

**Christ Presbyterian Church
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Valuable: Women
Galatians 3:26-29**

Well, good morning and happy Mother's Day! This seems like a pretty good weekend to talk about women and our value in God's family. As mentioned earlier, we are kicking off a series entitled Valuable: Why We Need Each Other. Over the next few weeks, we'll be talking about male or female, young or old, single or married, and why we are all valuable in God's family. Each of us belongs to the greater Body of Christ, this community where individual uniqueness and our unity in faith come together. Jesus was amazingly inclusive of all people. He saw the great value in each and every person He encountered and calls us to do likewise—to see the value in each person regardless of race, status, age, or gender, and to live a life that reflects that value. When we do that, the result is a community made stronger by its parts, a community that as *one whole* can more fully reflect God's love to the world.

As I was asked to talk about women and our value, I started thinking about my own life and this idea of belonging, of having a place and a space to pursue the person that God is calling me to be. When I was a kid, I was pretty sure that God was calling me to be a professional baseball player. I grew up in a suburb of Chicago, and I loved baseball. My dad, my brother and I would jump on the 'EL' and go down to Wrigley Field to cheer on our team, the Chicago Cubs. Summer after summer, we waited for the Cubs to clinch the pennant. They were always so close. Those were the days of Fergie Jenkins, Ron Santo, and Don Kessinger. For two years, from ages 9 to 11, I asked...no, I insisted...that my friends call me Ernie Banks. Hey, not only did I play first base, I was at Wrigley Field on May 19, 1970 and saw Mr. Cub hit his 499th home run. I loved baseball! I spent my summers playing baseball in my backyard with my brother and all the neighborhood boys. We played so hard that we literally dug permanent bases in our lawn. It was an amazing time and between you and me, I was the best player of all of them. I held the neighborhood record for home runs. In my family, we spent our summers with Little League baseball. Take a look.

(Video clip begins.)

This is Little League baseball. I loved those Saturdays. That's my brother Scott, running back and forth. You can see the team cheering because he slid in and stole home plate. There's my dad, he was the coach, walking back to third base. There are the parents cheering the team on. That's me on the sidelines watching and wanting to be a part of my brother's team, the Bees. I knew in my heart of hearts that I could be of value to the team but in 1970, girls weren't included in Little League baseball. No matter how passionate, how good, how called to baseball I felt, there wasn't a place for me on the team.

(Video clip ends.)

When I think about the history of women and, sadly, the history of women and the church, I realize there have been times when women haven't had a place on the team. No matter how gifted, how talented, how called, there wasn't room for women to participate. But here is the good news. Unlike Little League baseball of 1970, a life centered in Jesus transcends gender. We live in a culture that gives a lot of mixed messages on what it means to be a woman. But we can look at Scripture and Jesus to understand God's love and value of us as women. While we are at it, we can look at Scripture and Jesus to understand God's love and value of you men, too. That's the thing. This isn't an "either/or". This is an "and/both". I will try to hold back any shout outs of *Women rock!* or *You go, girls!* because, as I said, it's an "and/both". We are created in the image of our Triune God and in that, there is a relationship of love and equality that honors our uniqueness, yet holds us together in oneness at the same time. That's the beauty of this conversation. We need each other. The community of God is only truly alive and well when we are in it together. I want to clarify that this conversation about women and the church is not a political thing. It's a Jesus thing.

It is so important for us to understand God's love for us and our equality in Christ. When we understand it is who we are in Christ that is what's important, that our value is in being a child of God, then we can be the community that God intended for us to be. God intended us to be a community of inclusion, celebrating each person's uniqueness and living a life of unity that glorifies Him. Let's take a look at Galatians 3:26-29.

26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, **27** for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. **28** There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. **29** If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Paul is writing this letter to the churches in Galatia to confront the Judaizers. Think of Judaizers as an extreme faction within the church, who believed that Gentile Christians had to follow Jewish laws and traditions as well as believe in Christ. Paul is reminding the church that Jesus came for *all* people and that salvation is by God's grace through Christ and nothing else. Jesus changed everything. He moved God's truth from ritual to relationship, from law to grace, from deeds to faith.

