

Bible Truths About Women

M.W. Bassford
7-15-07

Introduction.

- A. In this day and age, the scientific community loves to look at almost every difference that exists between people and attribute that difference to genetics. At different times in the past ten years, various researchers have asked us to believe that some are homosexual because of their genes, some become alcoholics because of their genes, and some even become religious because of their genes. To the skeptical eye, this looks an awful lot like scientists hunting support for predetermined opinions rather than practicing genuine science.
- B. One of the great ironies of this ideologically driven pseudoscience is that it finds genetic reasons for behavior except where it doesn't want to find them. There are undeniably great genetic differences between men and women, yet many scientists want us to believe that they have little effect on the different ways that men and women act. Instead, they point to environmental factors and say that men are more aggressive because they're taught to be, women are more nurturing because they're taught to be, and so on. They make these claims because they think that for men and women to be equal, they must be the same and behave the same.
- C. As anybody who's been married for more than five minutes knows, that's just simply not true. Certainly, men and women are equal in the eyes of God, but equal and identical are not the same thing. Both in the church and outside of it, men and women have different roles for which they are suited, different responsibilities to carry out. Let's put aside modern misconceptions, then, and look at some Bible truths about women.

I. In History.

- A. Our examination of these Bible truths must begin with an exploration of the role of women in history. This takes us back to the very beginning of creation, back to Genesis 2. This chapter details how Adam was created by God, yet for the moment, was left by himself. The story picks up in Genesis 2:18, 21-22. It's important that we pay attention to this creation account because it gives us insight into why women exist in the first place. They are designed by God to be helpers for men.
- B. For most of us, it doesn't take much thought to see how true this is in our own personal experience today. There are exceptions, but when men and women come together in marriage, it's not the woman who gets the most out of the marriage; it's the man. Women are just naturally better at considering the welfare of their spouses and acting on what they see than men are. I know plenty of men who are competent, respectable adults, yet if their wives were to die, they would starve to death with a full refrigerator! I've never yet met a woman who relied on her husband to that extent. "Helpmeet" is a role that the woman fills quite well.
- C. We see another important aspect of the nature of women defined in Genesis 3:16. This is the curse that God places upon Eve and her daughters for eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Note first of all that this is a prophecy, not a commandment. God isn't telling women here, "Make sure that when you give birth, you suffer lots and lots." Instead, it's something that happens naturally. Similarly, when God describes the ascendancy of the husband over the wife, He is describing something that happens naturally.
- D. Indeed, throughout history, what God predicted has come true. All of the talk in the modern US about feminism and equality of the sexes is quite unusual, even in the world of today. Basically anywhere outside of the Western world, men are in charge, no questions asked. It's been that way for thousands of years, and, at a guess, it's going to continue to be that way for thousands more years. Now, this is not to say that the way that men use their superior position is always right. Indeed, that's not true. From bride-burning in India to child marriage in the Middle East to even more barbaric practices in Africa, men impose all sorts of ghastly practices on the girls and women in their power. That's why Genesis 3:16 is a curse, not a blessing.

II. In the New Testament.

- A. It's against this bleak backdrop that we need to consider the way that women are presented in the New Testament. One of the bizarre things about modern feminism is the way that so many feminists turn the apostle Paul into a whipping boy. They accuse him of being a woman-hater, a latent homosexual, and all sorts of other horrid things. The fact of the matter is that Paul was extreme, all right, but his writings were extreme in their favor to women. The Essenes, the Jewish sect that left us the Dead Sea Scrolls, described the woman as "a selfish creature, immoderately jealous, and skilled at seducing the morals of her husband."
- B. Paul, by contrast, speaks with a very different tone in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9, 11-12. In context, Paul is addressing a Corinthian church in which some, made over-zealous by their new-found freedom in Christ, have taken the opportunity to overturn every social convention they can think of, including the conventions that govern the subordination of the woman to the man. Here, we see Paul gently reminding them that the reasons for the original decree still exist. Woman, not man, is still the helper. The Essenes may well have agreed with that, but they almost certainly would not have liked Paul's next point. He shows that just as

arrogance in the woman is out of place, so too is arrogance in the man. Man does not create himself, but originates both from the woman and from God. Paul's point is that, yes, a natural order does exist, but the man who demeans women on the basis of that order forgets his own origins.

