

# Priscilla Papers



*"Priscilla and Aquila instructed Apollos more perfectly in the way of the Lord"*

Volume 13, Number 3

Summer 1999

ISSN I 0898-753X

## REDEMPTION: AN IMAGE OF BIBLICAL EQUALITY

LaDonna Osborn

I was raised all over the world. I carry a United States passport, but that may be the most American thing about me. I love America, and I am very aware of the heritage that is mine, being born in this great land. But the world in which I have grown up and that I really call my home, is what I call "the real world." It is a world close to the earth, a world desperate for good news, a world that does not know all that we know and therefore does not engage in all of the arguments that divide us. It is a world in bondage to all the effects of sin and separation from God. The people of this world do not know why they are in the condition they are in. They are just there, waiting for a voice, a hand, a message, an expression, and an answer to their problems.

One of the reasons that I am so drawn to CBE is that I see it as an international organization that relates to the peoples of the world and has a heart for the entire world. It is not just an American organization, but rather a world organization. I believe that God has raised up this group of leaders and scholars and advocates to get the attention of those who would use Scripture to keep people literally in bondage. Even though they know the Word of God and him who is revealed in Scripture, some would align themselves with the very societal norms that Christ's disciples are sent to challenge. I believe that CBE is changing ways of thinking from the top by influencing institutions of higher learning. I hope and pray that God may grant that the leaders of the church of tomorrow will be touched and changed by the materials being made available through this organization.

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My own relationship with CBE began in 1989. My mother and father had been pioneers in world evangelism and, since 1947 (the year I was born), developed various programs and methods for church cooperative efforts in evangelism. We traveled all over the world as a family. My mother and father were partners in everything that concerned the family, and in everything that concerned ministry. I grew up in a family that did not recognize distinctions between people. I only saw that there were those who knew God through Christ and those who did not. From my childish outlook, their spiritual condition was the only difference, because I grew up with people of various colors, languages, cultures, and religions. The diversity that exists in our world was normal to me. I did not know that human differences justified cruelty and even war. The only valid issue was, "Do you know God? Are you in relationship with God or not?"

Those who knew God through Christ comprised a minority of people of every color, language, background and tradition, coming together around the central, pivotal, eternal, gracious, magnetic theme of Christ and his love for people. We would link ourselves together as one spiritual and visible body to infiltrate and confront the rest of the world in order to introduce them to Christ and to wholeness.

But after more than 35 years of that kind of ministry, my mother began to hear another sound, the sound of the female members of the body of Christ. God began opening her eyes to the condition of women all over the world. This was really supernatural, because she was not from an abused background, nor was she lorded over by her husband, nor had she ministered in traditions that had ever limited her expressions of faith. Her awakening was a process that evolved over a seven-year period. She began looking at the condition of women and at the Scriptures with a new perspective.

It was during that phase of her own life journey and ministry destiny that she became aware of CBE. Our church in Tulsa hosted a conference featuring a number of well-respected scholars and teachers from CBE as principle speakers. Nearly 1,200 people came from all over the world

and filled our sanctuary day after day. Attendees were mostly from the Pentecostal and Charismatic tradition, which has not always placed a high emphasis on academic study and biblical scholarship. Yet we saw people from 37 nations of the world listen intently as scholars poured out truth concerning God's plan of equality for all people. That began our relationship with CBE and our deep regard and respect for the women and men who have invested so much of their lives to discover truths and present them in a way that can bring necessary change.

Since that first encounter, I have introduced many women who are the senior pastors of churches to CBE. They are in the trenches of Christian ministry, going against the streams of tradition, and obeying Christ's mandate to them as his followers. It often seems that we are out there in our little canoes, paddling as hard as we can to reach the appointed destination. We look up and see this great organization as a large vessel that is churning against the currents of tradition, making it easier for us to do our part by challenging the systems and messages that are contrary to the plan of God for his beautiful and blessed creation. Our world desperately needs the message of biblical equality.