In the passage we are looking at today, we can see that Paul's thesis statement in verses 26 through 29 is this: in Christ Jesus, there is a new oneness and a new relationship of being God's children. The theme of this passage concerns the new identity given by God to believers. All who are in Christ become children of God. They receive baptism as a sign that they have put on Christ. This means that they receive a new nature, which reflects the image of God. Out of their diversity, they join a community in which the members are all one in Christ Jesus. Regardless of racial ancestry, they become Abraham's offspring and, therefore, heirs of the promise to Abraham. That promise is now for anyone who has faith in Christ.

This passage shows us what happens to people who by faith identify themselves with Christ. Paul's emphatic answer is that we receive a new identity, which we share as believers. What I think is important for our conversation today around women is that this common identity changes everything. It transcends race, class or gender. The passage emphasizes our commonality as believers. It's a Jesus thing. "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor

free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Paul is clear on this. When we identify with Christ by faith, our spiritual allegiance, our commitment to Jesus takes precedence over racial or ethnic distinctiveness, class or social status, and our maleness or femaleness.

In this conversation, that means that our sense of personal worth moves from being a man or a woman to the unity that we share in Christ. We still remain male and female, celebrating uniqueness in that and at the same time acknowledging that this distinction becomes immaterial to our equal participation in the life of the church. Paul is telling us that our worth, rank, role, office or participation is not determined by our race, class or gender.

There seems to be some confusion among Christians as to some of Paul’s teachings in regard to women in the life and leadership of the church. The point of Paul’s statement is that all are one in Christ. This breaks down huge barriers of the culture, then and now, and clearly states that in God’s eyes, we are all equal. Galatians 3:28 has powerful implications for social relations. Paul’s message meant that a female no longer needed to be attached to a male to have a place in the community. Women’s roles need not be limited to wife and mother. As in Jesus’ own teaching, the apostle’s words opened the door to the ministry of women.

So where is the confusion for the church on the value of women and their roles in the life of the church? I have to be honest. When I hear conversations in the broader evangelical circles about whether it is biblical for woman to have leadership roles in the church, I am taken aback. Throughout Scripture, despite the culture of that day, we see many places where God has called women into leadership roles. The Old Testament mentions women who served in positions of spiritual leadership within Israel. Israel was a patriarchal society, yet the women of those times who led God’s people did so with the approval and anointing of God.

What can’t be ignored in this conversation is Jesus, more specifically, Jesus and women. John Ortberg says this in his book, *Who Is This Man?*

What is remarkable about Jesus – one of those seeds he planted that keeps producing surprising growth – is his amazing inclusivity of all people. ...there was an inclusivity to Jesus’ spirit that is part of what drew people to him – and still draws them – and it marked his relationships with women.

Ortberg goes on to quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer when he said: “Jesus gave women human dignity. ...prior to Jesus, women were regarded as inferior beings, religiously speaking.” During Jesus’ time on earth, women were viewed as greatly inferior to men, yet Jesus’ attitude toward women was revolutionary. Through His words, actions, and relationships, He showed high regard for women. His references to women were out of the ordinary and put them on a level equal to men. He gave women the same blessings that He gave men. He healed women. He included women in several parables. He further established their equality through specific teaching about women. His teaching on marriage spoke to the equal roles, rights, and responsibilities of both men and women.

His regard for women’s intellectual capacity and spiritual potential can be seen in His conversations with women throughout the Gospels. He violated the practice of the day by conversing with women, a deliberate and purposeful statement of His high regard. Remember the woman at the well? [John 4:1-26]. Jesus established equality through His relationships with

women. In Jesus' day, men did not keep company with women, but Jesus did. In a time that was unheard of, Jesus welcomed women as students of His teaching and to travel with Him.

Craig Keener in *Two Views on Women and Ministry*, states this about Jesus.

What is more striking is his acceptance of women as actual disciples—something few if any other rabbis did. To sit at a teacher's feet was to adopt the posture of a disciple.

Do you recall the Martha and Mary story?

This is the posture that Mary adopts, and Jesus defends her adoption of this role. [Luke 10:38-42]

Jesus' radical value of women meant that they began to take on unusually prominent roles of leadership in the early church. In different places in the Epistles, Paul acknowledges women in ministry in the churches he worked with. Two specific examples stand out. In Romans 16, Paul writes,

1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. 2 I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.

