

God Said It, I Believe It, That Settles It – Rev. Nicole Reilley

I remember the first time that I heard someone say, “God said it. I believe it. And that settles it.” I was an eighth grader and I was at the Orange Julius. Do you remember those? The Orange Julius. I had an Orange Julius and I was starting to drink it and this man came toward me and he invited me to his church, told me I needed to get some Jesus, and he invited me to come. I tried to explain to him that I was a Roman Catholic and I went to church every week. (This is before I went rogue and became a United Methodist.) He explained to me that the Catholic church was wrong in pretty much every way and did not follow the bible. So we engaged in a discussion about this and he ended the discussion by saying, “Well, God said it. I believe it. And that settles it.” I did in that moment what I often do, I laughed, because I knew that even though there was something in that that made a little sense to me, that really wasn't true.

Today we continue our sermon series on half truths and we are looking at that phrase, “God said it. I believe it. That settles it.” I think when you first hear it there's a little something that sounds right because certainly if God said something, we as people who love God would want to believe it. But the reality is that when we say, God said it, I believe it, that settles it, what we mean is that the Bible said it, and that's where the trouble begins.

Now let me tell you a little bit about myself theologically. I actually have a very high view of scripture. I read scripture every day. It informs my life. I look to it for wisdom. I look to it for knowledge. I look to it as the authority in my life. Scripture is now and has been for many years very important to me. But I also understand that the Bible did not fall from the sky and that the Bible contains ancient teachings and culture.

When I was here as your pastor for those six months in 2012 probably every week or every other week I would talk about a text and I would say context is everything. The context of the scripture really matters. Knowing that and understanding that is really key.

For example, did you know that putting indoor plumbing in a church was a big deal? You see, there is an obscure scripture people pointed to, and they said, “There should not be indoor plumbing in a church. There should be an outhouse outside that people use.” Aren't you glad that modern minds won that one, right?

There's a list of things that the Bible says that we just don't believe anymore. For example, the Bible tells us very clearly not to wear blended fabrics. So unless you're sitting here in all polyester or all cotton today, you're in trouble. The Bible also says in a field you shouldn't sow two types of seed. Very clear Bible teaching. So all of you growing tomatoes and basil next to each other, not biblically okay.

Now for you men, you might want to know that if you have a beard, you are not allowed to trim the edges of your beard. Clearly against the bible. And for any of us who spent yesterday, which is the biblical understanding of the Sabbath, if you spent yesterday

grocery shopping, shopping for anything, doing laundry or dishes, if you cooked, you broke the Sabbath, and so you all need to gather on the courtyard after church today because we're here to kill you. In addition, and this is the one that I am myself super glad because I was a very bad child, the Bible is very clear about the fact that if children are disobedient they are also to die. Right?

There's lots of things that are in the bible that we look at them and we go, "Well, obviously we shouldn't do that." But there's also a whole group of things that are in the bible that we look at and we think, "Well, I think that we're still supposed to do," and some of those things that we hold onto, maybe not understanding the context or even understanding the text fully, are things that have repercussions, ramifications.

Let's hear this morning's text, 1st Corinthians 14:34-35.

Scripture: "The women should be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but should be submissive as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, they should ask their own husbands at home, for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church meeting."

Now I told Jeff that after that was read I was just going to sit down and see what you all did. There is an insert that I want to draw your attention to. We're going to be doing some Bible study today. (Handout)

I grew up in a denomination where women were not pastors because I told you I grew up as a Roman Catholic. But when I was 13 years old, I started to feel a call to ministry. I remember at the time my parents had sent me to an all girls Catholic school, which later I was thrown out of, another story.

I remember trying to figure out what did this mean, that I had a call to ministry. Of course when I found out what it meant because I was a Catholic. So what would it look like if I had a call to ministry as a Catholic woman? A nun, I would become a nun. Can you see me as a nun?

Okay, so I figured I must have misunderstood God's call. But then when I became 20 or so I started thinking, "Hey, why is it that women cannot be ministers? What's that about?"

And so I asked. And the closest I ever got to an answer was someone told me, "Well the Bible says, all the disciples were men, and if Jesus wanted women to be pastors, women would have been disciples."

Now at the time that made a little bit of sense to me because I knew nothing about the bible really. But as I learned about the Bible, I learned that while the disciples, the 12 disciples were men, there were a lot more disciples than just the 12 and some of them

were actually women. They are Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Susanna, and that's found in Luke's gospel.

In addition, one thing you should know is that Bible, the Bible features women throughout especially the New Testament as people that God brought in to do important things.

- For example, the first person to learn of God's plan for salvation in Jesus Christ was Mary, the mother of Jesus.
- The first evangelist and convert was the Woman at the Well. She heard who Jesus was and became a follower of his, and then she went out and gathered a whole bunch of other people to know Jesus.
- The first one to receive the teaching on the resurrection was Martha in John's gospel of Mary and Martha, the two sisters. She was taught by Jesus about the resurrection and she made a confession of faith.
- The first one to learn that Jesus would die and understand some of the meaning of that was the other half of Mary and Martha, Mary. She was the first one to respond to this news by anointing Jesus for his death.
- Then as you learned over Easter, some of the first people to know of the resurrection and to proclaim it were women.