### *THE CHALLENGE TO COMMUNICATE*

As I approach Scripture, I see it as "the big picture" of God's eternal plan, presented in a way that can be understood by every person. Remember that my world-view is indeed a view that encompasses the *entire* world. Therefore, I believe that Scripture must be interpreted and communicated in a way that is not culturally biased. Truth transcends time, culture, and language. Likewise, truth can be communicated in a way that is comprehended by people on every level of society, in every culture, and in any language.

Language is one of our greatest vehicles, but also one of our biggest problems. For example, I have found myself in places like the bush of Papua, New Guinea, some areas of which seem trapped in the Stone Age. There is so little vocabulary you can hardly communicate. God is simply referred to as "the big pella" (big fellow). Yet, truth can even be communicated to the tribes in Papua, New Guinea.

And now, I have just returned from two weeks in China where I was literally locked in with church leaders representing over half a million converts within the Chinese underground church. For ten days, twelve hours each day, I shared truth from Scripture, teaching systematically,

beginning with Genesis 1 and discovering all that flows from that place of beginnings. Only God and my nervous system will record the agony of trying to communicate simple truth within a culture and through a language that are so different from my western, English paradigm. I carefully checked specific English Bible passages with my translator to avoid any potential misunderstandings. Painstakingly, I searched for methods and illustrations that would help me communicate truth to these Chinese brothers and sisters. Yes, when you understand God's "big picture," you can communicate to anyone, anywhere!

If we, as the people of God, are committed to bringing truth to our world so that God's plan can be fulfilled and made visible through his church, through his people, in a way that reconciles the world to him through Christ, we must learn how to communicate.

My personal goal and mission statement is this: To communicate God's eternal plan to as many people as possible, in a way they can understand; to bring people into relationship with God through Christ; and to help them fulfill the destiny for which they were created. That is the essence of what I am about and what I want to share with you.

Out of all that we have learned and studied, and all of the tremendous truth and inspiration that we have experienced, we must now ask the Lord how we are to take it into our realms of influence in a way that truly brings about change.

This is one of the reasons I love the multi-faceted vision of CBE. We are committed to not only communicating in the halls of higher criticism and the institutions of higher learning (yes, we have got to communicate there); but we must also communicate to church leaders who are already laboring to fulfill the mandates of Christ. It is also important that we communicate in such a way that the person in the pew can comprehend and relate to these truths. And finally, we must communicate in such a way that the person on the street can understand and find themselves in God's "big picture."

Let us take what we know away from the walls of our sanctuaries, away from the isolated corners of our Bible studies, away from the exclusivity of our denominations and our mono-cultural environments. Let us learn how to bear the responsibility of communicating in the streets, in the communities, in the places where people different from us are living and struggling with all the same issues we are.

If we are going to bring about change, we must make truth tangible, illustrate it with our very lives. That is

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communication. We have to communicate on the level of people's experience.

As proclaimers of the gospel, we bear the responsibility of relating our message to our audience. We don't just throw it out and say, "Well, it is up to you. Grab on. Enjoy. I am giving it to you. You choose. Agree or disagree." That would be arrogance. It is not the audience's responsibility to understand. It is my responsibility to communicate.

There is such a thing as top-down change, but it is very slow. In the economic arena we call it "trickle-down." But in the movements of the Church of Jesus, trickle-down change is not fast enough. The major changes that have been experienced in human history have been from the bottom up. We must empower the masses so that more people begin to hear, and feel unrest because they are no longer willing to support those who put them in bondage.

As a mature woman with a world involvement in ministry, I hear voices around the globe, saying, "What about us? We may not think like you. We may not talk like you. We may not be as many as you. But we are somebody! We have a history. Do not expect us to walk your history. Do not expect us to memorize your heroes. Let us be affirmed as a people with a perspective that is valid. Why? Because we are human beings, made in the image of God."

We must be sensitive to what God is doing in his world because he has a plan, and his people are the voice and the agents of change necessary to fulfill his plan. The message is not new. It is the message of equality, the message of reconciliation. It is the message that unfolds as we begin to truly understand God and his plan and his Word and his world, and our place and calling in it.

Change is happening, and we must communicate that change in a way that relates to every hurting person, regardless of circumstance or wounds or class or color or gender. We are the ones who bear the responsibility to say it, and say it plainly.