Phoebe occupies the same position as the deacons of 1st Timothy 3. Another powerful affirmation of a woman in a ministry leadership role can be seen in Paul's greeting to Andronicus and Junia in Romans 16:7.

7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

In one of my Greek classes (I took Greek for a year and a half), we spent a whole week studying this very verse, really, the name *Junia*. In the original Greek manuscripts, Paul, indeed, greets Junia, a woman. The *a* or *alpha* at the end makes the name feminine, so it is clear Paul is greeting a fellow apostle, who is female. After looking at Scripture in the original Greek, ancient manuscripts, and early church transcriptions, we saw that over the centuries, the ending became translated with an *s* or *sigma*, making it masculine. Some of the scholars must have determined there was an error in the early writings, as Paul wouldn't have, couldn't have, had a female in that kind of leadership role. Around the eighth century, the spelling was changed with a footnote at the bottom, which over the centuries disappeared. In many of our Bibles today, Junia has become Junias, a male name.

In terms of women and our value, there is still confusion today. Remember the uproar a few months ago over the Pope washing the feet of women? The washing of feet was a holy ritual restricted to men, but as a sign of greater inclusiveness in the church, the Pope broke from tradition. There were people who responded to that with outrage. A reporter wrote this. "Here the rite was for a small community made up also of women. Excluding the girls would have been inopportune in light of the simple aim of community – a message to all." The Pope's act showed the all-embracing love of Christ, who ministered to all He met; man or woman, slave or free, Jew or Gentile. When we respond by excluding others, I wonder if we don't forget Jesus.

How did we move from Jesus' inclusion of women and the significant leadership roles of women in the early church to a spotty history of excluding woman? Here's what we do know. Scripture affirms equality of men and women, affirms God's call to each of us, unique to our individual gifts, and it affirms that we are part of the priesthood of all believers. [1 Peter 2:4-10] In the community that followed Jesus, women would be given a different place. Jesus was a revolutionary figure and He came to earth to set things right. Christ, His life, His ministry, His death and resurrection changed everything. He ate with outcasts, touched the unclean and recruited women into His ministry. Through Christ, every life is worthy of God. It is from that belief that we know all men and women are created equal. Through Scripture, we know that Christ didn't just say these things, He lived them. How do we argue with that? Isn't it Jesus' example that we are to be following?

I am grateful to be a part of this church that seeks and follows Jesus, a place that values men and women equally in the family of God. I suppose I wouldn't be standing up here otherwise. As I have participated in this community, I have watched God work in amazing ways through both men and women. God has done extraordinary things in transforming people's lives in and through each and every one of us. It is an "and/both"!

Jesus' vision of life continues to challenge us to do it better, to live as one in Christ. As followers we are to live a life that reflects God's truth and treats each and every person as valuable. It *is* a Jesus thing! Jesus came and set things right. Sometimes we forget and mess it up but Jesus offered women a new community. He offered a place on the team. As I look back on my life and my love of baseball, I can see that a lot has changed for females since 1970. Take a look.

(Video clip begins.)

That's my daughter, Annie. She has the ball. You also see a little blond, running right next to her with the white sweatshirt. That's my niece Mollie. I got to play, too, because I got to coach. It's an amazing thing to see girls participate in ways I wasn't able to, having a place on the team.

(Video clip ends.)

Annie is now in her twenties. She and her sister Kate have been able to follow their passions and have played soccer their entire lives. The other little girl I pointed out on the screen is my niece Mollie, and you know what? I have to give a shout out to her because yesterday after I finished preaching, I got to see that little blond commissioned as an officer in the United States Army. And while I was preaching yesterday, my daughter Annie was taking her MCAT [Medical College Admission Test] for Med School. Because of Jesus, regardless of gender, they were able to follow their calls, and I think that's something to celebrate, so this is what I have to say. *You go, girls!* Here's the thing. We are all children of God through faith. "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." And it *is* a Jesus thing! We are all of value in God's family. Let's pray.

Holy God, we thank You that on this day we celebrate mothers and women and men because we know, God, in the way that You walked and ministered and spent your time on earth that You created each and every one of us to be in community. You created each and every one of us with our unique gifts to come together and love each other and value each other, just as You love us. Thank You for that truth, God. We thank You for

the truth that You know us and love us and value us. All this is in Your precious and holy Name. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.