

Mother's Day 2024 – The Incredible Value of a Woman

Christianity has been one of the greatest liberators of women (e.g. missionaries educating girls as well as boys how to read; women getting the vote in 1893). It also opposed long-standing cultural and religious traditions.

For example, the tradition in India was that when a husband died, the surviving wife was bound on top of the funeral pyre and burned with her husband's body. William Carey, the great missionary to India, fought against this for 25 years.

The woman is not just a property of her husband and in-laws. She is a person in her own right. She ultimately lives for God and not just for her parents first and then for her husband. Therefore her husband's death, even though it usually is her greatest tragedy, in no way means that her life is now without meaning and purpose. A husband is not a woman's God.

This practice was declared illegal and criminal on Dec 4th, 1829. William Carey next turned his attention to the evils of polygamy and early marriage – this was eventually outlawed in 1929, in policy, but not in practice.

<https://www.wmcarey.edu/carey/legacy/maharashtra/joseph2.pdf>

Jesus was revolutionary in so many ways, including how he related to women. Let us look at some of Jesus' encounters with women and see how He treated them.

John 4:1-42 The Samaritan woman at the well

This woman was incredible. She came at midday to fetch water, rather than cool of the morning when all the other women did, to avoid the constant shame and embarrassment. Yet she retained enough spunk and life to interact with Jesus, a Jewish male, a race who usually despised Samaritan women.

- v9 She was bold enough to answer Jesus, and even question His motives
- v15 She was humble enough to admit her need and ask for living water
- v18-20 She didn't become ashamed when her past (five divorces) was revealed but addressed her deep desire to commune and worship with God
- v28-29 She got the whole cities attention, "Come see a man who told me all things that I ever did" (remembering she intimately knew the secrets of at least five of these men)
- v39-42 The entire city responded and acknowledged her role in their salvation

What about divorced women? Deuteronomy 24:1; Malachi 2:16; Mark 10:1-9

- The Samaritan woman had been divorced five times. Men were attracted to her, married her, but later found some *justifiable* reason to divorce her and move on to a younger more obedient model. Divorce in Jesus' day was less about irreconcilable differences and more about the convenience and desires of the man (the one with the power in the relationship)
- The Pharisees came to Jesus to test him, in effect asking him "Do you know our current list of *"approved"* reasons why a man can divorce his wife?"
- Jesus answered them that God never intended divorce, but it was allowed because of the *hardness of man's heart*. He turned them back to God's original plan – one woman for life.

- In some cultures, you can divorce your wife for any reason, without a judge, simply by saying the words, “*I divorce you*”. That is not God's plan. Divorce is not to be weaponized as just another way to mistreat women.

Other Interesting Tidbits

- Women were the main providers for Jesus’ ministry – *Luke 8:1-3*
- There were many women brave enough, but only one man, at Jesus’ crucifixion – *John 19:25-27*
- Priscilla was acknowledged equally with her husband for explaining the way of God more accurately to Apollos, for co-leading the church in their house, and for risking their lives for the Apostle Paul - *Acts 18:2,18,26; Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19*
- It is highly likely there were women apostles – *Romans 16:7 Greet Adronicus and **Junia** ... who are of note among the apostles*. Junia was a common woman’s name.
- Women were praying and prophesying in the Corinthian church. (*1 Corinthians 11:5*)
- Timothy was taught the genuine faith by his grandmother and mother (not his father) *2Tim 1:5*

Difficult Passages- 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1Timothy 2:11-15

There are several difficult passages in the New Testament which have been used to keep women relegated to the sideline, with no voice, and no influence. A simple reading of the above scriptures would lead one to believe that women should not be allowed to speak in church, and not allowed to teach a man. The Islamic religion, and some branches of Christianity would agree with this.

- If the father/husband has passed away, then the next oldest male sibling has guardianship over a woman (according to Islamic law) and is to be obeyed, including deciding who she can be married to, and whether she should get medical treatment.
- Gloriavale, a Christian cult in the South Island, teaches different subjects for girls than boys, focusing on training girls for practical tasks like folding laundry, cooking food, serving food, and herding sheep. And all teachers are men, because a woman is not allowed to teach.

But there is a valid reason why these scriptures may have been mis-interpreted.