### *THE BIG PICTURE OF REDEMPTION*

That is why I have elected to speak with you about something I believe is foundational to everything that we at CBE are about: redemption as an image of equality.

I want to show you how to communicate profound truth that can be translated on any level. Information can be articulated in such a way that you can take it to any place, on any level, helping people see where they fit into God's plan and why they have equality in Christ.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and [he] has given [to] us the ministry of reconciliation, that is,

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and [now he] has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For [God] made [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in [Christ].

We then as workers together with him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, 'In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2 Cor 5:17-6:2, NKJV)

Redemption is an image of equality. People need to know that what God did on our behalf changes everything, and that what he did was not "Plan B." What he did was what he wanted in the beginning. God wanted it, and God is a God who does not change his mind and who is not affected by our disobedience.

God does not change his mind because we are weak and defiant, or because we slink away in our hopelessness and independence. He is a God who stays right on course and continues to bring about his plan. So, when we tell people that God had a plan in the beginning, we begin to understand that redemption is expressed not only through what Christ did on the Cross. God was also expressing redemption in the very beginning.

I often use the words "redemption" and "gospel" interchangeably. To me they are one and the same. Redemption: God bringing us back, God paying the price, God rescuing us from what would harm us. All of that is the gospel. It is the Good News that God has a plan, that God does not give up. It is the Good News that God loves us now, even in our brokenness and our mistakes and our continually not getting it right. It is the Good News that God is still there, working out his plan in our lives. Redemption is the whole picture of God's eternal plan, from the beginning, through the ages of history, to this very day.

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is power. I am not ashamed of the gospel because the world I see needs power. The gospel is what comes to empower a weak and hopeless, broken world and to transform people with the dignity that God intended for them in the very beginning. Redemption is the very central concept of God's eternal plan, and that eternal plan is made visible in Christ. If we are to effect change in our world, we must make the redemptive work of Christ visible.

The world looks at us to see what God is like, and sometimes we do not reflect him very well. We sometimes reflect him as being very narrow and biased and mono-

focused. We need to work on that because we want to embrace those whom we have not even been aware existed.

Redemption is where everything begins; it is the thread that runs from Genesis to Revelation. It is the anchor that we hold to so we do not get blown off course. Redemption is the guideline by which we interpret all spiritual revelation. When I preach the gospel and communicate it so that people can see God's plan where they live, I talk about four events that together comprise the big picture of redemption, through which we see the image of equality.

When I approach subjects like racism or sexism or classism or any other "ism" that describes the divisions among humanity, I do not approach them as social or even political issues. I approach them as redemptive issues because of my understanding of redemption as the whole picture that is God's plan.

### *DIGNITY, PURPOSE, EQUALITY*

The first event of the gospel and of redemption is Creation. We must begin in Genesis. There are only two pages of pre-Fall theology and everything important is there.

In Genesis 1 and 2, the story of God's creation, I want to emphasize three words and show how we come full circle back to God's original plan through this continuum I call redemption. The first word is "dignity." The second word is "purpose." The third word is "equality."

There are many important and theologically vital themes in Genesis 1, 2 and 3, but I condense them all into these three for the purpose of bringing understanding to people. People need to understand who they are, the purpose of their lives, and how they function in a unified community of equality with other people.

We see dignity, purpose and equality in Genesis 1:

Then God said 'Let Us make humankind in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it...' (Gen 1:26-28)

In this passage we find dignity for every human being, purpose for every human being, and equality among all

human beings. That is God's plan, and God does not change. All the changing is on our part. We change as we fall; we change as we rise. And we are rising to rediscover God's original plan.

### *SHAME, FEAR, SEPARATION*

The second event of the gospel, or of redemption, is the Fall of humankind. Genesis 3 contains a dialog that uses such simple words, but in this brief passage we find the root of all human problems, and we see the result of all human problems. There is an Enemy. The Enemy came. There is a force at work that is contrary to God's plan. The strategy of this Enemy, this beguiling serpent, this influence away from God, has only one real technique—deception. Deception is the Enemy's primary tool. And look what happened—Dignity, purpose and equality became shame, fear and separation.

