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WAIT UPON THE LORD

I have been reading *The Romanov Sisters* by Helen Rappaport. It is a marvelous biography of the daughters of Nicholas II, the last Tsar of Russia. I was struck by one of the people in the book, perhaps because of her Dutch last name was unexpected in a member of the Russian nobility. Baroness Sophie (Iza) Buxhoeveden, was a lady in waiting to Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna Romanova. She was one of the most loyal members of her entourage, only being separated from the Tsarina by force shortly before the royal family was murdered. And what is a Lady in Waiting? It is a personal assistant to a woman of high estate, such as an empress, queen, or princess. This may have involved many duties, but was often more of a companion, secretary, and advisor than a servant. This was certainly true of Baroness Sophie.

The Hebrew word that is translated “wait” in some of the psalms carries a similar meaning. It is the meaning that we have carried over so that servers (I once had one tell me, “I will be your servant today”) are called the wait-staff. In non-gender-neutral terms, they were called waiters and waitresses.

“Because of his strength will I wait upon thee: for God is my defence.” (Ps 59:9) The word in this verse is not the same as in Isaiah 40:31.

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

This latter verse talks about waiting upon God as if they are anticipating God, or expecting something from him. In the verse in Psalm 59 the word more appropriately means to wait upon the Lord as the person in the restaurant waits upon you. Depending on the restaurant, they are not just sitting around anticipating your arrival. Instead, they serve you. And that is what we should be doing for God.

That is not to say that God lacks anything, and for that reason requires our service. Most people can prepare their own meals, and don’t need someone to wait on them. But isn’t it nice when someone does? So God also appreciates, and sometimes even asks, that we wait on him. How can we serve a God that really needs nothing? Perhaps it would help to see how else this word is translated.

In the King James Version, the word is most often (over 300 times) translated “keep.” Frequently the Israelites were told to “keep” God’s laws. That is how they were to wait upon God. Obedience. As we wait upon God he expects our obedience. After all, what would happen if the server in the restaurant brought you the wrong meal, or it wasn’t served to your specifications (red and green chile)? Would you consider that person not to have waited on you properly?

Interestingly, we are to wait upon God, but He also waits upon us. Again, the word may also be translated “keep.”

He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. (Ps 121:3-5)

Using the translation of Psalm 59, this says that he that waits upon you won’t sleep. The Lord waits upon you; he does so by being your shade.

We wait upon the Lord, while he waits upon us. Paul says that is part of a demonstration of brotherly love.

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. (Rom 12:10-13)

If I put you ahead of my interests (prefer you, in this translation), and you do the same to me, then we are waiting upon each other. God honors us as we honor him. That is waiting upon each other. The next time you go to a restaurant, find a way to wait upon your waiter/waitress. That’s being like God. And how surprised they will be!

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WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

What is the role of a woman in the church? The answer to that may be the most disputed (and perhaps most misunderstood) issue in the church today. On the one hand we have the people who say women can only prepare meals and teach nursery classes. On the other hand, there are those who say women can do anything, from pulpit preaching to serving as elders. As with most things, the truth probably stands somewhere between the extremes.

One problem is that people tend to think in terms of the cultural church. In America that means many people's truth is the American version of the church. They would be shocked by those people in Australia and other places that say, "I want the church; I just don't want the American church." Both of the extremes in this issue are, by the way, very American. Some macho American men generally take the attitude that women should be "barefoot and pregnant." They don't allow their women to work outside the home. Even if they are deployed overseas in the military, they still control the check book and pay all the bills. Although a woman has not yet been elected president, in other aspects of life American women have become prominent and powerful. This is true in business,

I want the church; I just don't want the American church.

trades, and even churches. These positions are not uniquely American, but they do seem to represent the extremes in American churches more so than in the churches in many other countries; and not just in third-world countries.

So what is the role of the woman in the church? That is actually a much more complex question than it appears.

Public Assembly

The public assembly is the area that most of the controversy about women occurs. Can a woman preach? Lead prayers publicly? Be a song leader or worship leader?

Part of the issue here is that American (and other) churches have adopted a model that is not necessarily scriptural. That is not to say it is wrong; but the current model is much of the controversy. Most modern churches have adopted the orthodox model of a hired or appointed preacher delivering a sermon or homily as part of the public gathering. Today anywhere from half to three-quarters of most assemblies are taken up by the preaching.

This was apparently not the model for the first century church.

The early church assemblies were modeled, at least in part, after the synagogue gatherings. The rabbi then, and in many Jewish congregations today, was not equivalent to the modern preacher. Instead, each week had its assigned scripture reading. Any notable man could be invited to read the daily or weekly portion, and then comment on it.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. (Lk 4:16-21)

This pattern was followed, possibly with some modification, in the early church. "How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying." (1 Cor 14:26)

And yet, most of the time when women object that they are considered second-class Christians it is because a congregation is not allowing them to preach. Instead of asking why she cannot preach from the pulpit, should the biblical woman rather be asking why we hire anybody to do so?

Nevertheless, in the assembly the general admonition was for women to learn in silence, and not to usurp authority over men. Most people have heard the scriptures.