- Greek, the language the New Testament was written in, only has a single word, G1135, to translate as female, woman, wife. And a single word, G435 to translate as male, man, husband. Translators must have an educated guess at the context before deciding whether a female/wife, or male/husband is meant.
- The act of changing the English word from *woman* to *wife*, and from *man* to *husband* can bring out a very different meaning that is still an accurate translation of the original greek
 - 1135 . γυνή gun ē , *goo-nay´* prob. * from the base of 1096 ; a *woman*; spec. * a *wife*: — wife, woman.
 - 435 . ἀνὴρ an ē r , *an-ayr´* a prim. * word [comp. * 444]; a *man* (prop. * as an indiv. * male):— fellow, husband, man, sir.

1Tim 2:11 Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. 12 And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.

- This could be translated in two different ways with very different connotations.

A **female** is not to teach or exercise authority over a **male**.

OR A **wife** is not to teach or exercise authority over a **husband**.

- Which do you think is more accurate?

Let's look at the passage saying women should be silent in church and see if anything changes.

*1 Corinthians 14:34 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. 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.*

- Silent can mean mute, but can also simply mean not disruptive, calling out, or interrupting someone who is already talking.
- The culture of the day meant most women were not educated, as families could only afford to send males to school.
- The culture of the day had women sitting separately from men so a wife would be unable to turn to her husband to quietly ask a question, as she wasn't sitting next to him.

Paul is not saying that all women should be silent in the church. But rather than wives sitting in a different area from their husband should not call out loud, interrupting the service, and ask their husband a question. That would be rude and disruptive.

This is not a verse to be used as ammunition to command all women to be silent!

Mary and Martha

*Luke 10:38 Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named **Martha** welcomed Him into her house. 39 And she had a **sister called Mary, who also sat** at Jesus' feet and heard His word. 40 **But Martha was distracted** with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." 41 And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. 42 **But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.**"*

Mary also sat at Jesus feet but remained there listening to him whereas Martha was constantly distracted, getting up to engage in serving and preparing the meal. Her reaction raises a lot of questions about the accepted cultural norm of the day.

- Do women have equal right to spend time and be taught by Jesus? Or should they be relegated to the kitchen?
- What was Jesus' priority on fellowship with His Father? Does that take priority over practical service?
- Is serving a second rate task, and only to be carried out by less important people, namely women?
- What did Jesus teach about serving?

The reality is that:

- Mary had just as much right to sit at Jesus' feet as Peter, James and John. Women have just as much right to devotion and discipleship as men do. Mary wasn't motivated by trying to be lazy

and get out of work. She was simply and bravely accepting the wonderful opportunity of hearing Jesus' words.

- Jesus didn't dismiss or berate Martha for serving. He allowed her choice. Service is not second rate, and only to be carried out by less important people even if tradition and culture says so.
- But Jesus did deny Martha's request to force Mary to "*get back in the implied proper place*". He refused to give in to the cultural and familial pressure, forcing Mary to leave the place of worship and learning at Jesus' feet. Rather Jesus acknowledged the good choice Mary had made. How many opportunities would there be to sit at the Master's feet, listen to, and learn from Him? The urgency of being fed did not compare to this. And *men* were not treated as more important with the right both to sit at Jesus' feet and be fed immediately after by the women who missed out.
- The lion's share of practical tasks, especially household chores, has fallen to women. Men have too often used religion or culture to reinforce a women's role of serving. Indeed, it is to their selfish advantage to do so.
- Jesus didn't support this position. Neither did the early apostles. They appointed seven good **men** to oversee the tasks of feeding the widows. (Acts 6:1-4)
- Practical service is important, and Jesus often showed his willingness to serve. But He did not reinforce cultural norms and treat women as inferior and to be relegated to service. Neither should we!

The issue wasn't about *preparing and serving food* but about *who has the right and privilege to sit and learn from Jesus*. Service can come after this. And it can be done by anyone.

Society has a blunt solution of fixing the devaluing of a woman. *All women should be treated like men. We need gender diversity in all jobs; equal number of women CEO's as men; equal number of police-women as men.*

God has a different plan. He doesn't want equal number of women apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists as men. He doesn't want a fifty-fifty split. But he wants 100% of women who are called to one of those roles to fill it. God is drawing each woman (and man) to find and fulfill the gift and calling He has for your life. Do not allow cultural pressure, norms, expectations to cause you to disregard your gift.

If He calls you to what is traditionally a male-oriented role, then listen and obey His calling. God knows better than you.

And if culture is trying to force you into a male-role when that's not your calling, then don't let them. Embrace being a woman and being all the God has called you to be.

*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.
Galatians 3:28 (NKJV)*