

Based on what I said in the previous post, Paul's attitude toward women in the church may seem inconsistent, or at least ambivalent. Women could participate in his churches as ministers, prophets, and even apostles. But they were to maintain their social status as women and not appear to be like men. This apparent ambivalence led to a very interesting historical result. When the dispute over the role of women in the church later came to a head, both sides could appeal to the apostle's authority in support of their views. On one side were those who urged a complete equality between men and women in the churches. Some such believers told tales of Paul's own female companions, women like Thecla, who renounced marriage and sexual activities, led ascetic lives, and taught male believers in church. On the other side were those who urged women to be in complete submission to men. Believers like this could combat the tales of Thecla and other women leaders by portraying Paul as an apostle who insisted on marriage, spurned asceticism, and forbade women to teach.

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