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SHEHECHEYANU

All praise to thee, O Lord, our God, Thou blest Lord, our God, The ruler of the un-i-verse, The King of the world, Who gives us our life to-day, Sus-tain-eth us now, And bring-eth us in joy-ous life To this oc-ca-sion.

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One of the most important of the berachot (blessings) in Jewish life is the "shehecheyanu" blessing. It is recited particularly on the holy days and is intended to thank God for letting the one who prays it live to see that particular day.

This is an English translation of that prayer, which I set to music for a Passover some years ago. Whether it be a holy day, or merely another day, it is an appropriate prayer.

Passover begins March 30 in 2010.

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WHERE DOES SHE FIT IN?

Minutes With Messiah is generally a non-controversial teaching tool. There have been disagreements that caused hurt feelings. Those have, to the editor's knowledge, been few and far between. There may have been disagreements in which the individual kept their opinions to themselves. There have even been disagreements that caused people to cancel their subscriptions. There has been disagreement that never turned into controversy.

This topic, however, is almost guaranteed to be controversial. Some who do not want to hear what the Bible has to say will object to part of the article. Some who have followed a certain tradition will object to another part. Controversy notwithstanding, I will proceed to present the scriptures as I see them.

The role of women in the assembly of the church has long been an issue of controversy. One might even say that the controversy dates back to the early history of the church. Otherwise, why would Paul have to have written about it on more than one occasion? While the issue seemingly lay dormant for several centuries, it arose again in the middle of the Nineteenth Century, particularly with the rise of women claiming special prophetic revelation

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from God. The Women's Movement of the late Twentieth Century has added fuel to the fire. As is typical, the reaction has led some people to take a position that may not be totally scriptural.

Reaction to Paul

The apostle Paul is the only New Testament writer to address the role of women in the assembly. As a result of this and other issues there is a movement currently gaining prominence to denigrate the writings of Paul. Some people now claim that Jesus had one intention for his church, but Paul imposed his own will on the church in contradiction to what Jesus had wanted. These people take the position that Paul's writings do not hold the same authority as the words of Jesus in the gospels. If only Paul addressed a topic,

then it must not be something that the church needs to be dogmatic about. This would include such topics as homosexual behavior, church/state relations, music in the assembly, and the roles of women.

There are some inherent dangers and contradictions in this philosophy. The obvious contradiction is that those who were most closely associated with Jesus accepted what Paul taught as being an accurate presentation of what Jesus intended. Peter endorsed Paul's writings. (2 Peter 3:15-16) He even calls the people who would take this anti-Pauline position "unlearned and unstable." Paul told the Galatians that the apostles endorsed his teaching.

For they who seemed in conference added nothing to me: But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. (Gal 2:6-9)

A greater danger, though, concerns the authority of scripture. If one can take this position in relation to the writings of Paul, then those writings are obviously not inspired and should be deleted from the Bible. Of course, if you take out the writings of Paul you must also remove those of his companions, Luke and Mark. Taking that to a logical conclusion, however, leaves us only with the gospel of Matthew. Since that gospel presents Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, then those of us who are not Jewish might as well not worry about the gospel at all.

Women in the Church

Before proceeding any further, I must emphasize what has previously been mentioned in passing. There is a distinct difference between the role of women in the church and the role of women in the assembly of the church. Women have always been the backbone of the church, participating in ministries as varied as benevolence, encouragement, and even teaching the lost. If women did not do the work of the church, the work would not get done. If women did not teach the lost, the church would be much smaller than it is today. In fact, it might have died out early. The congregations in northern Asia Minor all owed their existence to a woman (Lydia). The congregations of Corinth and Ephesus grew stronger because a woman taught the gospel. If Priscilla had not

taught Apollos, those congregations would have been much weaker.

Nor did Paul even advocate absolute silence in the assembly. Besides the obvious role of women as teachers through singing, women participated actively in the assemblies of the early church. (This is where some of a more conservative bent may find fault with what I am saying.)

Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. (1 Cor 11:3-5)

This little passage is hidden in the section many people use to justify requiring head coverings for women or short hair for men. But it reveals something very important that is often overlooked. When Paul is talking of praying and prophesying in this passage, it is probable that he is speaking of the public assembly of the church; otherwise nobody would care or know if a woman prayed unveiled. If this is indeed speaking of public assembly, then apparently women who had a spiritual gift of prophecy or a prayer spoke those publicly.

On the other hand, it is just in the context of spiritual gifts that Paul tells a woman to be silent. In this case he is not talking about preaching, but the use of spiritual gifts.

