

Women find a friend in the Apostle Paul, Truett professor says

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HOUSTON—Contrary to popular opinion, women not only have a friend in Jesus, but also find a friend in the Apostle Paul, seminary professor Todd Still told a recent conference sponsored by [Christians for Biblical Equality](#) .

Too often, Christians pit Jesus against Paul, and some even have adopted the view of Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw, who labeled Paul as “the eternal enemy of woman,” said Still, the William H. Hinson Professor of Christian Scriptures at Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary.

Todd Still

Women played a pivotal role in Jesus’ ministry and in Paul’s mission, Still asserted. Jesus treated women with dignity and acknowledged their worth, extending healing even to those who were regarded as ceremonially unclean, he noted.

“Far from being inconsequential or token, Jesus viewed women as full participants in his mission and in the kingdom of God,” he said.

While many Christians readily accept the idea that Jesus defied conventional first-century views about women by valuing them, they see Paul as an oppressor of women, Still observed. He pointed particularly to passages in 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians, where women—or wives—were commanded to submit to men and keep silent.

However, Still insisted, those specific instructions need to be viewed in light of Paul’s affirmation of women who occupied leadership roles in

churches—notably Euodia and Syntyche in Philippi, Phoebe in Cenchreae, Priscilla and Chloe in Corinth and Ephesus, and Junia, Julia, Mary and others in Rome.

"It likely comes as little to no surprise that Jesus affirmed the dignity of women, treating them as those created in the divine image, and that women played a pivotal role both in Jesus' earthly and post-resurrection ministry. It may, however, come as a surprise to some that Paul's calling of women/wives to silence and submission is tempered—if not trumped—by his affirmation of mutuality, yea equality, of women and wives in marriage and ministry," he said.

Both Jesus and Paul affirmed women in principle and in practice, Still insisted.

"Pauline prohibitions and restrictions, I would contend, are occasional exceptions to this general rule," he said. "As such, they are contextual, not continual; time-bound troubleshooting, not timeless delimiting; a chapter in a book, but not the whole enchilada. More often than not, there is inclusion and embrace, and it is this trajectory that we trace."

The example of both Jesus and Paul should guide modern Christians' attitudes toward women, Still insisted.

"If it was the practice of Jesus and Paul to join hands with women in mission and ministry, should this be our contemporary practice as well?" he asked. "Yes, yes and a thousand times yes, we will answer."