So the Biblical witnesses that women and men have an important role in God's world and in the life of the faith community. So why is it that when people who don't believe in women's leadership in the church, why is it that they turn to the Bible as the tool to help them prove their point? What is the true story?

We're going to do some Bible study around this today, a little more Bible study than I usually do with you. But it's all on that handout and we'll follow it along together, but before we jump to it, I want to help you see what the bigger thing that's going on in this text.

This is in 1st Corinthians and Paul is speaking to the church at Corinth, and the bigger story that's going on here is that Paul has set up the church and then he's moved on to set up other churches. A group coming behind Paul has said, "Well, sure, Paul told you to do that, but actually what you should do is," so there's this whole other group.

They're a more traditional group. That makes a lot of sense because here at the earliest part of Christianity, most of the new converts are actually Jewish by tradition and practice and they're becoming Christians, and they are struggling to understand. What do we hold onto in our traditional way of being people of faith, and what is it we let go of?

This group of people who were following after Paul and trying to fix what he was up to, we call them Judaizers because they were really coming from this more traditional understanding of the faith. You can think of them as just traditionalists. They were coming to try and make things look more like how they thought it should. Paul was

actually setting up models of progressive leadership, shared leadership between men and women, the rich and the poor, and other commonly supported divisions, so the Jew and the gentile, and he was going to have none of this going back to how the tradition was.

This section of the text that we heard today is just part of one section, that's a larger section, I want you to see what's going on, what's the context for the text we heard. This is all about worship protocols.

- Worship protocols start in chapter 11:1-16, divisive worship practices based on Judaizers, so those are the traditionalist hierarchical understandings.
- Then chapter 11:17-34, divisive practices of the rich during congregational worship.
- Then chapter 12 at the beginning through 14, divisive practices pertaining to spiritual gifts in the congregation's life, and then
- the text we heard with a little more 14:31-40, divisive practices relative to the exclusion of women participating in congregational worship.

This whole section if you want to think about it this way is Paul debating with the people who came after him about how what he set up is the way it should be and what they are saying is not correct.

The big problem for us with reading this and understanding it is that punctuation isn't a thing in Paul's day.

If I were to quote Pastor Molly and something she said and then give my opinion, I would quote her by using quotation marks, so you would know. Paul has none of that. That's why it's really hard to read and really hard to understand.

But the text is Paul's understanding of what these traditionalists have said and then his disagreement and with what he thinks.

We're going to get to the little bit of the text we heard, but first we're going to back up and we're going to look at a more, a bigger understanding so you can kind of see how all this is happening.

If you look on your handout, 1st Corinthians 11:1-16. The first part says,

“Be imitators of me as also I am of Christ. Now I praise you, because you remember me in all things, and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you. But I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ.”

Paul is basically saying, “I want you to follow the traditions I have given you,” and now he's setting up his argument about why he is right, and he does that by saying, “Christ is head of every man. The man is the head of the woman. And God is the head of Christ.”

Now to a lot of people they read this and what they think is going on here is a hierarchy, and this is how it looks: First you have God, then you have Christ, then you have the man, and then you have woman. And they would say that the word “head” of means “authority over.” So Christ is the authority over the man. The man is the authority over the woman. And God is the authority over Christ.

But actually that's not what's happening if you actually read the text. This is what's happening: It's actually not about hierarchy but order of appearance. And, instead of hierarchy many biblical scholars would say the first thing we're hearing about is

- Christ and man, the creation of man, then
- man and woman the formation of woman, and then
- God and Christ the birth of Christ.

The text is about the *chronological order* of how things happened in the biblical account. And when they use the word head, scholars don't think it actually has anything to do with authority (because there is a word you could use for authority) Instead, the word “head” refers to “origin,” meaning that out of Christ the man is made. (The scripture talks about Christ being the firstborn of all creation.) In the story of Genesis, the woman is made from man, and then God comes down to earth in Christ.

This is not a hierarchical view of understanding, and we know that because God and Christ are listed LAST in what Paul says and not first. This is actually Paul's way of setting up his argument about the inclusivity and the importance of women in the community by talking about origin and when people were created.

The next part, this is Paul now is dealing with what he's hearing. This is verse 1st Corinthians 11:4. “Every man who prays or prophesies with something on his head dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with their head uncovered dishonors her head since that is one and the same as having her head shaved.”

So before we jump into the text, notice something people often overlook. Paul is speaking clearly about women speaking in the church. Women were praying and prophesying just like men. It's a shared model of leadership. Paul talks about it and acknowledges it.

The issue is that women do not have their heads covered, and Paul is quoting the old tradition that a woman should have her head covered, and if she doesn't, it's just like she were bald. That's the old tradition, and Paul will have none of it.

