

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

91.1 What Does the Bible Say About Women?

Part I

Scripture: Genesis 1:26-27, 3:16-19; I Corinthians 14:34-36; I Timothy 2:11-12; Galatians 3:28; I. Peter 3:7; Romans 16:1-5, 12-13, 15; Philemon 2; Philippians 4:2

INTRODUCTION

One of the characteristics of the age in which we live is revolution. The word may change. This kind of change is irresistible, pervasive, total, and rapid. It has a way of touching all of life. Revolution is born of a desire for freedom. It is the surfacing of the desire for identity, dignity, security and equality. Not the least of the kinds of revolution being seen today is that of the feminists.

The Women's Lib Movement of our time is an outcry being heard around the world. It is an organized effort which is both vocal and determined in its goal to achieve respect, equality and equal opportunity for women today. In one place it will emerge as rebellious and militant, while in another the effort will be intellectual articulate and through due process of law. The issues go beyond racial and social injustice to include those protestors who have chosen a deviant sexual life style.

Some feminists feel the issue of inequality can be traced to the teachings of Christianity and that Biblical traditions and morality are the cause of the bondage women have experienced. It is with these things in mind that we approach the women question and seek to understand the Biblical view. Consider with me today four initial observations which can be made on this important subject.

I. THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IS A FRIEND TO WOMANHOOD:

The thinking is advanced by the Women's Lib Movement that women have been brainwashed even when thinking of God. They insist that God is a she and when describing God the words "her" and "she" should be used. Their error is to introduce a sex issue where one certainly does not exist. The use of the word "He" when referring to God does not imply that God is male as opposed to

female. Evidently this is the way God has chosen to be known by virtue of the fact that “*He*” is used in the original manuscripts of the Bible.

Another issue has to do with Paul's apparent negative attitude toward women as seen in his obedience, and submission teaching, to say nothing of instruction that women should be silent in the church. (I Corinthians 7:8; Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18) They theorize that Paul was a woman hater, that he never married, and that he delighted in placing restrictions upon women. One could hardly fault such a man for advocating celibacy as he did in I Corinthians 7:25-40, this is the thinking of many feminists today.

Was Paul really a woman hater? The fact is that this man was a great friend to womanhood. Probably he was married. Few members of the Sanhedrin were not. Speculation is that either his wife died or left him when he came to the faith.

The issue dealing with his advice about celibacy is resolved in verses 29 and 26 of the chapter mentioned. Paul reasoned that the time was short and the suffering was great. Why plunge a husband or wife into sorrow when martyrdom strikes? Beside, Paul reasoned that the Lord's return was soon and with so little time left every believer should devote himself (or herself, I better be careful) wholeheartedly to the task.

Paul was not the king of chauvinists as he has been described. We know this by harmonizing other Scripture with Scripture. For instance, when Paul gave the qualifications of a bishop, or pastor in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-10, he said such a man should be the husband of one wife. If he had such a strong dislike for women he certainly would have advised Timothy and Titus to remain single and surely to seek unmarried men for this responsible office. Paul did not do that. When writing to Roman believers he shows his high regard for women by asking that Phebe be assisted in her work. (Romans 16:1-2) She was not to be overlooked nor was her work to be taken from her. All through that chapter Paul remembers the women of Rome. (16:3-4, 6, 12-13) In Ephesians 5:25 he urges, “*Husbands, love, your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.*” in verse 33 he admonishes, “*Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself.*” In Colossians 3:19 he instructs, “*Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.*” After reading these words from a man who did not know the companionship of a godly wife, I believe we can easily conclude that he was not a woman hater at all, that he recognized that women were to be loved by their husbands and they were to be respected.

We further recognize that the Christian faith is a friend to womanhood by the example of Jesus. No one ever treated women with more understanding and consideration than Jesus. Against the heathen cultures of the day with their unkind attitude toward women, Jesus is a sharp contrast. He brought an experience of love to the women of his world not known before. Jesus showed the deepest concern for every woman he met. (John 8:2-11; 20:11-18) The mother of Jesus said, *“For he hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden: for, behold, From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.”* (Luke 1:48) Through Christ God the Father has gone beyond considering the low estate of womanhood by lifting them to the position He originally intended. Through a woman God would devise a way for mankind to move from a creature status to a child status. The way Jesus treated women was revolutionary in the culture of his day. Because of Jesus women were no longer to be looked upon as tools or playthings. They were to be treated with respect, courtesy, and with compassion. I want to labor this point at the very beginning of our study of this subject. It is unfair and unrealistic to say that Christianity has put womanhood down and that women have been exploited by Christian teaching. Jesus is the best friend women have ever had. The Christian faith is a friend to womanhood.

II. THERE IS A SPIRITUAL REASON FOR WOMEN'S OPPRESSION:

A study of women's oppression is very revealing. Today in this world brides are still being bought and paid for as common chattel. Over the entrances to Muslim mosques signs read, “Women and dogs and other impure animals are not permitted.” According to Mohammedan belief women are soulless creatures because of their low estate. Four wives are allowed the Mohammedan husband today. New parents go uncongratulated in India when the baby is a girl. I understand that orthodox Jewish men still recite the ancient prayer, “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has not made me a woman.”

What is the reason for this subservience today and through the centuries? Is it just a matter of male pride and physical supremacy? Is chauvinism what it is all about? Are men the source of all this misery? The answer to these questions is to be found in the Bible.