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? (1 Cor 14:34-36)

Note that Paul is here addressing two issues: obedience and learning. The women are commanded to be silent, exactly like those who spoke in languages without an interpreter were commanded to be silent, because they controlled their spiritual gifts rather than being controlled by them. In the light of his earlier comments in chapter 11 this may not necessarily mean absolute silence, but temporary silence. The other issue is one of learning, rather than prophecy. In this case the silence is absolute. If they (or presumably even a man) has a question rather than a teaching, the assembly is not the appropriate place to raise it.

The passage in 1 Timothy 2:8-15 that also addresses women in the assembly says essentially the same thing. It is not about women preaching as we know preaching. Paul again addresses both of these issues. Learn in silence. Keep under authority. The difference is that in this case he is specifically speaking of not usurping the authority over the male human. Literally, 1 Timothy 2:12 says the woman is not to “teach or govern a man.”

That restriction would not preclude a woman praying or singing in the congregation.

Other Issues

Some would object that even so the woman is held to be inferior to the man. The response to that is both yes and no. Inferior is such a loaded word. Yes, a woman is to be subject to the man, who is subject to God. In the sense of order in a chain of command, a woman is to be inferior (below). That does not, however, mean that a woman is inferior in ability or value. A woman is not less important than man any more than a secretary is less important than his (or her) boss. They both hold different functions, but both are important.

A favorite argument of the anti-Pauline faction is that much of what he wrote should be understood to be uniquely for the culture of his day. Thus the role of women as stated by Paul does not apply today. Besides, Paul was a misogynist who believed women should stay “barefoot and pregnant.” Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth. Paul was an admirer of strong women of faith who took a role in teaching the lost. He mentions them in many of his letters. Moreover, Paul points out that his position on women is not based on current culture but on ancient and established scripture.

Women were not the
only ones told to keep
silent in the assembly; so
were some men.

When he speaks of women being silent in the assembly he states that it is based on the relationship between God, man, and woman from creation. (See the context of the passages mentioned above.) Unless six thousand years of culture has suddenly changed, the cultural argument fails miserably.

Most congregations with which I have been associated have been ambiguous in their interpretations of these passages. Women are allowed to speak in “Bible classes” but not in the “worship.” This necessarily creates an artificial distinction between an assembly of the congregation for directed learning and one for a combination of learning and worship. Consistency would demand that women be silent in both assemblies, which would make my Sunday morning Bible class much quieter than it now is.

This is not an easy topic to discuss objectively. It carries emotional baggage. However, we should be able to examine the scriptures together. We don't have to agree on all points. We just have to find some point of agreement with God's word.

THE SPORTS FAN

He was a young man raised in a strict home. Athletic competition, at least the popular kind, was on the forbidden list. After all, look at how little those athletes wear. Properly religious people do not expose themselves like that. "No you can't go to the races. We don't do that sort of thing." So he snuck out of the house. He was known at the training sites. He was a likable boy, though somewhat different than the usual crowd. He knew the best runners in the area, and rooted for them to be good enough to compete in the Olympic Games. He seems to have liked wrestling. And the boxers. He loved the boxing matches. Because the crowds were large he could usually sneak in without paying the admission fee. Even if he got caught, though, they usually let him stay. One of the boxers might vouch for him, or one of the regular spectators. He loved to be ringside.

As a young man he went away to school. They did not approve of the races and the boxing, just as his parents had not. At school, though, it was not as easy to sneak away. The second nearest training site was about two days away. The nearest was on the military base, and there was no way he could get through that security. So he had to settle for his memories of the runners and boxers of his youth. Still, what he had seen and heard near the tracks and rings stuck with him.

After he got out of school his life changed. His new job required that he travel all over the world. He even got to visit a site of the Olympic Games. His job title was "Motivational Speaker," and he was good at it. Now that he had the means and the opportunity to enjoy the games, he had not the time or the inclination. His work was important. The games were not a matter of life and death; his speaking was very much so. And

so, in his later years, when he wanted to talk about self-discipline he spoke of boxing. When he wanted to exemplify endurance he thought of the runners. To epitomize struggle he looked to the Greco-Roman wrestlers.

While that description of Paul's early years may be fiction, we do have some of his later writings to fuel that speculation. Here is what he said about those games that he seemed to love.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Eph 6:12)

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. (1 Cor 9:24-27)

Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? (Gal 5:7)

Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. (Php 2:16)

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (2 Tim 4:7-8)

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