

How Jesus Defied Convention in His Dealings With Women

Jesus refused to be bound by the conventions of his day. At times he even seemed to go out of his way to provoke the religious leaders. He chose to ignore manmade traditions.

One of the ways in which Jesus defied convention was in his treatment of women. Think, for example, of his willingness to have a conversation, alone, with a Samaritan woman of very dubious reputation (John 4). Jesus always treated women with dignity and respect. Whereas I can think of several examples where he publicly rebuked men, I cannot think of a single example where he castigated a woman or publicly shamed or embarrassed one. On the contrary, he went out of his way to defend them (Luke 7:36-50, John 8:3-11).

But Jesus went beyond that. In a society that was highly patriarchal:

He gave illustrations that women would relate to—for example, about yeast in a lump of dough (Luke 13:21), sewing a patch on an old garment (Matthew 9:16).

Women, as well as men, were the heroines of his stories—the woman who lost a piece of silver (Luke 15:8-10), the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-5).

He never told a story where a woman was the “villain” of the piece. (The closest example would be the five foolish virgins.) Men were often cast in that role.

He publicly honored women as examples to follow—the widow who gave two small coins (Mark 12:41-43), the woman who poured ointment on his head (Matthew 26:6-13).

He welcomed their children. Although the text doesn't

specifically state so, I suspect it was mothers who brought their children to Jesus so he could bless them (Matthew 19:13-15).

He defended their rights. Jesus stood against the common practice that a man could divorce his wife for no reason (Matthew 19:3-8).

Jesus didn't dumb things down when he talked to women. Some of the most profound conversations that were recorded in the Gospels occurred with women. Think of the talks he had with the woman at the well in John 4 (the first time he revealed his Messiahship) or with Martha about the resurrection (John 11). The story of Mary and Martha shows Jesus encouraging Mary to sit at his feet learning from him rather than being relegated to the kitchen (Luke 10:38-42).

In a society where a woman was not viewed as being a credible witness, Jesus revealed himself after his resurrection to women, and entrusted them to take the news that he had risen to the disciples (Matthew 28:1-10).

I think another of the reasons Jesus didn't have female disciples; he was protecting women's reputations. The Pharisees were out to get Jesus. They accused him of being a glutton and a drunkard just because he shared meals with sinners. If he had given them any hint of an opportunity, they would have accused of him of immorality too.

Jesus' actions speak of his attitude towards women—honor and esteem.

*Adapted from **Felicity Dale's** blog, *Simply Church*. Dale is an author and an advocate for women in the church. She trains people to start simple/organic/house churches around the world.*