

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

91.3 What Does the Bible Say About Women?

Part III

Scripture: I Corinthians 7:1-38; 1 Timothy 5:9-12

Seventy one years ago a young woman living in Philadelphia became concerned that at least once a year sons and daughters ought to make a point of giving tribute to their mothers. The year was 1907 and her name was Anna M. Jarvis. Miss. Jarvis arranged for mothers to be recognized in a local church service and that the mothers in attendance be presented with a white carnation. The idea had much appeal and similar services were held in other churches the following year.

The second Sunday in May was adopted as an agreeable date. By 1911 there was not a state in the union where the custom had not spread. Leaflets promoting the idea were printed in ten different languages and distributed in as many countries. One such pamphlet contained the words, "A day that has shown it has a heart and living interest for all classes, races, creeds, high born and low, rich and poor, scoffer and churchman, man woman and child, is Mother's Day, observed the second Sunday in May. The common possession of the living world is a mother. Everyone has, or has had, a mother. The miraculous growth of Mother's Day in a few years to a national and international day can be attributed to the heart and living interest it possesses for almost every home, and every person of a mother loving heart in this and other countries." Yes, today is Mother's Day. We wish for all mothers everywhere, and particularly for those of the Hope Church family, the happiest and most meaningful day ever.

Upon this occasion of our celebrating another Mother's Day, we come to conclude our study of what the Bible says about women. No attempt has been made to exhaust the subject. However, certain basic Biblical principles have been noted. The following facts have emerged. **I.** The Christian Faith is a friend to womanhood. **II.** There is a spiritual reason for women's oppression. **III.** Men and women reflect the image of God. **IV.** Women have an equality with men as believers. **V.** The role of women in the primitive Christian Church was an active one. **VI.** The Scriptures speak of proper dress and adornment for women. **VII.** Women are to be known for their quiet and submissive demeanor in church,

VIII. When women teach they are subject to authority. This morning we wish to continue our study of God's perspective of womanhood as seen in the roles life makes available to her. We will consider women as single and widowed, as wives and as mothers.

IX. THE SINGLE WOMAN CAN REJOICE IN HER GOD GIVEN OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE HIM:

The writings of Paul lay particular emphasis upon the service of single women. The whole point seems to be that she is able to serve Him freely. Verses, directed to younger women are found in Titus 2:4 and I Timothy 5:14. In Titus 2:4 Paul seems to take it for granted that the younger women would be married. We have the words, *"That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children."* The same impression is given in I Timothy 5. He writes, *"I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully."* Yet, this same Paul in writing to Corinthian believers (I Corinthians 7:8, 38) indicates that non-marriage is preferable. How are we able to reconcile these verses.

Some scholars feel that the Pastoral Epistles were written ten years later than Corinthians and with the passing of time Paul became more concerned that strong Christian centers of worship and service be established should the Lord delay His coming. A second reason has to do with the sexual impurity which surrounded the lives of Corinthian believers. He was writing to those who lived in one of the most sinful cities in the ancient world. Thus, he strikes out in strictness rather than in tolerance toward those who lived in the cesspool of Corinth. Believers in that city had approached Paul in matters having to do with celibacy and marriage to unbelievers. They were confused to the point of believers living together in a most unusual asceticism which prohibited sexual relations. Paul addressed himself to these problems in I Corinthians 7. In typical apostolic style He treats the subject thoroughly. He moves from the single state to the married relationship. It is as if he sets himself to taking all the fussing and fuming out of the issue.

1. It Is Good for a Man Not to Touch a Woman:

(7:1) Paul's feeling is that there is a certain nobility about the single state. He declares it is good for a man not to live with a woman. Good means beautiful and noble. It does not mean better. Actually, he views it as a gift of God, as a charisma (7:7). Some people will be celibate for congenital reasons.

But some will receive the ability to remain single as a gift from God. There are reasons for this single state. God sometimes calls people to a life free from the distractions of family living to do a unique work for Him. If it is done for selfish reasons it will probably lead to sin in the mind or body. The question is, "Does God want me to be married?" If He does not He will prepare me to remain single.

2. **Marriage Is a Provision to Meet a Strong Physical Need:**

Moving to the 2nd verse Paul writes, *"Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his wife and let every woman have her husband."* The principle here is clearly stated in the 9th verse, *"But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn."* Burning here does not have to be carrel, nor is control regarding sexual appetites a matter of the will according to verse 37. The teaching is that any single man or woman who is not able to control the God given sex urge should get married. Monogamy is the Divine pattern. God told them one. *"Let every woman have her own husband."* (v. 2)

3. **Marriage May Best Be Avoided by Some:**

Bible teachers have long understood verses 36-38 in different ways. Some are of the opinion the verses refer to young men marrying virgins. The words also are viewed to describe Corinthian fathers who had marriageable daughters. The New English Bible holds that Paul is describing ascetic celibate couples. It seems to me that the important thing being said is that while marriage is not wrong, it is good for some to remain single. We might ask ourselves why Paul said, *"but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better."*

The first reason is found in verse 26. It is the *"present distress."* God's people were being persecuted. It may have seemed unreasonable to Paul to be married only to lose the loved one to martyrdom a short while thereafter. Secondly, time is short. (7:29) The Lord could return momentarily. Time does not permit a relationship of long duration. Lastly, according to verses 32-34, the single person can rejoice in the opportunity to do service for the Lord freely. We might note that John Calvin takes the verses and verse 26 in particular to speak of difficulties encountered in marriage. He interprets, "Marriage brings with it hindrances from which I wish you to be free and exempt. Among the distresses of the day. He mentions the loss of children,

widowhood, quarrels, and the faults of children. Calvin believed these difficulties were a result of man's depravity, not that of marriage per se.