Dignity was translated into shame. Adam and Eve hid themselves from God. They saw that they were naked, and were ashamed for the first time. Humans had purpose, but our

purpose was interrupted when we locked ourselves behind walls of fear, and hid ourselves from God. What began as equality, in beautiful communion and harmony and relationship with God, became separation when sin and deception came, when God's motives were questioned and his integrity challenged.

Shame, fear, separation: In those three words are rooted the problems of all humanity, no matter how lofty or how lowly. Behind each problem is a sense of shame, a motivation of fear, or the result of separation—loneliness and brokenness. That is the condition of our world, regardless of gender, race, or class. These are the issues with which people are dealing. All of Adam and Eve's children, all of us born into the consequences of sin, inherit shame, fear and separation. We, the church, must know how to release people.

We see God's original plan outlined in Genesis 1 and 2. Then in Genesis 3 we see the fall, Satan's deception and beguilement. We see the results of the wrong choice. Then, right on the same page, we read God's promise. God speaks to the serpent and says, "You went too far! You beguiled the wrong one. I am going to put a separation between you and her and between your seed and her seed. You may think you have made headway today, but you will see your head crushed by the heel of the seed of woman, for through her will come the Redeemer who will set it straight and reestablish my plan for humanity."

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Then from Genesis to Matthew we see a faithful God who just keeps coming and coming and coming. When we mess up he keeps coming! He comes through the kings. He comes through the psalms. He comes through the prophets. He comes through the wisdom.

That brings us to the third event of redemption, the Cross of Christ. It is difficult to skip right to the cross because there is so much that the life of Jesus makes clear. He came to show us God, to make God visible, to make God touchable, to reveal his emotions, to make his plan real, to settle the squabbles of our broken humanity and our self-righteous, religious arguments.

In the event of the Cross, we see equality in Christ's substitution on our behalf. Hebrews 2:14 reads, "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, he himself shared in the same..." Christ always wanted to be with us; He always wanted us to be like him. "...That through death he might destroy the one who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

This is what Christ did on our behalf. Men and women, people of all races and classes were subject to death. Christ's substitution was for *all people*.

We see equality in Creation, in the Fall, and at the Cross. "Christ [is the one] who suffered once for sin, the just for the unjust" (1 Pet 3:18). There is never a hint that Christ's death is for an exclusive group of people, absolutely not! The cross is for all people, and that equality becomes the foundation of our message.

The redeeming work of Christ is not the end; it is the beginning—the beginning of our journey back to what God intended: dignity, purpose and equality.

In the fall, we saw dignity perverted into shame, purpose interrupted and absolutely shattered because of fear, and equality destroyed. Separation came to describe the human family. Separation resulted in men ruling women, the strong ruling the weak, the rich ruling the poor. Everything about fallen humanity depicts that separation. But when Christ came, the picture changed. He did not leave us in the condition we placed ourselves in through choice.

Dignity became shame, but Christ brought forgiveness. It is "in Christ that we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph 1:7). Miraculously, shame has been overtaken by the forgiving, atoning, loving work of Christ on our behalf. Once we were naked and ashamed, but now we can stand before him unashamed because of his forgiving love.

We had purpose, which changed into fear, but Christ transformed that fear into peace. Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but [you can] be of good cheer for I have [already] overcome the world" (Jn 16:33).

The things we have been afraid of no longer cause us to shudder and quake and recoil and hide ourselves. No, because Christ has already gone before us. He now is our peace. He has overcome what we face and he walks with us as our peace. We do not live in fear. Fear has no place in the life of a believer.

We had equality, then we found ourselves in a state of separation. But Christ came to bring reconciliation.

"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross" (Col 1:19).

Scripture pays no attention to the distinctions we place on people today. There is equality in creation, equality in our sinful natures, equality in what Christ did for us on the cross. Jesus said, "Whosoever comes to me I will not cast them out" (Jn 6:37). *Whosoever*... Everyone... As many as receive him, to them he gives the right to be the children of God. In this passage, Jesus did not say "men" or "women," "rich" or "poor," "black" or "white." He said *whosoever*.

