

# Lurching Toward the Goal

*Mars and Venus ought to revolve around the same Son.*

JAMES D. BERKLEY

I was alerted to the fact that all might not be quiet on the male-female front as I wandered out of a class one day—probably around 1969—on the University of Washington campus. Yet another student demonstration, complete with bullhorn, angry defiance, and hand-lettered posters, caught my attention. To my surprise, however, racist complicity or the war-mongering military-industrial complex wasn't the target this time.

No. It was Paul, poor old gone-but-still-reviled Paul, of apostolic and Bible-writing infamy. DOWN WITH PAUL AND THE BIBLE! a poster read. PAUL IS A MALE CHAUVINIST PIG! At first I didn't get it. Just how were they expecting to change long-dead Paul's mind? And really! Protest the Bible? Paul? How absurd! (Now I understand they were vilifying one they should have seen as an amazing ally.)

Since then, I've watched the gender wars ebb and flow through society and the church. Some great things have happened. My wife and daughter have far greater opportunities than my mother did—my brilliant mother who graduated valedictorian from her high school, only to aspire to clerical work (but later in life

earned her B.A. magna cum laude and a master's degree). My wife now works in a place where smarts and contribution lead to advancement, and gender appears highly superfluous. And my daughter, in college, will enter a workforce with greater opportunity than her mother and grandmother ever enjoyed at her age. That's great! Men's and women's roles have softened and faded, providing a much less rigid grid in which to choose one's own way. That's good, too.

But sometimes, in the midst of this pleasant change, women and men have been set against one another, as if we were enemies rather than allies, competitors rather than teammates, aliens rather than fit companions. That grieves me. I'm sure that grieves God. Mars and Venus are meant to revolve in harmony around the same Son.

I long for a time when gender doesn't matter at all in the election of an elder or deacon, or the call of a pastor, but rather love for the Lord, biblical faithfulness, theological acumen, and ministry effectiveness. I long for a time when denominational women's ministries can be more about ministry and less about

women, more about joyful service and less about perceived slights. I long for a time when—with truth and logic—women can sharpen men, and men can sharpen women, without being called hateful or violent, strident or misogynist. I long for a time when theology is done not by gender (or nationality or class), but by disciplines faithfully passing their richly varied experience through the screen of orthodoxy and the discipline of biblical exegesis. I long with a sigh for the fulfillment of Ephesians 5:21 ("Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ") in our churches and in our cross-gender relationships.

We're getting better. I really think we are. I rejoice in my collegial relationships in ministry with elders and clergy who complement my masculinity with their femininity. The church benefits from the fullness of that exchange. Could it be that even with our remaining difficulties, we are still lurching awkwardly toward the goal of "no longer male and female, for all of [us] are one in Christ"? Pray that it is so. n



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