4. The Unmarried Woman Careth for the Things of the Lord:

I believe it is important that the Scripture mentions this. The single state is not to be looked down upon, it is not to be considered inferior. A Christian single woman has the opportunity to commit her life to the Lord knowing He will lead her in the way which is best; if she is to remain single she has been spared certain difficulties and there are opportunities to be gained. Just what Paul meant by the words "*without distraction she attends unto the Lord*" (v. 35) Bible teachers are not certain. It may have been the caring of orphans as in James 1:27 and 5:14. Does he have in mind that time should be spent in prayer? Is he thinking of an unrivaled devotion to Christ? (See Ezekiel 16:8) In such a marriage to Christ spiritual children are born. We don't know the exact mind of the apostle here. We do know there is much evidence for the way God calls and uses single girls today.

X. WIDOWS ARE ALSO IMPORTANT TO GOD FOR THE SERVICE THEY RENDER:

I Timothy 5:19-12 is another passage which speaks about single women. They are widows. Commentators generally agree that the "number" means an official list but disagreement arises as to what kind of an official list. Is it a list of those being supported by the church? Or is it a list of women who belonged to a special order? Were these women on a special assignment? In the mid third century Didasculia Apostolorium spoke of the activities of the Order of Widows, and Chrysostrom mentions the Widow's Order at the end of the 4th century. We are able to conclude this section by saying that in spite of the lack of clear instructions in the New Testament, it is clear that single women and widows are important to God and have more time to be available to His service.

XI. HUSBANDS ARE TO TREAT WIVES WITH RESPECT AND CONSIDERATION:

When Adam woke from his sleep he said, "*This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.*" (Genesis 2:23) Paul reflects upon this realization in Ephesians 5:28 with the words, "*So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies.*" This is what Adam did. He said in effect, "*I will love her like I love myself.*" In Ephesians 5:28 Paul continues, "*For no man ever yet hated his own flesh but nourished it and cherished it.*" This is what man is to do for his wife. He is to cherish her and

contribute to the well being. In Genesis 2:24 we read, *“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife.”* Here is the leave and cleave principle. So strong is the marriage relationship that it breaks, not completely, but in a very real way, the original family ties in order to originate a new unit that is isolated upon love and devotion equal to the first. Instructions to husbands in the Epistles (1 Peter 3:7; Ephesians 5:25) were utterly revolutionary. See also Colossians 3:19 and I Corinthians 7:3-4.

XII. THE WOMAN AS A MOTHER HAS A FIRST RESPONSIBILITY:

There is a limited amount of instruction in the New Testament having to do with the ways and means of mothering. The Lord left no specific words for mothers as far as teaching goes. Peter, who was married, does not even introduce the subject. It seems that mothers are left to the promise of God which greets all of them through James. *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally.”* (1:5) Following are thoughts gleaned from the New Testament having to do with the Christian mother's role.

1. Women Do Not Experience Salvation Through Child Bearing:

There is an interesting verse found in I Timothy 2:15 which has been understood in various ways. It is suggested that if a woman dies in child birth she will go to heaven. It has been taken to mean that a believer's pain in childbearing will be less than the unbelievers. The verse cannot mean a woman is saved through her own suffering in bearing children because that contradicts the rest of Scripture. The solution, I believe, lies in the word *“saved.”* It means in the Greek *“kept or protected.”* Woman brought upon herself grief in childbearing and Paul teaches that by virtue of her faith in Christ, she will be protected. The word *“through”* is *“dia”* meaning *“during”* or *“by means of.”* The verse speaks of THE childbearing. I believe this signifies the great childbearing, the birth of the Savior. All women are thus saved through or by means of the Christ. Women who have borne no children may be certain of their salvation. Interesting verses are found in Isaiah 54:1-3.

2. Mothers Are to Love Their Children:

Titus 2:4 instructs mothers to love their children. This may seem to be an unnecessary suggestion but women in Paul's day had difficulty in loving their children. Today secular society would have us believe that being a wife and mother can never lead to fulfillment. The word Paul uses literally means

“child lovers.” It includes the emotional aspects in human relations. Those early believing mothers were urged to have positive feelings about their children.

3. Mothers Are to Nurse and Cherish Their Children:

This is the teaching of I Thessalonians 2:7-8. It suggests a mother or wet nurse tenderly breast feeding infants the only food available in Paul's time.

4. Mothers Are to Be Keepers in the Home:

To Timothy Paul urged that wives are to (widows) guide the house. (I Timothy 5:14)

5. Mothers Are to Be Honored:

“Honor thy father and thy mother.” This is frequently repeated in both the Old and New Testaments. This would surely be a little surprising if women were inferior or seen as responsible for the sin that is in the world.

6. Mothers Are to Teach Their Children About the Lord:

Ephesians tells them not to provoke children unto wrath (fathers). In II Timothy 3:15 Paul points to the way mothers undertake that task. Timothy received his faith from his mother. (1:5) It was not just a head knowledge of Scripture. The NEB expresses it in the words, *“a faith which was alive in Lois your grandmother and Eunice your mother before you, and which I am confident lives in you.”*

On these pages I have sought to share with you what I believe to be what the Bible teaches about women. It is not the view of the Women's Libber. It is not the position of a male chauvinist. In between there is the Biblical view. Here women are best fulfilled. Let us be among those who take God at His word.

Alan B. Christensen, Pastor, Hope Evangelical Free Church, Wilton, CT,
May 14, 1978