One of the most significant changes that happened on the day of Pentecost was the fact that "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). Every person could hear the message of redemption in their own language; redemptive truth was no longer available only in Hebrew or Aramaic. The wonderful works of God could be presented in any language so that all would know they were included.

### *NOW IS THE ACCEPTABLE TIME*

The fourth event of the gospel is *now*. When you understand the gospel, you know it is a *now* thing. It is not just about getting saved at the altar or first communion. The gospel is a redemptive work that continues in the present. *Now*, my life submits to the work of God who is continually transforming me into a right way of thinking. *Now*, I am being conformed to the image of Christ as I submit myself to God's Word and to the power of the Spirit who makes it a reality in flesh today.

*Now*, we have equality in restoration. Our dignity is being restored through forgiveness. Our fear is being cast out by peace. We have come full circle.

God does not change. God's plan is not Plan B but Plan A, an eternal plan. When we catch on to that fact and get in step with him, he walks with us and brings us so subtly and so beautifully and so perfectly back to a garden relationship with him. It is a wonderful plan: Restoration.

Dignity... Image of God... Likeness of God. Humanity, with God's thumbprint upon it, that is who we are, and who the people in our world are. It does not matter if they

are beggars or derelicts in the street. It does not matter how broken their lives, how wasted, how seemingly hopeless the marks of abuse that have distorted them. Because of what Christ has accomplished, because God does not change, the image of God is at work in them reforming them into the likeness of God.

Purpose became fear, which became peace and now it is purpose again. In John 15:16 Jesus said, "You did not choose me. You ran away from me. You did your own thing. But I chose you and I appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain" (paraphrased). In the garden we were given a purpose to be fruitful and to multiply and have dominion. We as God's image in the earth today have the same mandate to go and reproduce his kind in the earth.

When we come to a relationship with God in Christ, something dynamic happens. Relationship only begins with God and me, but then it's made provable, demonstrable in my relationships with others. As Jesus said in John 17:20-21, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in me through their word; that they all may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." Equality.

Redemption is an image of equality. Redemption starts with God's plan. Redemption is tested by the separation between God and us and between us and others. But redemption is triumphant at the cross of Jesus Christ. Now, that redemption is entrusted to us. We understand God's entire plan in its simplicity, and we also see the profound nature of God's character and faithfulness and God's willingness to be expressed through human flesh, as we read these words:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new. All of this is of God who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and now he has given to us that ministry of reconciliation. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. God was not in Christ imputing transgression and pointing out sin and judging and condemning. God was in Christ reconciling them. Now he is trusting us with the same. And he has given to us, committed to our very trust, that same word." (2 Cor 5:17-19, paraphrased)

So now we, the Church of Jesus Christ, are called to be ambassadors of Christ. It is as if God himself were pleading through us to a world that is broken and lonely and frightened

and bruised: "Come back to God," because (as the Living Bible says it so beautifully), "God took the sinless Christ and poured into him all of our sin and then in exchange he poured all of God's goodness into us."

#### MY PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of understanding your ways, and the gift of communication whereby we can take words and present them in such a way that truth can be presented to people wherever they are and whatever their lives have encountered. Lord, our hearts are turned toward you and our minds and spirits have been nourished with truth concerning your plan, the equality that is our inherent right as your creation.

Now, by your Spirit, stir our hearts that we might commit ourselves to be those reconcilers who, entrusted with the precious words of hope, will know how to communicate them on every level.

Lord, you see every woman, every man. You know the responsibilities they bear. You see their hearts, their families, the ministries and labors that they pour themselves into. I pray that

each one will feel a sense of being right in the very center of your will, knowing that they are the physical expression of your eternal plan that began even before the foundation of the earth and continues throughout eternity. I pray that your anointing upon your people will increase as they carry out their duties and responsibilities.

Lord Jesus, you are the Christ, the anointed One. May you rise in your people so that your anointing might be released through them in love and compassion in creative and courageous ways, so that they will not give up or be overcome with criticism, difficulty, or the deception that they are not making progress. Lord, show them the progress that their lives are effecting in their worlds. Lord of our lives, we invite you to live through us that the world might know that you are the Sent One. Amen

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