cannot fully understand as we do not have their voices or live among them. When you are born in a man driven society you do not know that it is wrong or right. When you are born 2000 years after a society is gone, it is hard to judge truth from so far away in both culture and time. Scholars struggle with this problem all the time. Do I make a translation that puts the words in today's lingo or do I do a word for word translation and let people do the interpretations themselves? I think that you would want the latter but the problem is that even with education, many do not know how to interpret the written word appropriately.

Consider that Paul lived in a world where women were not educated nor were they trained in the daily discussions of logic and philosophy that went on in the gates with the men. So when Paul speaks, he is not as concerned about the woman getting what he is saying as he is the man. The men, if they get the idea that their wives are important, will share with their wives and spend the time explaining what was said. Knowing that this was the condition of most women it is easy to see why Paul didn't want them asking questions in the gathering of the church but to ask in private. It also makes sense why they were not to be teachers.

More importantly, when Paul says "I" do not want women to teach men, he is stating his opinion and not necessarily the opinion of God. The Bible contains discussions of every aspect of human living. If you compare other religious works, much of the ugly parts of humanity are not discussed. The Bible records the murders, rapes, incest, theft, lying, and all other kinds of indecent acts. It even has references to pagan philosophy and worship of all kinds. Just because something is mentioned does not mean that we take it as God's Word to act on blindly. We must let scripture explain scripture. You don't find anywhere from Genesis to Revelation where God forbids a woman to teach. It only came from Paul's opinion.

Paul may have said women should not teach men due to the general lack of education of women. Boys at 12 years old had infinitely more education than women in this society. Compare having no education to what Paul had. He was very highly educated even by the standards of today. Thus, for him to be concerned about an uneducated person leading a flock is entirely reasonable. Many churches won't let you teach at all without some form of formal training so this would not be a new concept.

Consider that Paul often considered the women in his discussions. For example, he said that husbands were to love their wives. Regardless of what you think of the rest of the verses, Paul would not tell husbands anything in regard to their wives if he viewed women as mere property to be seen, used, and ignored. Paul is elevating a woman very highly by telling a husband to love her in a society that she would be more like property. The fact that he addresses women at all in any of his writings says he was pushing the envelope of his society.

In Jewish culture a son had authority over his mother. Paul tells children to obey their parents. This is elevating the wife to the level of the husband in authority of the home unlike the culture generally accepted at that time. Cultural context is so important to understanding real meaning I am ranting almost on the point.

Consider that in today's society we still do not have equality of men and women. Anyone that believes it is equal is kidding himself or herself. It is certainly better than it was at the time of Paul or even 50 years ago. The point is that until recent history the world of women was very limited unless you were in a society that I watched on TV years ago. In this society the men were of no value. If the woman decided that he was not doing enough she could tell him to leave and find herself another man. In this culture to not have a woman was a death sentence. That seems to be reversed from the rest of the world but not all societies obviously buy into the woman being lower than an animal. It just happens that you were born at a time and in a place that you have considerable respect as a woman.

I suspect that some of you see that the world still is not equal to all and are sensitive to the issue and make Paul a scapegoat for your frustration. What do some of you think that you ultimately accomplish by bringing this issue up so frequently? I am already convinced that we are equal. I don't know of anyone in the class that feels otherwise. Why is it so important to hammer on this issue so much? Is it possible that you are so focused on this one issue that you do not hear anything else that is said? This seems to be the case as the discussion after the class was still on this and not on the focus of the teaching. I am guessing on a lot of this so don't think that I feel I can read minds. It just appears this way to me, that's all. I think that it behooves me to speak to you about what you might be doing to yourself with this issue. It does not bother me but it clearly does you and this is sad.

If you like to hear it from the psychological viewpoint you may have heard about dealing with the pain of unmet expectations. This has all the appearances of unmet expectations and is hurting your emotional person. There is little we control in life and this is certainly one of them. I can't change the Bible and neither can anyone else. Let go and be at peace with yourself that you are born in a society that basically agrees with you even if it has not fully implemented the belief that all men and women are equal and have equal opportunity. Jesus supported this

psychological view when he said that we should not worry about tomorrow and Paul said that we should be at peace in whatever the circumstances in which we find ourselves. So be at peace in an imperfect world!

Consider that Paul, in his effort to teach men God's love told men that they had to show love to their wives and treat them as sisters. This is hard in this culture to accept and it is a new idea for this place and time. So give Paul a break and consider that he was chosen by Jesus to do what he has done. If he were so wrong then why would Jesus choose him? Why would Jesus want people so misled? Wouldn't someone like the loving disciple, John, have done a much better job? The point is that Paul does far more right than he is construed for doing wrong.

If it were not for Paul we would still be following the legalistic system of Jewish practice and grace would be a vague idea at best. Paul did the best with the circumstances and conditions of his time that he humanly could. He even tried to be whatever he had to be to reach diverse individuals with the gospel. Paul says very little about the stature of women compared to all the other things that he had to say. Almost all of his treatments of topics are to make the Body of Christ function best. Even the ones in which he addresses issues of women.

Consider that when you compare how Jesus treated women and how Paul supposedly treats women you are comparing the actions of God to the actions of a man. There is no comparison. Jesus is totally unbiased in his dealings with men and women. This is evident in many ways especially when he spoke to women and defended them when they were criticized for doing the right thing on his behalf. Think about the fact that in a man driven society that Jesus let a woman be the first one to see him after the resurrection. This had to bother some of the men. They didn't even want to believe the women, as the word of a woman was not as important as a man's. Thus, you have a problem. This is evident by the reaction of the Disciples.

