

## Gender War in the Church: Opposing Views of Women and their Role in the New Testament

Women play a prominent role in the New Testament. They accompany Jesus throughout his ministry, are the first to visit the empty tomb, and are seen as leaders both within and without the church. At the same time, various passages in the New Testament ranging from Colossians 3:18 to 1 Corinthians 11:13 relegate women to an inferior status to that of the men. Women are told that they must be silent, modest, and above all, submit to their husbands as if they were submitting to god. In fact, the verb used in Colossians 3:18, *hypotasso*, is the exact verb used in other New Testament passages commanding that slaves submit themselves to and serve their masters well. In this light the earliest Christian women would have been little more than slaves in their own households. This seems to be an obvious contradiction.

This paper will argue that the above premises, while both true, are in fact not a contradiction at all. Rather, it will attempt to show that these various views in the New Testament are reflective of varying schools of thought on the roles of women in the early church. In other words, the reason the authors of the New Testament present modern readers with such a conflicting view of the role of women in the church is because those same authors did not agree on what the role of women should be. Additionally, these varying views should not only be seen as representative of different schools of thought regarding women, but also as representing different time periods in the early church. Although modern readers tend to look at the entire New Testament (and its teaching on women) collectively, in reality these epistles were written over a period of almost sixty years, and certain passages regarding women are known to be interpolations into the older text long after that. In order to prove this thesis, this paper will focus on the specific language used in some of the most controversial passages about women in the New Testament. Specifically, it will look at where, when, and by whom they were written, and

see if there is consistency of thought among authors and regions. Additionally, this paper will also look at non-canonical works, specifically the Acts of Thecla, to see an alternate view of the role of women in the church. Finally, if this thesis holds true, this paper will offer an explanation as to why views of women changed as the church standardized its teaching.

### Bibliography

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