Chapter 32 - Is the Bible Prejudiced Against Women (Misogynistic)?

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Is the Bible Prejudiced Against Women (Misogynistic)?

Misogyny means a hatred of women. The word is built from the Greek roots *misein* ("to hate") and *gynē* ("woman"). Misogynists treat women as morally or intellectually inferior to men. *Misogynistic* is the word Richard Dawkins, the famed atheist, used to describe the Old Testament God. Some feminists charge that Christianity, the Bible and the church are anti-female and horribly oppressive to women.

Does God Really Hate Women?

Those who claim that the Bible is misogynistic are misguided in interpreting certain passages in the Scriptures. They take verses out of their context and neglect the overall message being put forward. Most importantly, they force modern cultural conventions onto ancient cultures.

Ephesians 5:22-24 is a favorite target: "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord." Critics claim that those words teach

them "as their own bodies," providing and caring for them just as Christ does.

And how much did Christ love the church? "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

The Scriptures tell us that all people are equal in the eyes of God, regardless of gender, race, or status.

- "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

The value of women, as noted in the New Testament, is *not* found in the Greco-Roman culture or the cultures of other societies. For example, Greek wives had virtually no freedom; men kept close tabs on them. The average woman had the social status of a slave. The wife could not divorce her husband whereas he could divorce her anytime. Boys were sent to school, taught to read and write, and educated in poetry, music and gymnastics; girls did not go to school at all. Throughout the woman's entire life, she was not permitted to speak in public. Women were also deemed inferior to men. The Greek poets were fond of equating her with evil.[206]

The status of Roman women was not any better. Roman law placed the wife under the total control of her husband, who had ownership of her and all her possessions. He could divorce her if she went out in public without a veil. A husband had the power of life and death over his wife, just as he did his children.[207]

New Testament Attitude Toward Women

The Lord Jesus respected women and treated them with dignity throughout the Bible:

- He rescued the adulterous woman from her accusers (John 8:9-11).
- He conversed in public with the Samaritan woman at the well, which was shockingly bold, and completely against the social norms of that day (John 4:9-10).
- God allowed it to be women who first found the empty tomb after Jesus' Resurrection and became the first preachers of it (Luke 24:1-10, Mark 16:2-8).
- The first people Jesus chose to appear to after His resurrection were women; not only that, but He told them to tell his disciples that He has risen from the dead (Matt 28, John 20). In a culture where a woman's testimony was worthless because she was perceived worthless, Jesus elevated the value of women far beyond anything the world had seen.

The early church not only attracted women followers, but many of them were instrumental in the proclamation of the gospel.

- "Therefore, many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men" (Acts 17:12).

All the Synoptic* Gospels (Mathew, Mark, and Luke) note that women followed Jesus, a highly unusual phenomenon in first-century Palestine. This behavior may not seem unusual today, but in Jesus' day, it was extremely uncommon.

Scholars note that in that culture only prostitutes would follow a man without a male escort.[208] These women were not groupies; some of them provided financial support for Jesus and the

Explaining Difficult Verses

Some verses, when taken out of context, seem difficult to understand. For example:

"But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ" (1 Cor 11:3).

- Headship is neither misogyny nor oppression. In Biblical theology, headship represents responsibility of leadership. Furthermore, if it is misogynistic to say that the man is the head of a woman, then what do they say about God the Father being the head of Christ? Does it mean that God the Father is superior to God the Son because He is His head? Of course not.[209]

"Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man" (1 Cor 11:9).

- Eve was created to work alongside Adam in his responsibilities of governing The Garden (Gen 2:18). This is not misogyny but a role that has its own power and responsibility. It has them working together to obey the commands of God.

"Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Pet 3:7).

- The "weaker vessel" refers to the generality that women typically have less physical strength than men.[210] But notice that a man is to *honor* his wife, and they are to be *heirs together*.

"Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says" (1 Cor 14:34).

- This verse refers to prohibiting women (usually uneducated in the culture of St. Paul's time) from asking disruptive questions. Such disruptive public questioning was considered a disgrace and morally indiscreet in that culture. This view of disruptive questioning fits well in the context of this passage in which St. Paul is concerned about orderly worship.

AND NOW?

Today, men and women in many countries have equal strength educationally, politically, professionally. Women in first world countries do not need to be literally protected as was necessary in many cultures over many centuries, and thought to be necessary in more recent times.

Although God in His great wisdom prepared Scripture that remains constant and true throughout all time, each book was written during specific times of human history. The events of the New Testament take place during the power of the Roman Empire, who occupied Jerusalem and the Near East.

We must be aware of the cultural context and social practices of that day. The fact that some of them don't sit well with us is to miss the point: Jesus came for us all.

Paul's teachings were somewhat progressive! So, let's return to the book of Ephesians. Before Paul tells wives their duty, before he tells husbands their duty, he tells us all: "Give thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus

Final Thoughts

Renowned English writer, poet, and Christian humanist, Dorothy Sayers, writes:

> "Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man—there had never been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, who never flattered or patronized; who never made arch jokes about them, never treated them either as 'The women, God help us!' or 'The ladies, God bless them!'; who took their questions and arguments seriously, who never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no ax to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as He found them and was completely unselfconscious... Nobody could possibly guess from the words of Jesus that there was anything 'funny' about woman's nature."[211]

Christianity does not oppress women. Christianity teaches that, though men and women are different in many ways and complementary to the core, they are of equal worth and dignity; and when the differences between them are recognized and appreciated, it is only then that all humanity will come to its fullest expression.

Revision #1
Created 2023-05-17 07:44:32 UTC by Fr.Maximus Wahba
Updated 2023-05-17 07:45:59 UTC by Fr.Maximus Wahba