

To Be Female and Called by God to Speak

by Carol Schmidt

For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that the one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Corinthians 5:14-17)

When by means of legalistic religion the soul is tormented by the demand for impossible perfection and obedience to religious law, there is no cure or salvation in sight except by the grace of God through Jesus Christ. But what do those words mean, and why do we insist that people believe them when the church that calls for such belief denies the grace of God by its demand for unquestioning conformity to its tradition and interpretation of Scripture?

I was raised in a church whose main teaching was the fear of hell and what I must do to avoid the eternal fires of hell. From my earliest memory, I lived in fear of sudden death where there would be no instant before death in which I could pray for forgiveness. Twelve was a particularly perilous age because it was the normal age for baptism, but before being baptized a person had to work up the desire within her/himself to repent. About a month after my twelfth birthday, I was baptized and clearly recall the desire that I had to die at that moment because I was certain, according to all that I had been taught, that I would never again be as pure or assured of salvation as I was in that moment.

Following adult confirmation and twelve years of membership in a congregation of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, the indoctrination of my youth remained with me even though I had heard the word “grace” many times. The word itself and the formal teaching of it did not mean anything to me, and I felt a certain amount of guilt because of my inability to grasp this concept.

I have considered the re-establishment of communication with the pastor who confirmed me no coincidence. Through several years of conversation with him, grace began to become a reality. It was not only his teaching that facilitated understanding but also his example of patience with me, his love for and acceptance of me. He allowed me to write and say anything to him, and I trusted him more and more. I have found that this is the way it is also with God, in prayer. The Word of God is living and active. Through the Holy Spirit the words of the Bible come to life and have meaning. It is as if they jump off the page into the heart and mind of a person, changing him or her forever. The grace of God cannot be found in words of teaching alone, but it is a gift of God that must be experienced; it must be lived. The life of Christ in us displays the grace of God to others in this way. I will always be grateful to my former pastor for his teaching of grace that leads to the assurance of eternal salvation and the belief that there truly is nothing that can separate us from the love of God.

Once this certainty and trust in God is formed in a person, she then asks, “What now? Lord, what is it that you would have me do?” The love of God cannot remain contained within a person but

must go out to others, and the person filled with this love must look to the Source of love for direction. She must follow Jesus Christ and go wherever he leads her. It is at this point that some women come into conflict with the beloved teacher and are forced to choose between pleasing him or following Christ, for some women are called by God to teach and prophesy in the same way as men.

The gifts of God are not rationed by men but are given freely by God according to God's will. When by the grace of God faith is formed in the female, she is a new creation, and Christ lives in her. There can be no other Lord in her life except Jesus Christ. When religious leaders deny this reality and demand that she return in obedience to their lordship, they attempt to build a wall between her and God to replace the curtain torn through the cross of Christ. Should she attempt to return and appease the men while saying to God, "Surely there is something else that I can do for you that will also be pleasing to men," she will find that any work she attempts to do under these conditions will be as nothing because she cannot serve two masters. She is effectively sidelined, silenced and separated from the life of God when she accepts the teaching of men that God will not speak to her in the same way that God speaks to men. Retaining the belief that she is eternally saved while allowing this wall to stand between her and God, she is returned to a state of wishing for death because there is no life apart from God. She waits for the end of time and prays for Christ's return while sinking in the emptiness of bargaining with God for gifts intended for others and the rejection of gifts given to her. She has been returned to the law and rule of men because she fears the disapproval of men more than she fears God. She believes the words of men rather than the Word of God when she believes their teaching that she will lose her reward in heaven if she is disobedient to them, to their traditions and interpretation of Scripture.

We will each stand before God to give an account of how we have used the gifts given to us. How can men instruct women to bury certain gifts as if God mistakenly gave them to us? When a man says to a woman, "It's a shame you aren't a man. You would have been a pastor if you were one," he is acknowledging that gifts for pastoral service have been given to the woman. Why does he not say along with Acts 15:8-10, "God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?" Why do you keep us under the law and refuse to release the captives so that we may serve the Lord? Why do you go against Christ by setting yourselves as walls between people and God?

What man who is a pastor would resist the will of God that he use the gifts he has been given for the building up of the Church? It is the same for women. We who believe in Christ can only follow and go where Christ leads. The church that refuses the gifts given to women to fulfill the duties of the pastoral office is in danger of idolizing the physical form of the male and has even allowed some of its leaders to publicly proclaim that God is male.

There is no going around the wall of separation created by men, but the Gospel demolishes the wall. In the cross of Jesus the curtain is torn. There are no barriers between us and God. When we do not believe this, we allow people to build barriers, and we remain contained, refusing the grace of God that is constantly and persistently pursuing us. To fail to refuse the grace of God is to believe that God is able to save us and that salvation begins now, in this moment, and to

believe that God's grace and mercy are new every moment. It is to believe that there really is nothing that can separate us from the love of God. This is the freedom in which we live, trusting that, even though we are weak and not yet perfected, God does indeed break those barriers. In Luther's words, we sin boldly. We move, trusting in God's grace.

The mission of the Church is to proclaim the Gospel freedom that we have through Christ to all people. How do we proclaim a message we do not believe? It is a gift from God to believe the spoken Word even when the visible evidence in the practice of those speaking is contrary to it. To be healed by Jesus Christ is to move; it is to progress and follow him. We can no longer sit by the gate begging.

"It is written: 'I believed; therefore I have spoken.' With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence" (2 Corinthians 4:13-14). Jesus Christ is Lord! We also believe and therefore speak.

(Written for *The Daystar Journal*, 2005, edited by Robert Schmidt and included in A Daystar Reader, 2010, edited by Matthew L. Becker)