Consider the woman brought to Jesus that was caught in adultery was caught with a man and the man was not there to be stoned. Jesus saw the inequity of their ways and he made it pretty clear that they did not understand truth or exercise it fairly. As each one saw their own sins and left the circle they showed that they realized that they should be the ones being judged. Jesus did not judge her as she had been judged already both as guilty and as not guilty when they walked away. Remember that Jesus said that the measure we use to judge others would be used to judge us. I don't know about you but knowing that my own measuring stick will judge me, certainly will keep me from judging even Paul. Consider the possibility that if you were to show even the slightest form of discrimination of any kind for any reason it would be amplified due to the severity that you have judged Paul.

When interpreting scripture it is important to understand the verse in the context in which it was written. Then once it is understood you apply it to your context. If Paul does not want women to teach for whatever reason that does not stop women from teaching today in a society where women ARE educated and have equal capabilities of men to teach. It is key to understand that you are interpreting words written in 60AD with a 2007AD World View filter. Thus, you miss the meaning and focus on the words themselves trying to interpret them using meanings, biases, and emotionally charged issues of today.

Women also are in the workforce today. In Paul's day they did not and were counseled to have children and live at home. Does that mean that I am to teach that women can only stay home and have babies? Of course not! Paul is merely citing the culture's acceptable means for women to meaningfully function in the society. Paul was not worried about women working or not but was worried about them having nothing to do and falling into sin due to their lack of focus. But you have to get to the meaning and not the words used in the example used. Now that you know that Paul was talking about falling into sin due to a lack of focus you can see that a workingwoman of today won't have that problem and therefore the meaning of the verses is applied properly.

Paul makes lots of references to cultural things. For example he warns about braided hair and makeup and clothing. There are churches that don't cut their hair and prohibit a woman from doing a lot of things that this culture does not have a problem with. In Paul's time, only a prostitute does the things he is mentioning so he is using that example to point out that women are to pay attention to their behavior in a Christ-like manner. In our culture, we would have to say the same thing by pointing out that women of prostitution wear very scanty clothes and stand on corners soliciting men in bad parts of town to express the same thing in our context. Paul does not care about you looking good, he cares about you paying attention to your behavior.

Every verse about women can be interpreted properly by applying the context that is given. God made woman from the man's side to be loved and not lorded over or treated as dirt. The fact that God made Eve out of man implies strongly to me that he made them both from the same exact substance implying equality. Inequality was never God's plan and to automatically think that Paul is doing that is wrong, in my opinion. It smacks of an agenda rather than a valid concern. Please understand that all of my books from very good scholars on the subject do not take the position on Paul that you are. They recognize that words do not always mean what they say on the surface. Jesus made it clear that the scribe brings out things old and new from scripture. Thus, a well studied understanding of scripture opens a world often missed.

I really don't want to offend anyone but this issue is hurting some of you and that angers me. This is the problem of having the gift of Prophet. I see this as a problem to some of the people I love and I am confronting it head on and not trying to be politically correct either. I may be wrong and I ask you to forgive me if I am doing the wrong thing. I will state as Paul did many times, "I believe that I have the Spirit". This is to say that I believe that the Holy Spirit has given me the issue to address and I have to address it as best I can and my best is far from the perfection of Christ. Thus, some may be offended by my strong words and some may feel hurt. This is not the intent and my prayers over this letter are that God will use it as He has planned and no matter what or how I said it, the intended results or fruit will prevail. Hey, I love you guys and hate to see you burdened by this junk. Seek peace and contentment.

A theological friend of mine reviewed this letter and gave the following comment:

In today's terms, Paul comes across as a "male chauvinist pig." But you are right - we have to consider the context, context, context.

Paul does his best when he addresses theology and his worst (in our minds) when he addresses social issues. He is gifted and skilled as a systematic theologian, but comes up short (in our minds) as a

sociologist or psychologist. But cut him some slack! He did not realize his letters would be read 2,000 years after they were written. He expected a more imminent return of Christ. Furthermore, he could have never even imagined the changes in the social rights and orders of our day. Let's not forget they had slaves and thought little of it. For many it was the only means of survival.

Paul claims to have had a "burr in his side" - some constant pain to endure. Some have speculated that it was a limp, some a chronic disease and some a nagging wife. Maybe that is where he got some of his "piggishness." But at any rate, the truth of his message was essential for the spread of the gospel in the Gentile world. Being both a Jew and a Roman citizen made him perfect as a bridge between those two worlds. God knows what He is doing.

If Paul had a problem with women, so be it. But don't throw out the truth of the gospel because of his perceived prejudice. God has a way of using many flawed characters in the faith story.

The writer who amazes me is Luke. Look sometime at how many of his key issues and revelations are presented by women. That took a lot of courage in that society, where the value of women was so much less than the value of men. Yet, in spite of the lack of importance placed upon women, the Good News spread and flourished.

Yes, Paul presents some problems in his regard for women. But give him some space.

Having progressed from causing Christians to be killed to almost single handedly bringing the gospel to the world, he went through a lot of suffering in the process. In case anyone did not notice, all of his persecution came from men with different ideas than his. I'm sure that a vendetta against women would have been way down on his list of things to do in prison.

Love, your Rabbi, Jak