

A Community without Barriers

Thomas Robinson, *Women Freed by Jesus 2*, June 25, 2017

Galatians 3:21-29

²¹ Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that was able to give life, then God's righteous fulfillment of his promises would indeed have been on the basis of law. ²² But the Scripture closed in everything **under sin**, so that the promise based on the **faithfulness of Jesus as Messiah** might be given to those who have faith.

²³ Now before this **faithfulness** arrived, we were being guarded under law, closed in until the coming faithfulness would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our caretaker toward the Messiah, in order that **by his faithfulness we may be put right with God**. ²⁵ But now that his faithfulness has come, we are no longer under a caretaker. ²⁶ **For you are all children of God through the faithfulness that is in Messiah Jesus**.

²⁷ For as many of you as were plunged/baptized into Messiah have put on Messiah.

²⁸ There is **neither Jew nor Greek**,
there is **neither slave nor free**,
there is **no "male and female,"** (Gen 1:27)

for you are all one in Messiah Jesus. ²⁹ And if you belong to the Messiah, then you are Abraham's "seed," heirs according to promise. (Gen 22:17-18)

1 Corinthians 14:3, 26-36

³ One who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding, exhortation, and encouragement. ...

²⁶ What should be done then, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things take place for building up.

²⁷ If in a tongue someone speaks forth, let there be only two or at most three, and one after the other; and let one of them interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no interpreter, let them stay quiet in assembly and speak to themselves and to God.

²⁹ But as for prophets, let two or three speak forth, and let everyone else critically evaluate. ³⁰ If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first person be quiet. ³¹ For you are all able to prophesy one by one, in order that all may learn and all be encouraged. ³² And prophets' spirits are subject to prophets, ³³ for God is a God not of disorder but of peace, as in all the assemblies of the saints.

³⁴ The wives (of the speaking prophets) should remain quiet in these assemblies. For it is not acceptable to them speak up, but let them act in subordination, just as also the law says. ³⁵ If there is something (in their husband's prophecy) they wish to learn about, let them question their husbands at home. For it is considered shameful for a wife to speak forth in assembly (challenging her husband with questions). ³⁶ Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies, ²¹ but test everything. Hold fast to what is good; ²² abstain from every form of evil.

1 Corinthians 10:31 - 11:1

³¹ So ... whatever you do, do all things for God's glory. ³² Give no cause of stumbling to Jews or to Greeks or to the assembly/church of God, ³³ just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. 11:¹ Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:4-6, 13-14

⁴ Every man when he prays or prophesies with something on his head shames his head, ⁵ but every woman when she prays or prophesies with her head uncovered shames her head, since it is the very same as if her head were shaved. ⁶ For if a woman will not cover her head, let her cut her hair short. But if it is shameful for a woman to cut her hair short or shave it off, let her be covered. ...

¹³ Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴ Doesn't nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace for him?

All People made One as the Outcome of God's Story

God has given us scriptures that are remarkable and challenging to understand. He engages our minds to understand and discern. We receive the whole OT. The Gospels tell Jesus' story in four different ways. The letters are real letters written on a particular day to a distinct situation, set of problems. No systematic theological treatises or law books. There is built-in flexibility, diversity, and interpretation.

In Gal 3 Paul looks broadly over the whole story in the context of deep disputes about the OT law and the Gentiles. God's ancient promises come to fruition in Jesus' faithfulness as Messiah and our faith/trust in him. He is one person who is both Israel and every human, but also God so that every person can become part of him.

All the deep, ancient barriers are broken down. Humans are given a new reality by God, united not by virtue but by what God has done in Jesus. Jesus actively breaks down religious, ethnic, class, socioeconomic, gender, relational barriers, back to creation. All of these barriers were set both in custom and in Roman law, city laws, and Mosaic law.

The Challenge of Implementation in a Divided World

But actually breaking these barriers was an explosive challenge. Jewish communities didn't want to lose their rights by blurring their ethnic distinctiveness. Paul and Silas were in stocks in Philippi for interfering with someone's slave. Respectable women belonged to their fathers or husbands by law and were always to be silent in public.

But God's Spirit interfered, making prophets of Gentiles, making slaves into brothers and sisters, empowering women with gifts of prayer and prophecy to build up, exhort, and encourage the community of believers. The disciples didn't set themselves the task of overturning Roman law, but in spite of law & custom they had to be true to the Gospel.

There grew a range of challenges. The Gospel of the cross was already offensive. Breaking these barriers could cause deep offenses that kept people from even listening to the Gospel. Paul tried never to cause unnecessary offence, for the sake of the Gospel. The central importance of the word of the cross, creates a situation requiring judgment.

The Challenge of Reading a Letter when it becomes Scripture

The letters are vibrant and take us into the life of the early church. But when we later Christians are seeking to find regulations and laws for church life, they pose problems.

God did not give a book of laws, but we tend to look for items that can be turned into laws.

The more explicit & generic, the easier a statement becomes law. "Let women be silent."

A letter is written to a specific situation. We easily miss what was at stake in a passage.

We no longer understand the significance of silence, the relation between wife and husband, the reaction of potential converts. We need as much as possible to understand both the NT culture and our own to translate the meaning of a text.

It is especially difficult when a NT practice went out of use with the passage of time. The churches struggled with how to evaluate prophecy and revelation. It was already problematic in Corinth; often problems in 1 Cor. seem to derive from prophecy.

When we hear as clearly as possible, we see the remarkable new freedom given to women in a very constricting society. We see that the text assumes women's free use of their spiritual gifts of all kinds, that the breaking of barriers of Gal 3 was in full force.