The text goes on. Now we're at chapter 11 verse 11. “However, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man, man is not independent of woman, for just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman and all things come from God. Judge for yourself: Is it proper for a woman to pray with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that a man with long hair, that a man who has long hair is a

disgrace to him? But what if a woman has long hair? Is it her glory? For her hair is given to her as a covering. But if anyone wants to argue about this, we have no other custom, nor do the churches of God."

There's a lot here. But what I want you to see is that "however." So he's saying, "This is what you all think. However, this is what I think."

Paul is quoting their desire for women to go back to the veil and now he turns to his rebuttal and he says, "Man and women are connected to each other, there is an interdependence, and that woman stands before God just like a man does." Verse 15 literally says, "Hair has been given to her instead of a veil," and this meaning is what Paul is trying to bring out and trying to lift up that he is not calling like the traditionalists for the women to go back to the veil, back to the hierarchical way of seeing people. Paul will have none of it.

Then he adds this great part, "And if anyone wants to argue about this, we have no other custom, nor do the churches of God." Churches of God, that's a way that Paul is talking about the churches he is founding, and that'll be important in just a second.

I want to give you a sense of this argument and to see that what Paul is actually trying to set up at the time would've been considered wildly pro women. He is actually speaking against those who have come after him and have tried to pull people back to a previous time.

Now we're going to look at the text we heard read and we're going to add a line right before the text starts so you can get a sense of it.

"As in all the churches of the saints, the women should be silent in the churches for they are not permitted to speak. But should be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, they should ask their own husbands at home, for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church meeting."

Scholars would say that the important part of this text is that first part, "all the churches of the saints." "All the churches of the saints" referred to at this point in Biblical history to a very specific group of people, the Jewish-Christians of the time from Palestine and from Jerusalem, in other words, the traditionalists. Paul as he's setting up churches is setting up churches of God, and these folks are coming behind him and trying to set up churches of the saints, and Paul is speaking against it. Paul is basically quoting their old tradition that women are to be silent in church. This is what they say and not actually what Paul believes.

How do we know this? Well, there's a couple ways. One is just how the text is set up. When you get that there is no punctuation and that he's having this debate, you can see how that unfolds.

But there is other evidence as well. For example, Galatians 3:26-29, "For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, as many of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise." Very inclusive, including all people.

Then in the text we have for our center text today follow: "Did the word of God originate from you or did it come to you only? If someone thinks that he is a prophet or spiritual, he should recognize that what I write to you is the Lord's command. But if anyone ignores this, he will be ignored. Therefore, be eager to prophesy and do not forbid speaking in other languages. But everything must be done decently and in order." In other words, it is nonsense to want anybody to be quiet in church. Women have a voice as well as men. And, because it's Paul, everything needs to be done *decently and in order*.

It's a huge irony that a text that has been quoted to me dozens of times for why I should not be a pastor is actually a text that is about women and it's pro-women. I think all of this matters for us to understand this, but it's often hard to understand because of these constraints of the text and our own lack of knowledge. But I hope this unpacks it a little bit for you today because this matters.

Why does this matter? I think sometimes people think that women have made progress in the society in spite of the Bible, not because of the Bible. But today I want to make you aware that the Bible has an inclusive vision of women and that extends to an inclusive vision of slaves and the poor and the gentile and to any marginalized people. They are welcomed and affirmed.

So if you run into someone and they say to you, "Well, you go to that church with the lady pastor," (that's always my favorite term, the lady pastor,) "Oh my gosh. Well, the bible is very clear." It's not the bible that's really motivating them. What's motivating them, and you should just call it, is sexism. Sexism like racism is not supported in the overarching biblical vision.

Now I wish that this wasn't still an issue today. But it is. We hear in the news quite a bit in these last six months or so, some of the injustice women have suffered because they are treated like second-class citizens.

But it's not just the world where this happens. It is also happening in the church. For example, in the United Methodist church a study was done and they found that if you have a male pastor and a female pastor with the same number of years of experience serving the same size of church, the woman pastor is paid substantially less than the man.

I myself have been told, "We don't really need to pay you because you're married." Also, you should know that in our conference, which is Southern California for the

United Methodist Church, and Hawaii, Guam, and Saipan, there are 360 churches and with 300 in worship and over. Of those 28 churches, 26 are pastored by men, even though clergy women are a third of all clergy here in Southern California and Hawaii.

I share this because I want you to be agents for justice, to be agents of fairness, to be agents for change.

When somebody lifts up, "Well, lady pastors, I don't know," you can lean in and have the courage of your convictions to say, "Actually, what you are believing is not the Biblical witness. It is a half truth."

Let's pray.

Prayer: God, you have called all people, men and women, the rich and the poor, the Jew and the gentile, people of all backgrounds and orientations to serve you. Help us to be agents for justice, agents for change, and people who welcome diversity in our leadership. Help us to embrace the glory of your creation and how you have called all kinds of people into leadership. All this we pray in Jesus name. Amen.