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Women

Viewing Women Through A Biblical Lens



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Viewing Women Through A Biblical Lens

What is a Christian woman's role in the world today? While this can feel like a dangerous question to ask, it is important to do so, as how we answer this question radiates out to the world around us. Historically, some cultures and scriptural interpretations have led to the devaluation of women, while some movements have arisen that overshoot and put women on an unhealthy pedestal. These extremes of repression and exaltation are both outside of God's design.

Movements like feminism can make the biblical commandment of submission seem outdated and weak, while movements like male supremacy can miss the mark, discounting the God-given strengths and gifts of females. Over time, both extremes can creep into the church, leaving confusion and frustration in their wake and begging the question: How do Christian women live with purpose, recognizing their value as one of God's creations, yet balancing this truth with an appreciation and respect for God's ordained order?

CREATED EQUAL BUT WITH DIFFERENT PURPOSES

To begin, let's examine *Genesis 1:27*, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." Both genders have been created in God's image and uniquely display characteristics of Him. This equalizing verse is foundational as we consider God's design. Furthermore, when this Scripture is placed next to *1 Peter 3*, we see a mutual order and responsibility emerge.

1 Peter 3:1, "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives;"

1 Peter 3:7, "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered."

We must be careful not to take these verses out of context of the whole counsel of Scripture. While women are called to be in subjection to men, we also see God's plan that men would honor women in return, creating a relationship of mutual respect. In addition, when we look at the Greek, we see these passages can refer beyond the marriage relationship, as the word "wife" in *1 Peter 3:1* is translated back to "gyne," the Greek word for "woman." Likewise, the word "husband" in this passage is the Greek word "aner" or "male." The world would emphasize the equality standpoint of *Genesis 1*, but dismiss the structure and order God has established. Both pieces are needed for women to successfully appreciate God's design for them.

A LOOK AT BIBLICAL EXAMPLES

A further look into Scripture shows us the different ways women were used to fulfill God's plan for their lives. "The weaker vessel" mentioned in *1 Peter 3:7* does not mean incapable or powerless. God equipped the following women, giving them the bravery and wisdom needed to face the circumstance in which they were placed.

- Deborah filled a gap in male leadership, becoming the judge of Israel. She was a trusted advisor and led in a way that empowered Barak to fulfill his duties. She did not commandeer his responsibility; rather, she strengthened him by her presence and guidance (*Judg. 4:4-14*).
- Given the choice to return to the familiar, Ruth instead chose to selflessly serve her mother-in-law (*Ruth 1:16-17*).
- Hannah desired motherhood and asked God for a child, humbly keeping her promise and giving her son Samuel back to the Lord's service (*1 Sam. 1*).
- When Abigail was presented with an issue that arose from the foolishness of her husband, she showed wisdom in her approach and was able to establish peace through her words to David (*1 Sam. 25*).
- When a lost book of the law was found, the prophetess Huldah was consulted by the king to interpret the meaning (*2 Ki. 22:13-20*).

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- The king was originally struck by Esther's beauty, but when her people were in danger, Queen Esther recognized God had placed her in a unique position to save them. She demonstrated great bravery in addressing the king (*Esth. 4:16*).
- Mary believed the message of the angel Gabriel, accepting the extraordinary task of being a mother to the Savior of the world (*Luke 1:26-38*).
- As a widow, Anna stayed in the Temple for years and was known for her devotion to God. She was blessed in her great age to see the King of Kings (*Luke 2:36-38*).
- Women were allowed to learn and participate in Christ's ministry, traveling with Jesus and the disciples (*Luke 8:1-3*).
- Women were actually the first people to carry the gospel message by delivering news of Christ's resurrection (*Luke 24:6-10, Mat. 28:5-10*).
- In *Acts 16:14-15* and *40*, we meet Lydia: a successful businesswoman and homeowner who balanced her vocation with her Christian faith and provided hospitality to fellow believers.
- Priscilla, alongside her husband Aquila, worked as a tentmaker and played a vital role in the early church. They mentored Apollos, supported Paul and allowed believers to assemble in their home (*Acts 18, 1 Cor. 16:19*).

IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

Women tend to struggle with comparing themselves to other women. We see this tendency even in the biblical accounts of the tumultuous relationship between sisters Leah and Rachel (*Gen. 30:1*) and later illustrated in the New Testament by Martha's critiques of Mary (*Luke 10:40*). We are to recognize who God has designed each one of us to be. Our purpose may look different than our neighbor's purpose, and it is important to embrace and value these differences, praising God for how He has made each of us and encouraging each to use their gifts to His glory.

The accounts above deeply illustrate the way God has used women throughout biblical history to fill roles in leadership, mediation, motherhood, missionary service, and much more. God placed some women in marriages to fulfill His plan for them, while some remained single. God has called some women to raise children, while others take on different nurturing roles. By studying the lives of women in Scripture, we see God looks at willingness and character, versus fortune or status, when He selects those to be used. We see a unique balance of confidence and humility in these examples, not the extremes of self-exaltation or low self-worth. Each woman recognized their strength came from God, just as ours still does today (*2 Cor. 12:9*).

The world would tell us a woman's place is in the workforce and being a "keeper at home" is outdated and demeaning. In guarding against this extreme we must be careful to not fall into the other extreme of viewing that a woman's place is ONLY at home, leaving those who need to work feeling ostracized. We must focus on the principles of the whole counsel of Scripture. Again, as we look at the examples above, we see beautiful ways God used women from all walks of life in many different stages and places for His glory. It is up to each of us to be open and willing to be used as He would have us to be.

In summary, neither elevation nor repression are the right interpretation when we look at women's roles. In the changing world today, there is always going to be a tension as women try to live out Biblical womanhood, gaining their strength from Christ rather than their own efforts. This is an amazing opportunity to the sisters in our church, because when this is done well, it can leave a remarkable impression on others and provide an illustration of boldness and humility that can only be accomplished through God's grace.

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