1. Satan Is the Real Cause of Woman's Grief:

According to the Bible woman is the woman is the object of Satan's hatred. The Genesis story of the first man and woman is foundational in understanding the notorious way in which women have been used and

abused. In that story it was the initial doubt concerning God 's goodness which caused Eve to lose her place of a shared dominion with Adam. Genesis 1:26 reads, *“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”* Upon sentencing Satan for his deceit, God said, *“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head (a fatal blow) and thou shalt bruise his heel (a temporary wound).”* (Genesis 3:15) Enmity means “a deep seated hatred.” Satan has hated women with a passion ever since. It was Eve who exposed him with the words, *“The serpent beguiled me.”* (3:13) It was through woman that Satan's doom will come. Thus, he is the great enemy of women. It is so unfortunate that so few women know the source of their being exploited. It is not man alone who oppresses them.

2. Woman's Place Has Been Affected by the Fall:

Eve was angry with Satan because she had been told that now she would bear her children with pain, she would no longer share dominion with her husband, and she would be ruled by him. (Genesis 1:26; 3:16) Because sin entered the human experience all manner of problems developed in the relationship between man and woman. Male selfishness will prevail in society. Satan will vent his hatred for woman through these people who are under his control. When a woman becomes an informed Christian she realizes the spiritual reason behind the gravity of the woman's problem. Otherwise, she will react to male selfishness in the only way she knows. Urged by the same sinful nature that impels the male, she seeks liberation apart from the ways God has said that freedom comes.

III. MEN AND WOMEN BOTH REFLECT THE IMAGE OF GOD:

Genesis 1:27 informs us that God created man in His own image. The word man, refers to humankind, God created generic (belonging to a class of related things) man. We also read, *“Male and female created He them.”* We have the impression from this wording that both male and female were necessary to reflect the image of God. God's image could not have been reflected by the male alone, nor by the female alone. The difference in them reflected the different qualities inherent in the Godhead. In that reflection man and woman are equal.

An interesting observation is to note in Scripture the instances where God is pleased to reveal Himself as father and mother. Passages such as Psalm 103:13, Isaiah 9:6 and Matthew 5:16 are examples of God's fatherly overtures toward us as seen in His protection, authority and the supply of our needs. God further reveals Himself to us in a motherly way according to Isaiah 66:13. In this identity we feel the love, comfort, understanding and tenderness associated with femininity. *"If your father and your mother forsake you, the Lord will take you up."* (Psalm 27:10) There is no suggestion in Scripture that man is superior and woman is inferior. Both reflect the image of God. They were created equal.

IV. WOMEN HAVE AN EQUALITY WITH MEN AS BELIEVERS:

There is a spiritual equality between man and woman. Referring again to Genesis 3:16, it is important to note that the curse which came upon Eve did so as a wife, not as a woman. The words *"but he shall rule over thee"* mean that Eve would have a subordinate place in the family, they do not mean that she would have a subordinate place in the Lord. With the passing of time Christ would give men and woman the insight to see themselves as already in heaven. Peter writes, *"For the husband and the wife are heirs together of the grace of life."* (I Peter 3:7) Paul likewise emphasizes, *"In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male or female; for you are all one in Christ."* (Galatians 3:28) In Romans 8:29-30 Paul records, *"Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."* In the sight of God we are all one and as good as in heaven already even if we are still at the mercy of time and space which he doubtless had in mind in mentioning neither bond nor free. Christian men are not more important than Christian women. Spiritually they are equal.

1. There Is a Functional Subordination Among Spiritual Equals:

Many verses speak about women being submissive to their husbands. Some of them are I Peter 3:1-7, I Corinthians 14:34, Ephesians 5:22, Colossians 3:18, and Titus 2:3-5. The word is **hupotasso** and translated, submit and subject. It is also found in I Corinthians 16:16. I understand the word to mean a desire to please one another as far as possible so as to avoid disputes, contentions and divisions. There can be a submission among equals. Christ is the best example of this. In John 5:18 we read that Christ was equal with God. Yet in Philippians 2:6 we read He subordinated Himself under the Father so that the purpose of God might be fulfilled. He was no less God but

in His role as redeemer He was submissive. There is submission among equals. Equality and role are not exclusive. Submission is a voluntary yieldedness.

2. Submission Is Not to Suffer in Silence and Servile Subjection:

Paul wrote in I Corinthians 14:34 that women were to be under obedience, as also saith the law. The word law refers to the Ten Commandments, the books of Moses or the entire Old Testament. One Old Testament story is that of Abraham and Sarah. In Genesis 16:5-6 Abram allows his wife to have her way. She spoke and he responded to her. In Genesis 21:10-12 God approves of Sarah's correct reasoning. In I Samuel 25:32-33 God stands on the side of Abigail whose husband was a fool. She won the favor of David, but disobeyed her husband.

3. Submission Is Not to Respect the Violation of God's Revealed Will:

No man or husband has the right to countermand the Lord's command. Paul did say that wives were to submit to their husbands in everything. (Ephesians 5:24) There are other verses which help us understand what he meant. He did not mean that a husband was to become the Lord of his wife's conscience. There may be those times when a wife will have to identify with the Jerusalem apostles who exclaimed, we "*must obey God rather than man.*" (Acts:5:29)

4. It Is Allowable to Flee Unbearable Tyranny in a Marriage Relationship:

Submission does not mean a woman must endure abuse physically or mentally which will eventually destroy her. The submission Paul advocated often meant survival for women whose culture saw wives easily disposed of. Submission to authority was enjoined upon slaves (I Peter 2:18, Colossians 3:22) and in relation to authorities. (Romans 13:1) In submission God had preservation in view as well as an incentive to faith. (I Timothy 2:1-4; Titus 2:9-10)

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