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but 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. (1 Cor 14:34-35)

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not

deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. (1 Tim 2:11-14)

Lest anybody think that Paul's admonitions were merely based on the culture of his time, he refers back to the Law of Moses, and even further back, to the creation. The context of the passage to the Corinthians clearly puts it in the public assembly. ("If the whole church be come together," and "when ye come together.") If there are men present, women are not to teach in the public assembly, or to lead in prayer. Except

There are exceptions. When we sing together, women sing too, even though we are teaching. Women (today) speak in even the most conservative congregations, when they speak in Bible classes, which are a public gathering of the church for the purpose of teaching.

If they can sing, what else can a woman do in the public assembly? In the Churches of Christ, where congregational singing is the norm, can a woman "lead" the singing? Many song leaders are merely song starters these days. If a woman can sing, what is the difference if she sings from the pews or from the pulpit? Even some conservative congregations allow a woman in the seats to start a song that begins with an alto or soprano solo. In congregations where the Lord's Supper is passed among the congregants, women routinely pass the trays within the seats; what is the difference if they stand to pass them, as long as they don't pray? Each congregation will have to answer those questions for themselves.

Evangelism

If preachers in the first century, or at least those mentioned in the Bible, were not pulpit preachers in the modern sense, then what were they? Can women preach like they did?

Most, if not all, the preachers in the New Testament were evangelists. That is, they preached the good news of the death, burial, resurrection, and post-resurrection sightings to people who had not heard or did not believe. They were what we might call missionaries today. (One church bulletin listed such a preacher who targeted the local area as their missionary to their own city.) If women want a role in the church beyond "cooking and children's classes," this may be one option.

We know from the scripture that women were sometimes as involved as men in teaching the lost, or teaching in private. The prime example is Priscilla.

And he [Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. (Acts 18:26)

It is interesting to note that, in all the times that Priscilla is mentioned by name, exactly half of them list her before her husband. Paul obviously held her in high regard as an evangelist. He calls them "my helpers" (Rom 16:3), and probably not just because they made tents alongside him in Corinth.

Preachers need to get out of the office and spread the gospel to the lost. That is true of both men and women who feel the need to preach.

Servants

It has been said that if women did nothing in the church except cook and teach, nothing would get done. Others have said that the reason that elders must be men ("a one woman man" in 1 Tim 3:2) is that otherwise the men would let the women do all the work.

Of course, the secretary is the backbone of any organization. Not all secretaries are women, but most church secretaries are. Even if a man is put in charge of getting something done, it is usually the women who figure out the how, and carry through. This is certainly true of the "people" tasks, but is often true of the manual labor as well. Gone are the days when plumbers and carpenters were men and secretaries and nurses were women. If a woman wants to feel useful and used in the

Even some conservative congregations allow a woman in the seats to start a song.

church, there are so many other areas of service, and more important, than delivering a sermon or saying a prayer in the public assembly. Phoebe may have been recognized as a special kind of servant (Rom 16:1), or it may be that she did what every other woman and man did and caught Paul's attention.

Are women important in the church? Certainly! Do they have a special role? Most assuredly! Are they any less important because they are not allowed a vocal role in the assembly or a title among the leadership in the church? Definitely not! Men have their roles; women have their roles. Sometimes those roles coincide; sometimes they do not. Does that make men any less because they are not (usually) mothers, or organizers, or doers? Not in the family, and not in the church.

For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. (1 Cor 12:14-21)

LIFE BLOOD

Is it any wonder that the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus. Even some of those who had been following him avidly walked away. Why? Because of something he said. But isn't that often the case; people reject us more for our words than our actions.

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. (Jn 6:53-56)

The Jewish people had no problem eating flesh, although this sounded a lot like cannibalism, to which they did object. The really problematic part of what he said involved the drinking of his blood. "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." (Jn 6:66)

There are some laws that predate the Law of Moses. These are called the Noahide laws (after Noah), and were considered to apply to all people, not just the Jewish nation. These seven laws were: Do not deny God; Do not blaspheme God; Do not murder; Do not engage in illicit sexual relations; Do not steal; Do not eat blood; and Establish courts/legal system to ensure obedience to the law. The Jewish people knew Genesis 9:4, which equated life and blood after Noah was told he could eat flesh. They could quote Leviticus 17:11, which said "the life of the

flesh is in the blood." What they could not necessarily grasp was the prophetic nature of the verse in Leviticus.

The disciples of Jesus who turned back took his words literally. He said they had a spiritual meaning. There are those today who still don't understand. To them, Jesus was a good man. He was a moral teacher. To them the essence of Christianity is what Jesus personally said or "what would Jesus do?" They miss that the important thing that Jesus would do would be to shed his own blood as a sacrifice for sin.

That is the problem in the eyes of some theologians, professional or amateur, these days. Blood. Some contend that the whole concept of a blood sacrifice is barbaric. Others contend it is purely symbolic. Many don't understand the concept of blood sacrifice at all. And the reason for all this confusion is that they don't understand what God said in Leviticus: the life is in the blood.

The basis of much of the Law of Moses was, according to some is "an eye for an eye;" but they forget that was preceded by "life for life." (Ex 21:23) If a man caused death, the only cure was another death; and sin is death. The only cure for sin is the death of the sinner, or of one who is willing to pay that price. "And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission." (Heb 9:22)

That is the basis for the atoning power of the blood of Jesus. He voluntarily gave life for life. He paid the blood debt with his own blood.

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