

#### Reconcile handout #4

Women in **Acts** and in the **letters of Paul**. How do they actually behave and live their lives? How does the church view them? What do the male authors say about them?

Look at the first chapter of Acts, where the Holy Spirit came to "all" - and there is no distinction between men and women:

This is what Peter said: (1:16-18) - ... "This is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and **your sons and your daughters shall prophesy**... Even upon my slaves, **both men and women**, in those days I will pour out my Spirit and they shall prophesy."

**Dorcas** 9:36ff "Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and to charity" No mention of a husband or family. She became sick and died, so the disciples sent to get Peter to come pray for her to be raised. He came. She was raised up and "shown to the people to be alive."

**Note:** Paul follows local customs - In the Roman world, women would not have normally traveled alone, and so men were sent. But even men had to conform to custom. Out of *respect* for Jews, for Jewish Christians, Paul had Timothy circumcised (16:3), even though it was not necessary for Christians to be circumcised and this requirement was explicitly denied this in response to some Christian Jews who said, "they must be circumcised." (See chapter 15 - ) Why? So that there would be no social scandal regarding the gospel. No other reason.

Later in this chapter, 16:14ff, we meet **Lydia**, "a *worshiper of God* (a non-Jew who nevertheless believed in God as Jews preached God), was listening to us; she was from Thyatira and a *dealer in purple cloth*." [ a wealthy woman, a business woman.] She was the convert - and clearly the leader of her household: ""when she and her household were baptized..." Married? No mention. But Paul stayed at her home. And the new church met there - see 16:40 "After leaving the prison they went to **Lydia's home**; and when they had seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters there, they departed."

In chapter 18 we find **Priscilla and Aquila** in Corinth - As fits tradition, in the second verse, they are introduced as "A Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife, Priscilla because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome." - but by verse 18, Paul leaves for Syria accompanied by "**Priscilla and Aquila**." It is traditional to mention the man first - unless the woman is the actual leader - the person in focus - and from now on, clearly Priscilla is. By the time Paul reaches Ephesus with this couple, they meet a man, Apollos, who has heard only part of the gospel message. "When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the way of God to him more accurately. " (18:26)

The author of Acts also has no hesitation about mentioning the **four daughters** of Philip the evangelist, "who had the gift of prophesy" - (21:9) The gift of prophesy means, simply the gift of proclaiming the truth, the gift of preaching - It not really about fore-telling future events.

## The Letters of Paul

I am interested here not only in what Paul said to specific churches or individuals, but in what he actually DID - that is, how he worked alongside women and honored them.

This is often - very often - at odds with what we think we understand by his statements about women or wives in general.

This next section is by Mary Mowezko, an Australian Bible scholar. You can easily find her work online.

“Paul was not a misogynist. He did not hate or mistreat women. Far from it!

Paul valued Priscilla, Euodia and Syntyche as his co-workers in gospel ministry.

He refers to Junia as a fellow Jew, his fellow prisoner, and as “outstanding among the apostles.”

Paul commends Phoebe to the church at Rome as “our sister,” as a minister or deacon of the church at Cenchrea, and as a patron on many. He also entrusted to Phoebe his letter to the Romans. This means that she would also have been the one who read it aloud, answered questions and explained the mind of Paul to the hearers.

He positively acknowledges the ministry labors of Mary of Rome, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and of Persis, whom he said he loved.

He warmly mentions no fewer than ten women in Romans, chapter 16. Paul had met some of these women when his and their journeys had intersected. Other women in Romans 16, such as Julia, hosted house churches in Rome.

He took seriously a report from Chloe about problems in Corinth.

He passed on greetings from Claudia of Rome and sent greetings to Apphia of Colossae.

He recognized the house church of Nympha in Laodicea and asked that greetings be passed on to her and her church.

He accepted the hospitality of Lydia in Philippi and held meetings of the fledgling Philippian congregation in her home.

He respected the teaching and faith of Lois and Eunice.

Paul valued the ministry of women and even compared his own apostolic ministry to that of a breast-feeding woman.

At least eighteen women are mentioned in Paul's letters; sixteen are identified by name.

Paul uses his favorite ministry terms, co-worker, deacon/minister, and apostle for both women and men who are his colleagues in ministry.

Here is a list of the eighteen women in Paul's letters, plus Lydia

Apphia (Phlm 1:2)

Chloe (1 Cor 1:11)

Claudia (2 Tim 4:21)

Eunice (2 Tim 1:5)

Euodia (Php 4:2-3)

Julia (Rom 16:15)

Junia (Rom 16:7) - in order to avoid the striking recognition of a woman as an apostle, some translators have changed her name to Junius - but that is a deliberate error)

Lois (2 Tim 1:5)

Mary (Rom 16:6)

Nereus' sister (Rom 16:15)

Nympha (Col. 4:15)

Persis (Rom 16:12)

Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2)

Priscilla (Rom 16:3-5, 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19, Acts 18:1-3, 18-19)

Rufus' mother (Rom. 16:13)

Syntyche (Phil 4:2-3)

Tryphena (Rom. 16:12)

Tryphosa (Rom 16:12)

Lydia is mentioned in Acts 16:13-15, 40

I believe if these verses were the starting place and focus in discussion on women in ministry, more so than 1 Cor 14:34-35, or 1 Timothy 2:12, 13-14 - we'd be in a better place.

(Those were written to address a local situation, perhaps even in regard to one woman or couple. Whatever was happening in Ephesus or Corinth was not intended to silence all women for centuries. That is clear from what Paul DID in his own ministry, supporting and praising women in theirs)

My objective is simply to acknowledge every woman who Paul mentions in his letters, plus Lydia, and note how he speaks of them and interacts with them. If there is a main point it is that Paul trusted women and valued their ministry.

In the New Testament, the prerequisites and the means for ministry are giftedness, grace, faith and character. Gender does not come up in Paul's general teaching on ministry (Rom 12:3-8 1 Cor 12:1ff, 1 Cor 14:26, Eph 4:4-13, Col 3:16, etc)

On the other hand, gender is plainly mentioned in Acts 2:17-18. Here it is clear that Spirit-inspired, prophetic ministry is open to both male and female ministers.