- C. We see Paul take a similarly nuanced stand in Ephesians 5:22-24. This passage indicates once again that wives have a responsibility to remain subject to their husbands. Indeed, the woman is instructed that she should measure her own subjection by the subjection of the church to Christ. Christ is the head of the church, and so too is the husband the head of the wife. She is responsible before God for treating him as the head and respecting him, regardless of whether she feels he has earned that respect or not.
- D. Once again, though, we must turn to the context of this passage to grasp its full meaning. Ephesians 5:21, which instructs Christians to be subject to one another in the fear of Christ, actually serves as a subject heading for Ephesians 5:22-6:9. Wives are to be subject to husbands, yes, just as children are to be subject to parents and servants to masters. Conversely, though, this context also tells us that husbands are to be subject to wives, parents to children, and masters to servants. There is nothing in God's order that gives anyone the right to trample on anyone else, and that's especially true in marriage. Marriage is a two-way street, and both husband and wife have the responsibility to serve the other with self-sacrificing love.
- E. Finally, we see the apostle Peter take up the subject of the general behavior of women in 1 Peter 3:3-4. It is part of the nature of the woman to desire to be beautiful, and here he addresses what adorns the Christian woman should seek. A woman doesn't have to be any better than Paris Hilton to ornament her outward form, but she must be a true disciple of Christ to ornament her soul.
- F. Of the Christian ornaments that Peter describes, perhaps the most important is the gentle and quiet spirit. The Greek word translated here as "quiet" doesn't mean "not talking;" instead, it means "not loud," both literally and metaphorically. The Christian woman doesn't need to go around brazenly asserting herself and demanding that everyone pay attention to her and respect her. Instead, she is content in the assurance of her relationship with God, knowing that she is already so highly valued by him that she needs nothing else.

III. In the Church.

- A. We see all of these ideas repeated and reinforced as we consider what the word says about the role of women in the church. As Christians, our responsibility here is to conform our beliefs and actions to the teachings of God and not to the prejudices of the world around us, regardless of what those prejudices may be. We learn this from the apostle Paul. For instance, in the time of Christ, it was customary for a Jewish man to thank God every day that he was not born into the world as either a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. We see what Paul thinks of this assumption of spiritual superiority in Galatians 3:28. The Jew rejoiced that he was not a Greek; Paul points out that in Christ, the categories of Jew and Greek do not exist. The freeman rejoiced that he was not a slave, but in Christ, the slave was free and the free was enslaved. Finally, when the man praised God that he was not a woman, Paul replies that Christ saves neither men nor women as such, but only souls. Every human being, regardless of his situation in life, joins in a fundamental equality as a Christian.
- B. As we said before, though, we need to say again: equal does not mean identical. People who are worth exactly the same to God may still fill different roles, and that's exactly what we see in the church. Consider Paul's instructions, for instance, in 1 Timothy 2:11-12, 15. This tells us that in the setting of a Bible class containing both men and women, it is to be a man, not a woman, who teaches that class and exercises authority in it. Note, though, that the word "quiet" here is the same word as "quiet" back in 1 Peter 3:3. Women are allowed to speak in Bible class, and even ask questions, provided that in so doing, they do not draw undue attention to themselves nor attempt to usurp authority from the man.
- C. Even though all this is true, 1 Timothy 2:15 reveals how women can make an impact on the world through their teaching. When I went to the church in Cedar Park, Texas some years ago, the preacher there was a man named Jim Everett. He was an extremely capable preacher, a man from whom I learned a great deal. Sadly, he died in 2005. Despite his death, he is preserved in me as I follow and repeat his teaching. Women can be preserved in the same way, not by instructing a congregation, but by teaching the children they bear to follow Christ. As great a debt as I owe to Brother Everett, I owe a far greater debt to my own mother for raising me in the path of righteousness, and as I continue to obey, that obedience honors her. Every Christian mother should seek the same thing, so that even after she is gone, her godliness lives on in her children.
- D. The Bible places one last constraint on the behavior of women, though, and that concerns what women should do in the assembly itself. By contrast to our sessions of Bible class, in which we are in a number of different rooms, we are in the assembly when we're all here in the auditorium paying attention to the same thing. Let's look at what Paul has to say in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. Apparently, the desire of the Corinthians to overturn the existing social order extended even to the assembly itself, in which some women were disrupting the service and arrogating the authority of the men. In response, Paul's instruction is to be silent in the assembly. This is a different Greek word than the one for "quiet;" this one actually does mean "don't talk" instead of "be tranquil." That's why, in our assemblies, other than singing, the women do not speak.

Conclusion. Obedience to God is what's important. Have you obeyed?