

Paul's view of women in the ministry



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The apostle known as Paul speaks many times throughout the Bible in the New Testament, most often in teachings and letters that have become Scripture. Regarded as an apostle of Jesus Christ, it is unclear whether he was born in Tarsus or to a family from Tarsus, and due to his writing letters in Greek, signed his name “ Paul”, the Latinized form of his Hebrew name, Saul (“ In the footsteps of Peter and Paul”). During his travels, he came upon many women in many roles; some were acting as wives of their husbands and some teaching others in service to Christ. It is clear through Scripture verses that Paul, unlike many men of his time, was supportive of women actively teaching and praying in the ministry.

One of the most profound references that can be found to the views of Paul is in the book of Romans. Romans 16: 1-2 states: “ I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.” If Paul did not support women in the ministry, he would not be commending anyone, let alone a woman, by name. Furthermore, though Paul refers to Phoebe as a “ servant”, he wrote his letters in Greek, using the word “ diakonos”, from which the word “ deacon” is derived (Fees). Though the translation reads “ servant”, it has been speculated, that Phoebe may have actually been a church leader, such as a deacon, not a servant. In fact, the word is only translated once out of thirty-four times as “ servant”, and that is when it has been applied to Phoebe; the rest of the time it has been translated as “ minister” or “ deacon” (Fees).

Another female name of note is Priscilla, noted to be a tent-making team of husband and wife whose house Paul is a guest in, as stated in Acts 18: 1-3. In

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Acts 18: 24-26, it states “ now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” Priscilla, along with her husband, taught and explained the gospel to Apollos while Paul was staying under their roof and sharing their house and meals (Keener). It seems unfathomable that Priscilla was allowed to do this if Paul had objected. Perhaps the most significant point in which Paul states his views on equality of men and women is in Galatians. Galatians 3: 26-28 states, “ You are all sons 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.” Paul states, through this, that he did not consider women to be any less worthy to teach the Scriptures than men. With that in mind, we must acknowledge that the cultural subordination of women was part and parcel of the patriarchal societies of biblical times; women were thus expected, even legally required, to occupy a largely subordinate status with respect to social functions such as leadership and teaching (Irving Bible Church). However, in making this statement, Paul has essentially stripped away the barriers of not only race but gender; he states specifically that as long as a woman is a believer in Christ, she is looked upon by Christ as an equal, and not subservient to her husband.

Clear evidence is given throughout the New Testament that Paul is

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supportive of women in the ministry. Though other passages are used to essentially keep women from holding certain roles in certain churches, Paul the Apostle was very clear in his own views. By greeting and recognizing not only one but many, and speaking to equality, he made clear that he considered women not only a necessary but vital part of any ministry.

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